

Communication Technology & Policy

Looking Ahead: Where's the edge?

By David Thompson, CTP Head

On October 23, I will travel to Minneapolis, Minnesota to attend the last day of the 22nd Annual Closing the Gap Conference. This event focuses on computer technology in special education and rehabilitation.

Not journalism. Not mass communication.

This will be my third visit to Closing the Gap. To tell the truth, I attend the last day because that's the day I can get in free. I don't understand most of what is discussed in the research and panel sessions. Special education and rehabilitation is not my field. No one in my family and very few of my friends have a need for special education and rehabilitation. But I truly enjoy visiting with vendors.

The exhibits at Closing the Gap blow my mind. I come away inspired by that time I've spent out of my comfort zone. Technology can do amazing things for people and people can do great things with technology.

Making connections between assistive and enabling technologies and media is the next stage of being inspired, for me. What forms will some of these innovations take if they are mainstreamed for use by individuals without physical or mental disabilities (sometimes known as "the temporarily abled" because anyone can become disabled in a split second by accident or illness)? And how can media professionals and media audiences apply these technologies in productive ways?

I'm looking for the edge. Today, "New Media" seems old. Really innovative "media convergence" seems to have been squelched by organizations that can't really figure out how to get along and by "old farts" who were willing to test the waters but didn't really want to get wet. Media scholars have figured out decent ways to approach research questions and methodologies for studying digital media. So, what's new? What's next? Where's the edge?



At Closing the Gap, I've learned about screen reader software, such as Jaws® from Freedom Scientific. One thing a screen reader does is speak, out loud, content on Web pages. It's a text-to-speech converter.

Screen readers can't see image-based content. So when we design Web sites with Flash, screen readers don't really help. At least, not yet. When we use photographs in our online publications, screen readers cannot see them, unless we type in "alternative text," a textual equivalent of an image.

That inspired me to explore. A few baseline studies tell me that a very high percentage of online newspapers in the United States, Australia and Germany are not providing accessible content to readers who are blind or vision impaired. There's more work to be done to find ways to describe news photos or banner ads or Flash movies in words. Do we provide a detailed description of the images themselves, or do we provide some interpretation of the meaning of the image?

That's not too edgy, technologically. But it seems to be beyond the horizon of the media organizations I studied.

One-handed keyboards are pretty cool, too. The whole keyboard is set up to be used with one hand. Like baseball gloves, you can get a right-hander or left-hander.

If one of my hands quits working for some reason, I can still type. For now, since both of my hands still work, I wonder if I could learn to answer email on the one hand and write a research paper with the other. The technology could handle it. But how can I get my mind to overcome its conditioning to do one thing at a time? Perhaps the answer lies with studies of teenagers who have grown up simultaneously playing video games, talking on the phone, listening to music, answering email, monitoring their instant messenger, watching a football game on TV, eating a pizza, and ignoring their parents.

There are possibilities here for research and education. But where's the edge? How far are we willing to go to advance the body of knowledge about communication technologies and the policies that guide their development and use?

For more than ten years, I've dreamed of the day I can wake up knowing every article in the new edition of *Time* magazine, remembering tonight's episode of *The Apprentice* -- before it airs, and singing songs that were released an hour ago. What I've really dreamt of is the day my students can wake up knowing their textbooks.

Three years ago I saw a practical device at Closing the Gap: the MindMouse. This device was designed "for individuals who are physically incapacitated by traumatic brain or spinal cord injuries, a stroke, quadriplegia, muscular dystrophy or cerebral palsy" (www.sforh.com/pointing/mindmouse-head.html, retrieved Sept. 29, 2004). A headband with electrodes that sense brain activity is connected to a computer. Basically, the sensors detect arousal and relaxation in brain waves. The intensity of the brain waves drives the cursor up or down, left or right. The MindMouse is now commercially available. How can we apply that technology to our own research?

Consider the possibilities for our fields of specialty. Finding the edge can be kind of fun. I think the rewarding part for us, as scholars, is to explore ways to redefine the edge.

Don't forget: the cool thing about digital technology is that the edge isn't a dangerous place. If we fall off, we can just refresh, restart, or reboot.

CTP GOALS FOR 2004-2005 (with annotations)

AEJMC requires each division and interest group to submit an annual report. The incoming head has an opportunity to identify important goals for the year. One of those goals for 2004-2005 is to find the edge. Here they are:

Revisit the CTP Division's purpose and how it serves AEJMC.

* On September 27, I posted a message to the CTP listserv that summarized an open discussion at our Members' Meeting in Toronto about the possibility of renaming the division. This is an ongoing issue that was brought up last year because "and" or "policy" seems to be causing some confusion for people who choose to or decide not to submit papers to our division.

* The CTP mission statement will be reviewed by CTP officers. We'll also look at mission statements of other divisions and interest groups.

* If you are a CTP "old timer" - someone who had a hand in creating the interest group that grew into this division, or someone who watched the division develop over the years - let us hear from you on the listserv. We can all benefit for your memories and observations of the history of our group.

Find the edge and encourage CTP members to "push the envelope."

* CTP has played an important role in defining emerging trends in teaching, research and PF&R of communication technology. Pioneering work done by CTP members eventually finds its way into mainstream work in other divisions. CTP's incoming leadership would like to encourage members to look ahead and continue to define emerging ways technology may be used for journalism and mass communication.

Encourage productive use of the CTP listserv.

* We seem to be a pretty quiet group. What are you thinking?

Improve diversity on panels by encouraging those who propose panels to design sessions with a balance of gender, race, ethnicity, and international perspectives in mind.

Involve senior members of the division to mentor graduate students and junior faculty by encouraging them to serve the division and to become more involved in the association.

* Our annual Midwinter Conference is a fantastic opportunity to mentor grad students and junior faculty. We take the lead in organizing the midwinter event, so I hope to see a strong turnout of CTP members.

As your division Head for 2004-2005, I encourage you to continue to participate in CTP. We have many roles that need to be played: research author, moderator, reviewers, panelist, listserv contributor, officer, and more. Your support of CTP is greatly appreciated.

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QUO VADIS, CTP?

By Sriram "Sri" Kalyanaraman
Vice-head and Program Chair

Greetings! Over a year ago, former CTP head Sally McMillan raised the issue of whether CTP had an important role in the future of AEJMC. While most members firmly believe that CTP is AEJ's "tech" division, and hence has an important stake in the organization, related discussion has spread to the question of whether the current name (Communication Technology and Policy) needs to be changed. Sally instituted discussion with members of the Law division to explore whether "Policy" may fit more naturally in that division. At the members' meeting in Toronto, we decided to come up with a mission statement so that we can revisit the issue of name change, and formalize it, if necessary. The current CTP head, David Thompson, has posted messages on the CTP listserv inviting members to share their opinions. I would like to get this discussion going by offering my thoughts on the issue, including many perspectives gleaned from my experience as research chair last year, where we went with an electronic submission system that resulted in record submissions.

1) In many ways, the "policy" aspect is robbing our division of focus. I think we are thriving with just pure "technology." It appears that several papers that are even perfunctorily examining some aspect of policy are being submitted, irrespective of whether they fit the technology focus or not. However, this is not the only problem. What is even more troubling is the fact that many "proper" technology papers are NOT being submitted to our division because authors are unsure about the technology component. This is especially true of new/first-time submitters who are unfamiliar with the division. In fact, I received quite a few e-mails regarding this issue when submitters wanted to know whether their papers would have any chance at all since they did NOT have a policy focus.

2) Given the diversity of reviewers, some expect policy ramifications-while I cannot fault them, I think it is unfair for authors to make a policy statement when none is warranted (or appropriate). This also leads to

a dilution of scholarship-frequently, authors talk about "implications for policy" in their discussion section when it is clear that they are doing so purely because of the division name (I have been guilty of this in the past as well but can attribute at least one top-paper award to this machination-the reviewer's chief words of praise were attributed to the fact that an experiment grounded in social psychology made a policy statement). At other times, policy papers make a case for "new media" when it is not really a logical step.

3) As mentioned earlier, the quantity-and quality-of technology research has increased substantially in the last 3 years or so. By keeping our focus on technology, I think we will not only appeal to a much more diverse audience focused on technology but will also shed the uncertainty of who we are. Currently, I see a tremendous impetus for new media and technology research and think we are ideally positioned to capitalize on it. Also, and perhaps, most importantly, we are receiving a diversity of papers that pertain to communication technology. So, for example, last year, we received excellent papers centered around history, law, ethnography, theory, and empirical methods. The common, unifying theme around all these papers was that every one of these papers related to technology. Not so with all the "policy" papers. While policy papers centered around technology are obviously welcome (as pointed out succinctly by Justin Brown), I fear that the current name incorporating "Policy" is actually adding to ambiguity and uncertainty, because there are many authors who assume that ANY policy paper can be submitted, irrespective of whether or not it pertains to communication technology. Having recently dealt with over 300 reviews as well as varied correspondence with around 100 authors and 100 reviewers, I can testify that this is a matter of concern.

4) Bottom line: I am in favor of leaving out "policy." My choice for re-naming would be "Communication Technology." Of course, we can (and should) make it clear that all papers from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives are welcome provided they address the technology component.

continued on p. 4

Call for 'Best of the Web' Entries

Submissions are being accepted for the 2005 AEJMC 'Best of the Web' Design Competition, co-sponsored by the Visual Communication and Communication Technology & Policy Divisions.

The 'Best of the Web Design' competition aims to recognize academic work in the design of websites that advance education or research in journalism and mass communication. To submit a site for consideration, the entrant must be either a faculty member or graduate student who works for or attends an ACEJMC-accredited institution or is a current paying member of AEJMC. Entries may be submitted into one of the following categories: departmental/school sites, teaching, journalism, or creative.

All entries will be peer-reviewed. Depending on the number and quality of entries in each category, more than one prize may be made. First-place sites will be presented in San Antonio at this summer's AEJMC convention and will be awarded **\$50 cash prizes**.

Entries must be submitted online no later than March 1, 2005. To obtain an entry form or to learn more about the competition, please visit the following website: <http://www.jou.ufl.edu/aejmcweb/index.htm>.

For questions about submissions, please contact one of this year's co-directors:

Helena K. Särkiö at hsarkio@jou.ufl.edu or Regene Ann Radniecki at radnieck@mnstate.edu.

Contact: Helena K. Särkiö, 2005 Best of the Web Design Competition Co-Director, (352) 846-2399, hsarkio@jou.ufl.edu; Regene Ann Radniecki, 2005 Best of the Web Design Competition Co-Director, radnieck@mnstate.edu, (218) 477-2509

Quo Vadis, from p. 3

As I said earlier, many scholars with diverse theoretical and methodological approaches already realize this, except for the policy aspect. So, for example, several legal papers that were related to technology were submitted to CTP (and not the law division). Similarly, some history papers related to technology were submitted to CTP (and not the history division). Therefore, we will continue to receive policy papers as well, but at least, it will be policy papers that address technology issues. Obviously, it is for the Law division's officers and members to decide whether they want to add "policy" to their division name, but I believe that making "CTP" a "CT" division will strengthen our focus as AEJ's technology division while shedding the ambiguity of who we are.

Please share your thoughts on this issue with David or me. I think it is important to cull together many opinions even as we embark on the possibility of a name change for the division.

CTP Listserv Reminder

The listserv is not just for division business; it exists to encourage discussion on topics relevant to the members' research interests, academic experiences, and issues related to communication technology and policy.

A reminder is in order, though: Please avoid using the listserv for other purposes, such as making job announcements. The listserv's value is greatest when we use the medium for its intended purposes.

If you change your email address please be sure to let us know so you can stay on the list. You can email Robert Magee, listserv moderator at:

rmagee@unc.edu

The listserv email:

ctp-aejmc@listserv.unc.edu

Citing Online References: Scholars, Beware*

By Daniela V. Dimitrova and Michael Bugeja**
Iowa State University

The Internet has opened up new possibilities for information retrieval and instant communication across national borders. But the World Wide Web has also opened up a web of problems associated with Internet footnotes, which become unreliable over time, due to unstable URLs.

Potential Problems

As every researcher has experienced, online information can simply vanish. When URLs vanish with Web pages or become archived under new links—two of several factors impacting stability—replicability of research can become difficult or even impossible. Our own research featured in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (30 April 2004, A33) showed that a large proportion of Internet citations used in academic research disintegrate even over short periods of time.*** The "here today, gone tomorrow" problem involves different types of inaccessible Web pages: (1) Web pages that have been permanently removed from the Web; (2) Web pages that are inaccessible due to temporary server problems (i.e., intermittent Web pages); (3) Web pages that exist at the same URL address, but contain different content; (4) Web pages that are password protected: for instance, online documents that are easily retrieved through local library databases are generally inaccessible to people at other universities and other countries.

Possible Solutions

What can we do as researchers to ensure that our citations are valid, especially when many study Internet-related issues? Here are two immediate recommendations: preserve a record of the Web page that you are citing, either by printing a hard copy or creating an electronic copy. You can also archive a complete copy of an article by saving it to your hard drive. Considering the high attrition rate we are discovering, both of these are highly desirable.

Word of Caution

When possible, it is desirable to cite the published article as opposed to any online version, especially

one vended in html or text format, as our continuing studies show that online footnotes can be corrupted by the data-feed process used by libraries. Also, avoid citing the home pages of news media (e.g., <http://www.nytimes.com/>) or organizations such as the Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov/>) or the Pew Internet and American Life Project (<http://www.pewinternet.org/>). If you are citing a specific report, we highly recommend that you provide a link to the pdf version of the report directly. These Web sites are likely to update frequently. In sum, the Internet is the perfect medium for updates. Unfortunately, when it comes to online citations, updating content corrupts it.

* *Note: Some of these issues were discussed by the authors at the Internet Research Ethics conference conducted at the University of Colorado in June 2004.*

** *Dimitrova is an Assistant Professor and Bugeja is Professor and Director of the Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication at Iowa State University.*

*** *Carlson, Scott. (2004, April 30). Here today, gone tomorrow: Studying how online footnotes vanish. The Chronicle of Higher Education, A33.*

AEJMC Midwinter Conference

Feb. 11-12
Kennesaw State University
Kennesaw, Georgia

Deadline for paper abstracts and panel proposals is **December 20, 2004**.

More information on the conference, including maps and directions:

<https://webpace.utexas.edu/mark43/www>

News Value, or Macabre Voyeurism?

By Peter Morello
PF&R Chair

The images of the recent beheadings in Iraq can be viewed in horrifying detail on a few obscure sites on the Internet.

In an article written for the October 2003 edition of this newsletter, but before Iraqi militants began beheading their captives, I argued that Internet access to images mainstream news organizations choose not to display are often disturbing but honest depictions of the real world. I stated that although some policy guidelines are needed, consumers of Internet news sources were getting information withheld by the mainstream media. I went on to conclude:

"With multiple global sources to retrieve online media content, self-censorship hurts online US network claims of posting news in a fair and balanced way, even as they consider public sensibilities in what images to release. The Internet now stands as the premier global marketplace of ideas. I am convinced that freer online access to disturbing images of bodies and other horrors of war and crises by leading news sources would help audiences draw their own conclusions. This would also improve the credibility of those online news sources as they try to provide audiences with a more complete picture."

My firm belief in the public's right to Internet access of even gruesome images of war footage was shaken when I saw the video tape of the beheading of Nick Berg on ogrish.com. Captured last April, Berg, 26, was executed by Iraqi militants. I had not heard of ogrish.com until a student in my war reporting course told me about the site last summer. I downloaded the video and was sickened by what I saw.

Ogrish.com challenges the consumer with the question "Can You Handle Life?" in its banner. Before you are permitted access to the site, you must agree to terms and conditions which in part state:

"This Site contains exclusively newsworthy stories and images. All content displayed on this site is protected by the First Amendment rights to Free Speech, Free Expression and Freedom of the Press. Ogrish.com firmly believes that the public's Right to

Know is best served by uncensored access to newsworthy information. We also believe that the best judge of appropriate information retrieval is you, not the government or third parties. We therefore offer you the broadest selection of newsworthy content available on the Web, and allow our users to decide for themselves what information they desire to receive. Ogrish.com is merely a venue for the dissemination of information, and is therefore deemed an "Internet Access Provider" under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996.

After agreeing to the terms, gaining access and examining the site, I concluded that most of the content does nothing to further the public's understanding of the news. Selections include videos and photographs of automobile fatalities, suicide victims, sporting accidents and a vast archive of all kinds of beheadings. What is most disturbing is that al-Qaeda inspired militants are now using ogrish.com and similar sites to torment the world with their most potent weapon. A series of beheadings or threats of further beheadings have compelled several nations like The Philippines to abandon their assistance to Iraq. I contacted editors at grish.com and sent the following list of questions:

Where did you obtain material of beheadings and similar content?

What has your consumer reaction been?

Have you changed your policy considering the disturbing nature of the most recent material?

What kinds of editorial discussions have there been about concerns that your site is being used by Iraqi militants or other al Qaeda inspired groups?

Despite several messages to ogrish.com, I received no reply. I agree with the site's statement that "the best judge of appropriate information retrieval is you, not the government or third parties." However, I would urge those who value the Internet as the premier global marketplace of ideas to avoid a site that is using beheadings and similar disturbing content for pure shock value and for commercial gain.

Online Resources Showcase

Journalism Organizations, Teaching Tools

By **Constance K. Davis**
Teaching Chair

The school year may be well under way, but it is still a good time to talk about some teaching resources. Whether you are teaching online journalism, a class in which your students need to do lots of online work, or planning to teach a Web-based class, you will be able to find a wealth of information on the Internet.

A good place to start is by visiting the Online Journalism Review and becoming familiar with the resources they offer. You can find a number of helpful links by going to their education page. An excellent article by Mindy McAdams discusses tips for building an online journalism course - and reminds you to ask exactly what online journalism is before you begin to structure the course. On the right side of the page you will find links to syllabi for online journalism courses, showing a range of ways in which the course can be approached. Another link is to resources for online journalism, including such topics as how to create a Web page, to storytelling and writing for the Web, to designing.

The Poynter Institute offers a variety of links to online news issues. Among the resources you will find there is a discussion of their recent research on how readers see online news. The Eyetrack III research project explored, among other topics, the way readers followed the page, what makes viewers stop to read, and what happens with advertisements.

The online bibliography that you find on Poynter also takes you to a variety of other organizations that also focus on online journalism. The bibliography also includes a lengthy listing of books (separated into those published before 1993 and those after 1993) about the Web and about online journalism. At the Poynter site you will also find suggestions for using the Internet as a reporting tool.

The American Press Institute also offers online resources for those who teach journalism. Some of the links are designed for high school teachers, but college professors will find other links helpful. It also provides a link to the ERIC Digest. If you plug in "online journalism" for your search, you will find

Digest #182 includes "Mass Communication: Technology Use and Instruction" or Digest #178 offers "A Review of Trends in Journalism Education," prepared by Shawna Brynildssen.

One of my favorite sites for useful online resources over the years has been a University of Iowa site that offers links to a variety of resources such as journalism organizations, reporting tools, newspapers and magazines, media legal issues, jobs, and journalism teaching resources.

If you are contemplating using a blog in your courses and want to find out more, you might find the discussions at Weblogg-ed useful. One of the resources is a link to journalism weblogs.

For those planning Web-based courses, AEJMC has put together a listing of links to helpful resources.

Although all of the links mentioned above were working, some of the links in their collections of resources are either broken or getting outdated.

Websites:

Online Journalism Review

<http://ojr.org>

OJR Education Resources

<http://ojr.org/ojr/education/1081490316.php>

Poynter Institute

<http://www.poynter.org/subject.asp?id=26>

Poynter: The Internet as a reporting tool:

<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=32&aid=3089>

American Press Institute

<http://www.americanpressinstitute.org/content/4072.cfm>

University of Iowa site

<http://bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu/journalism>

Weblogg-ed

<http://www.weblogg-ed.com/2004/04/15>

AEJMC links to helpful resources

http://www.aejmc.org/pubs/web_courses.html

An Invitation to Join CTP

By Yifeng Hu
Membership Chair

Thanks for your continuing support of our division. I am glad to report that by the time of the annual conference of AEJMC in Toronto, our division has had total 187 members, including 75 females and 112 males. This number will surely increase with our improved work as well as your ongoing support.

To existing members: if you haven't done so, please renew your membership as soon as possible. And please bring in new members!

To those who are still new to us: you are more than welcomed to join us! The following is a brief introduction of our division. If you have any more questions, please feel free to contact me.

The CTP division is one of more than a dozen divisions of AEJMC. It brings together researchers, teachers and professionals who are interested in how new communication technologies are changing media and society. In recent years, the division has attracted scholarship pertaining to policy issues in new media and telecommunications.

CTP'S GOALS ARE TO: (1) Foster cutting-edge research on technology development, technology and telecommunications policies, application, and integration with existing media and communication systems; (2) Improve college-level instructions in the uses and implications of new communication technologies; (3) Assist college professors and high school journalism teachers in learning to use emerging communication technologies and to integrate those technologies into their classes; and (4) Work with professionals to explore the uses and implications of new technologies in areas such as the newsroom, public relations firms and advertising agencies.

CTP'S ACTIVITIES INCLUDE: (1) Research sessions, pre-convention workshops, seminars on teaching and panel discussions during the annual AEJMC conference in August; (2) Faculty and student research competitions (The Jung-Sook Lee Student Paper Competition); (3) Midwinter research conference and professional seminars around the nation co-sponsored with other AEJMC divisions; (4) A Web

site (<http://www.aejmc.net/ctp/>) and updated online newsletters to help members stay up-to-date on division activities and inform them about upcoming conferences and calls for papers; and (5) A listserv (ctp-aejmc@listserv.unc.edu) where members can ask questions and discuss issues with their colleagues around the world.

As a member of AEJMC, you already enjoy free subscription to AEJMC publications, extensive listing of job openings, and AEJMC annual convention membership rates. If you join CTP, you will get a bonus because CTP meets your special interest and devotes to your specific area of communications. As a member of CTP, you can (1) Meet people who are doing research similar to yours; (2) Get exposure to "research in progress" so that you can stay on the cutting edge of the discipline; (3) Get tips on teaching courses in the communication technology area; (4) Learn about how technology issues are impacting on communication professionals. For more information, please go to CTP Web site: <http://www.aejmc.net/ctp/>

TO BECOME A MEMBER

Go to <http://www.aejmc.org/about/membenefits.html>

Or contact AEJMC headquarters at:

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Communication Technology and Policy Division

Call for Paper Abstracts and Panel Proposals

AEJMC Mid-Winter Conference
February 11-12, 2005
Kennesaw State University

WHEN: February 11-12, 2005
WHERE: Kennesaw State University
Kennesaw, Georgia (20 miles north of Atlanta)

PARTICIPATING DIVISIONS/INTEREST GROUPS: Communication Technology & Policy, Media Management & Economics, Cultural and Critical Studies, Mass Communication and Society, Visual Communication, Civic Journalism, Entertainment Studies, and Graduate Education.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS: Authors are invited to submit research paper abstracts or panel proposals to be considered for presentation at the 2005 AEJMC mid-winter conference. Submissions can address any aspect of communication technology and policy, and may include work in progress. Work that addresses both communication technology and issues of interest to other participating co-sponsors is encouraged. Graduate student submissions are strongly encouraged. Here are some specific guidelines for submission:

1. All proposals must be submitted by **December 20, 2004**. Send proposals to me via e-mail at **Tremayne@mail.utexas.edu**. Please use a standard word-processing format (preferably RTF) for all attachments.
2. Research paper or panel proposals should include a 300- to 500-word abstract. In addition, each panel proposal should also include a list of potential panelists.
3. Identify the paper's author(s) or panel's organizer(s) on the title page only and include the mailing address, telephone number and e-mail address of the person to whom inquiries about the submission should be addressed. The title should be printed on the first page of the text and on running heads on each page of text, as well as on the title page.

RESERVATIONS: Further details on registering for the conference, housing and traveling to the conference will be available at:

<https://webpace.utexas.edu/mark43/www/>