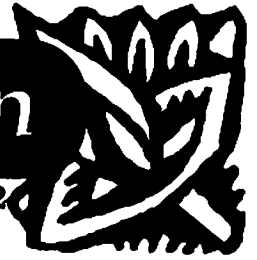




Media & Religion Bulletin



AEJMC Religion & Media Interest Group • November 2002

Exciting Developments Afoot for the RMIG

*By Debra Mason, Religion Newswriters Association
Head, Religion and Media Interest Group*

Debra's Goals for RMIG

What an exciting time it is for journalism educators whose research, teaching and service interests center around the nexus of Religion and Media.

This newsletter details some of the hard work your colleagues are doing on behalf of RMIG, and I want to summarize some of our activities to date:

Please see the list of fine people who were elected in the RMIG business meeting in Miami Beach to help guide and work hard on behalf of RMIG matters in the next year. That list is printed on page 4 of this newsletter.

Also in Miami Beach, AEJMC's executive committee reviewed a petition to renew RMIG's status as an interest group. That petition was approved, and I'm pleased to report that RMIG will continue as a vital outlet for religion and media interests within AEJMC for another three years.

This newsletter details some of the panel proposals that Vice Chair Rick Moore from Boise State and I will lobby for at the Dec. 6 & 7 planning meeting of AEJMC in Palo Alto. Thank you to all who submitted their program ideas to Rick, who admirably submitted the proposals several weeks before the final deadline to assure good placement in the book of proposals all division and interest groups receive. The next newsletter will let you know which panels made the cut and which divisions and interest groups we're partnering with to expand our visibility.

Elsewhere in this newsletter is a call for papers in RMIG's annual research paper competition. Thanks to North Texas University colleagues Eric Gormly and Ken Loomis' work as co-chairs of the research paper competition, we're hoping for a second year of record-breaking increases in research paper submissions. The Journal of Media and Religion is an important vehicle for helping RMIG members see that their work is refined and ultimately published. Take advantage of comments from your peers by presenting your research first to AEJMC.

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- Greater communication among RMIG members. We're in the process of reconstructing RMIG's listserv, which had become outdated. One problem is that AEJMC only has e-mail addresses listed for about one-third of our members. We're using a lot of good old fashioned investigative work to come up with the rest. We hope to debut the new listserv early next year.

- Creation of a web site where updates to RMIG news, this newsletter, officer contact information, media and religion course syllabi and research bibliographies can be posted. This will be launched in tandem with the updated listserv early next year.

- We also are reaching out to more groups than in the past, hoping to build our membership and expand the audience for RMIG programming. For the first time we have a Membership Committee chair. Our new Diversity Committee Chair is making sure we expand the diversity among our membership and reflect that diversity in our programming.

These next few months will fly and before you know it, we'll be scouting out barbecue spots in Kansas City for AEJMC's 2003 annual meeting. In the meantime, please keep in touch (mason@religionwriters.com). I wish you the best in weathering advising, midterms, finals and the like with patience and finesse.

Chandlers Step Up: More Than A Little Help From a Friend

*By Michael A. Longinow, Ph.D
Journalism, Program Coordinator,
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Our students need a break. They tell us that often, probably. But what they need is not less work. They need help to make the work they do get somewhere. And Russell Chandler's recent set-up of a \$25,000 fund to reward good religion reporting putting the money right where it ought to go.

The old adage is that students won't get jobs without experience, and to get experience they need a job. The students sitting in our classrooms are facing a tougher journalistic and media marketplace than we did at their age. The economy's softer, the job marketplace is more resistant to what used to work in the

job search. Partly due to collapse of what were strong publications, just doing internships won't do it. A resume isn't just a resume anymore. Neil Ralston and Karon Reinboth Speckman wrote, in a Quill piece this past summer, that the students would have to put themselves in "unfamiliar territory" to find jobs. The unfamiliarity of territory isn't any easier for students who want to do religion journalism. In fact, if Mark Silk, Stewart Hoover and Judith Buddenbaum are right, it's never been more complex. Religion in news appears in headlines nearly in every section of the newspaper - the recent sniper shootings making an interesting case in point. But for a rapidly diversifying readership in the U.S., how will students hope to dig in and get it right? What incentive do they have to plumb the depths and pursue the proper

context for stories? What help are they getting from the generations that did better at getting the story right when it comes to religion news? The funding structure set up by the Chandlers shows the kind of help these students need. Chandler knows students need a boost. He's seen their clips as a judge of contests for the RNA's Templeton, Cornell and Supple Awards. The prize will be awarded for the first time in 2003 to an undergraduate or graduate student for excellence in writing with an emphasis on reporting skill and a grasp of religion issues that is fair, balanced and in accordance with journalistic standards. It's the biggest award of its kind in the history of journalism education. And it makes so much sense it gives one pause. Why didn't somebody do this before?

Continues on page 4



Knight Chair at USC Annenberg School of Communication Will Focus on Media and Religion

MIAMI - At a time when many Americans are examining the role of religion and spirituality in their lives, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation has funded the Knight Chair in Media and Religion at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication in Los Angeles.

The \$1.5 million endowment enables the Annenberg School to bring a seasoned journalist to the USC campus to help improve coverage of religion in the U.S. media.

The creation of the newest Knight Chair in Journalism comes at a critical time in the nation's history. The events of Sept. 11 and the scandals involving the Catholic Church have dominated the news. The discussion about the civic role of religion has gone from the pulpit to the front pages, prompting journalists to seek a spiritual context to key issues such as prayer in the classroom, abortion rights, politics in the Middle East and human cloning.

"Polls, the participation of millions

of the faithful in regular worship, and the inescapable impact of each day's news all demonstrate that religion is a subject of deep and abiding interest to a vast majority of Americans," said Hodding Carter III, president and

"We expect that the Knight Journalism Chair in Media and Religion at USC's outstanding Annenberg School will help focus the media's attention to and deepen its understanding of an issue that is central to American life."

Hodding Carter III

CEO of Knight Foundation. "We expect that the Knight Journalism Chair in Media and Religion at USC's outstanding Annenberg School will help focus the media's attention to and deepen its understanding of an issue that is central to American life."

The Knight professor will design graduate and undergraduate courses, suggest ways journalists can cover faith and values, and be an advocate for the improvement of journalism and its contributions to society.

"The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Religion Newswriters Association, The Freedom Forum and a number of journalists in all media are working to improve religion coverage," said Eric Newton, Knight's director of

journalism initiatives. "But I think we all would agree that true journalism excellence in this field is still a long way off. USC's Annenberg School has the dynamic leadership, diverse talent and growing resources that a great journalism school needs to make a major contribution."

USC, the oldest private university on the West Coast, was selected from a national pool of universities that sought to host the Knight Chair in religion. The university is home to the Center for Religion and Civic Culture, and its academicians write about the civic role of religion and faith-based organizations. USC's rich history of study in the field helped advance its proposal.

"As a school, USC Annenberg is committed to the improvement of the practice of journalism, and this is an area where we can bring the resources of a great university to bear on an issue of critical importance to the world, particularly today," said Michael Parks, the Pulitzer Prize-winning international correspondent and former Los Angeles Times editor who now directs Annenberg's School of Journalism

Journals & Publications of Interest

The *Journal of Media and Religion* addresses the broad question of how religion as a social and cultural phenomenon broadens understanding of mass communication in society. It is a forum for scholars, media professionals, and theologians to discuss media and religion from a social science viewpoint. This journal examines a full range of religious traditions (i.e., Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Eastern Religious Philosophies, and new/alternative religious movements).

Editors

Daniel A. Stout, Brigham Young University
Judith M. Buddenbaum, Colorado State University, Fort Collins

For more information, go to:
<http://www.erlbaum.com/Journals/journals/JMR/jmr.htm>

The *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* is an annual academic journal dedicated to analyzing the affinities and interactions between Indic and Judaic civilizations from ancient through contemporary times.

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The *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* is a new, web-based, peer-reviewed journal committed to the academic exploration, analysis and interpretation, from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, of the interrelations and interactions between religion and religious expression and popular culture, broadly defined as the products of contemporary mass culture.

For further information, consult the JRPC website:

<http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/>

Mary Ann Beavis
Academic Editor
Journal of Religion and Popular Culture



News on Joint Session Proposals

By Rick Moore, RMIG Vice Head and Program Chair, Boise State University

As many of you know, November 1st was the deadline for submitting joint session proposals to the main office. I'm happy to report that RMIG submitted some very interesting ideas and also that we met the deadline quite comfortably.

This all started in September when I put out a call for proposals. I hope each of you received a copy of that call. Moreover, I want to thank all those who took the time to come up with ideas.

After you submitted those ideas, I gave them all careful consideration, made some alterations, and created eight finalists that were sent to AEJMC headquarters. In examining your original offers, I looked for ideas that appeared interesting but had not received great attention in recent RMIG panels. I also looked for subject matter that was of interest to more than one RMIG submitter (i.e., several of you proposed similar ideas for panels). In these cases I sometimes took two or three proposals and made them into one. Finally, another important criterion I used in examining proposals was potential interest on the part of other divisions or interest groups within AEJMC.

This last criterion is important because of the nature of the proposal process, specifically the next step. All eight of the final RMIG proposals are placed in a book that is copied and sent to heads and vice heads of each of the 28 divisions and interest groups in AEJMC.

In December, representatives of these 28 divisions and interest groups, including RMIG Head Debra Mason and myself, will convene in Palo Alto to discuss them. At the meeting, negotiations take place to determine which proposals will be programmed in Kansas City.

Each division or interest group is allowed a certain number of slots for its proposals. In other words, each proposal RMIG makes has a cost. However, that cost is lowered if a division/interest group can get another one to agree to "co-sponsor." Hence, RMIG can get more material of interest at the Kansas City convention if it can get other divisions to join in supporting our proposals. By co-sponsoring all your panels, you can get a say in twice as many panels.

With this in mind, each of you should understand that what you proposed may or may not end up on the program in Kansas City. And if your proposal *is* programmed, it may be greatly modified from what you originally conceived. It may have been modified already. Or it may be modified as we negotiate with other divisions to get it on the program.

Keeping all of the above in mind, here is a brief description of the proposals that were submitted. Again, there is no guarantee which of the following will go further than this and how they might be re-configured in the process. But, we thought you might be interested in what kinds of things we are contemplating.

RMIG Submissions to the Palo Alto Meeting

- **FAQ about Covering the Religion Beat**—A Teaching session to allow discussion of the uniqueness of religion reporting.
- **Reporting at the Interface of Science and Religion**—A PF&R session on news coverage that requires some understanding of both scientific and religious/ethical dimensions of the world.
- **Selling Religion**—A Research session that examines the ways in which religious institutions have attempted to sell (and/or continue to sell) their "product" to "consumers."
- **Press Coverage of the Roman Catholic Church**—A PF&R session for discussion of recent high visibility news about one of the world's most powerful religious institutions.
- **Faith and Moral Imperatives Behind Journalistic Ethics**—A PF&R session about the religious roots of many reporters' sense of social responsibility.
- **A World of Faith: Coverage of Religion Around the Globe**—A PF&R session on the nature of the religions dimensions of international news.
- **The Art of Dealing with Sensitive Issues in the Classroom**—A Teaching session on managing an open classroom environment without offending students when discussing sensitive subjects such as (but not limited to) religion.
- **Gender, Religious Publishing and Group Formation in American Religion**—A Research session on popular texts that inspire their readers to reconsider their lives in the context of their gender roles and their faith.

Exciting Things Afoot for RMIG *(continued from front page)*

Eleanor Block's summary of religion and media research for 2002 so far yields several useful works. Block, who is RMIG's secretary, is a journalism librarian at The Ohio State University. We're fortunate to have her excellent search skills to make our jobs easier.

These are only a handful of the hard workers on the RMIG leadership team this year, not the least of which is

David Scott, serves as our newsletter editor, putting together this issue just days after his wife delivered their second child.

In other news, we'll be sure to keep you posted on the search for a new chair in Media and Religion at the Annenberg School at University of Southern California. The

announcement is included in this newsletter. The position will begin in fall 2003. A job description is expected any day. A number of other schools have expended their media and religion programming or are planning new degree or certificate efforts. In an upcoming issue, we'll summarize them for you.

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More Than A Little Help From a Friend *(from page 1)*

Time was when seasoned journalists took younger ones under their wing and mentored them. Apprenticeships were a structure in old-time printer culture that morphed into newsroom hierarchies that made sure the traditions of print media weren't lost from one generation to the next. It wasn't a perfect system. There were abuses. And indeed, the argument can be made that ossified tradition in American journalism needs to be shattered at certain points in the generational sequence. New generations need to pursue new ideas. But there's something about religion journalism that mentoring could help with.

Religion journalists aren't theologians, but they have to know their way around a seminary library. More importantly, they have to know their way around a denomination's PR structures, and need to know how to read the directions - the directions in which denominations, religious sub-groups, and para-church organizations are going. Good sportswriters learn how to read plays on a football or soccer field by shadowing a seasoned sports journalist. Good religion newswriters learn how to cover the Nation of Islam by hanging around people like Russell Chandler, learning from his experiences, picking up on the cues he gives. Russell Chandler isn't the only out there who knows the backdoors, alleyways and shortcuts to accuracy, context and

depth in religion coverage. Ken Woodward at Newsweek does, too. So does Marshal Frady. Charles Shepherd dis his homework on the Jim and Tammy Bakker case in North Carolina. The question is whether these veterans will be willing to open the door to a generation that needs to know what they know. Many established religion writers have the wherewithal to fund programs that help religion-news students pursue careers with vigor and insight. We can only hope the Chandlers' example serves as a catalyst.

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