

Using AEJMC Conference Abstracts in Journalism and Mass Communication: An Introductory Awareness Tool for Librarians

By Anne L. Buchanan and Jean-Pierre V.M. Herubel

Abstract: Journalism and mass communication research constitute a vibrant and creative arena in which many emerging interests and subjects converge. Surveying and using conference papers is a sound approach to gaining insight into trends, if not recent research topics and prevailing interests of a given field. This cursory examination of AEJMC conferences for 2000-2009 offers an open window into the trends and preoccupation's of researchers in the journalism and mass communication field. Examination and discussion of data, reveals particular loci of specialization and emergent trends. As an awareness tool and approach the use of conferences and their respective listings is a valuable tool for librarians engaged in reference, instruction, as well as collection management.

Within the repertoire of possible tools and procedures for effective library support of academic disciplines, librarians will use as many effective measures as possible to offer creative and innovative services to those respective disciplines. Librarians use many different tools to monitor subjects for which they have responsibility, often relying upon proven approaches—liaison relationships with academic departments, perusal of scholarly research journals for book reviews, and keeping abreast of research and pedagogy as they may affect how librarians approach support of those disciplinary activities in teaching departments. Discussions with vendors and publishers and their representatives, constitutes another useful avenue for keeping *au courant* of disciplinary needs vis-à-vis libraries and provision of information resources. Additionally, knowledge of disciplinary interests, perspectives and research orientations offer aid in bringing to bear successful information literacy programs. All these and other time-honored approaches serve librarians well in their support of academic and research needs of faculty and students. Another useful approach is the

monitoring of academic and professional conferences and possible conference information websites (Buchanan, Goedeken, Hérubel 1996)¹. Albeit, not all conferences readily publish conference reports, abstracts, or even presented papers, some do offer rich sites replete with all manner of materials for public consumption.

Among academic disciplines, nowhere is the availability of conference abstracts and other useful information more accessible than for AEJMC (Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication). Among its offerings, it maintains a database for conference abstracts. The organization "is a non-profit, educational association of journalism and mass communication faculty, administrators, students and media professionals. Dedicated to promoting the highest standards for education, the Association provides an abundance of resources for news, research and career opportunities, including a multicultural network of practitioners from every discipline of journalism and mass communication."²

As the official site for the journalism and mass communication profession in the United States, this website provides in-depth and current academic as well as perspectives on research and professional issues concerning J & MC education.³ Librarians who need to keep up with current trends and concerns of J & MC education can avail themselves of this website for purposes of gathering information as well as monitoring the trends and emphases of J & MC educators.⁴ For librarians responsible for journalism and mass communications reference, instruction and collections, monitoring the AEJMC website for conference abstracts offers the most expeditious approach to keeping aware of where J & MC research and pedagogy is moving.

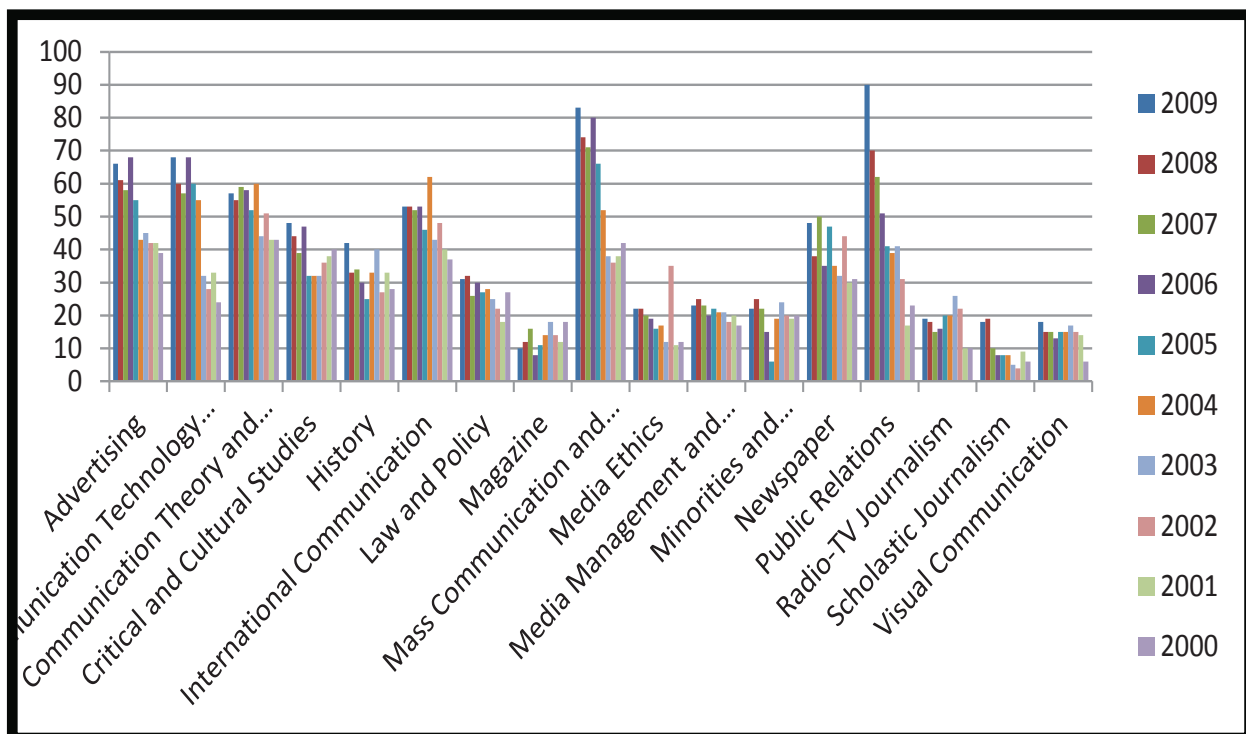
With this in mind, this paper attempts to frame the importance of using conference

programs and websites for purposes of ascertaining research fronts and continuing emphases pertaining to disciplines for which librarians maintain critical support roles in the information spectrum. For the J & MC librarian, judicious monitoring of such websites as exemplified by AEJMC constitutes a ready and reliable barometer of J & MC research and preoccupations evident among J & MC researchers. Reference and especially, instruction and collections can be amplified with knowledge of trends and emphases as they are reflected in current research archived in AEJMC conference archives. Knowledge of nuances as well as larger trends can be beneficial when instructing students how to choose a topic or how to grasp the larger contours of J & MC concerns and professional prerogatives. Decisions where to place one's collections strengths or what may require remote storage or withdrawal, can be enhanced through awareness of these characteristics appearing in AEJMC conference abstracts. Additional permutations occur when addressing problems concerning student papers and the best possible approach to advising students in pursuing topics and methodologies. Given that time is a limited resource among librarians, harnessing the most current of J & MC interests can only enrich the librarian's efforts in maintaining effective and mutually supportive coordination and collaboration with J & MC faculty and students.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

To effectively gain a measure of J & M C research, data was triaged for the years 2000-2009 from the AEJMC website, specifically the conference papers abstracts webpage for available rubrics under which conference papers were presented. The number of papers under each rubric was noted and each abstract read. From data gathered trends and concentrations of research revealed specific orientations and major loci of timely research initiatives and interests of J & MC presenters. As an awareness indicator of continuing research, emerging trends, or continued strengths and orientations could be ascertained. An additional procedure was to match conference papers with those professional interests and associations of AEJMC members; in doing this, an additional dimension of what constitutes critical or pertinent areas relevant to AEJMC scholarly professional preoccupations revealed strengths and emphases. Although a preliminary examination of conference papers abstracts, the animating purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the possibility and the effectiveness of using conference websites as a venue as an awareness tool for gaining salient information vis-à-vis scholarly and professional associations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION



Graph I. Division Papers Over Decennial Years

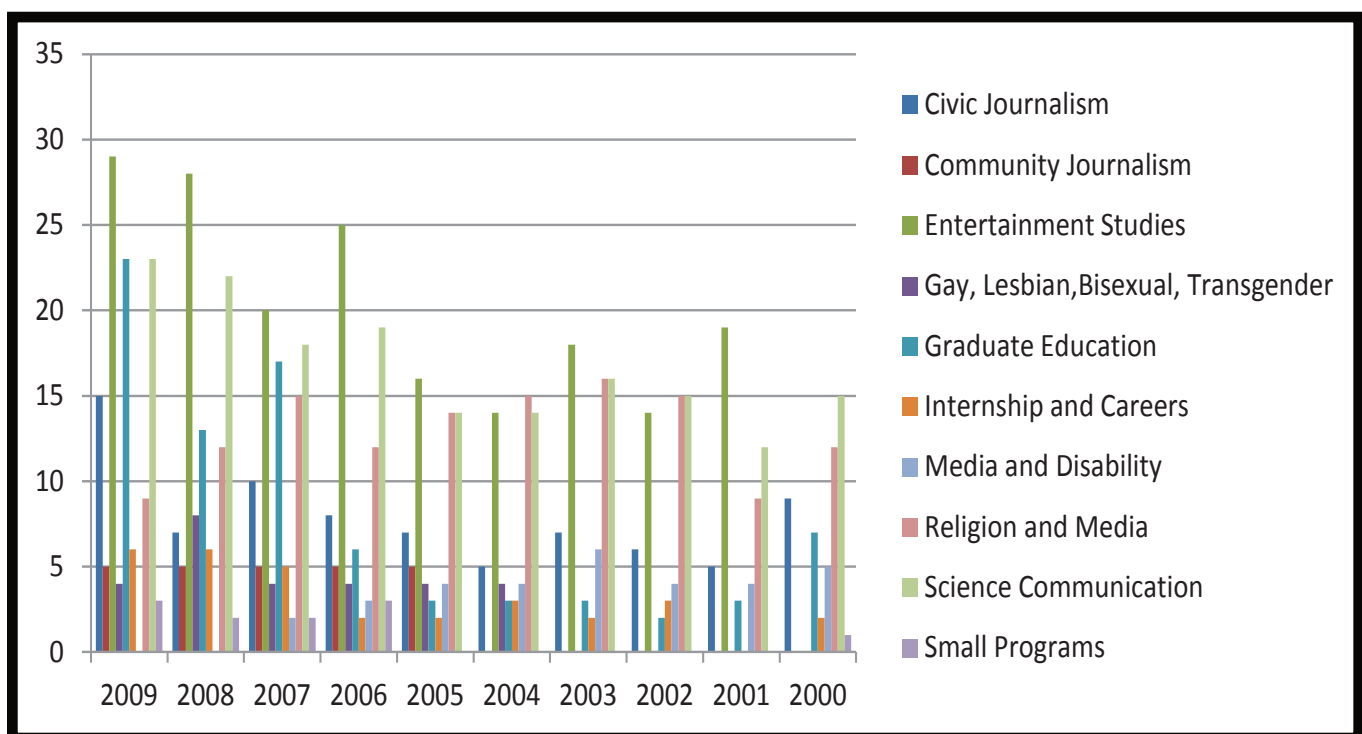
Upon examination, the data revealed salient characteristics of J & MC research emphases as well as trends in research orientation. Analysis of data indicated that conference papers produced a spectrum of identifiable concentrations of AEJMC research activity, within a clearly evolving pattern of increasing numbers of papers offered from 2000-2009 with continuous and sustained growth. Two broad grouping of papers conformed to AEJMC composition of research and professional interests; these groupings were divided between Divisions and Interests Groups. The data was collected and triaged according to this AEJMC scheme—in doing so, clearer configurations could be isolated and noted.

Keeping in mind that these papers represent cutting-edge research and intellectual perspectives, as well as methodological innovations and discoveries, the discernible growth reveals a vigorous pattern of research emphases and engagement. Moreover, the number of papers over the decennial period is segmented along well-delineated lines of intellectual and professional concerns (Table I).

Production of papers indicates general growth among rubrics except for a pronounced decline for Media and Disability, slight growth for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Small Programs, while other rubrics were

experiencing sustained growth. The major rubrics of research activity, the top ten, were represented by Advertising (8.2%), Communication Technology (CTEC) (7.7%), Communication Theory and Methodology (8.2%), Critical and Cultural Studies (6.1%), History (5.2%), International Communication(7.7%), Law and Policy(4.2%), Mass Communication and Society (9.2%), Newspaper (6.2%), and Public Relations (7.3%), as they appear in the website. Interestingly, when these top rubrics are compared with membership affiliations of researchers in AEJMC, seven rubrics in the top membership affiliations constitute a total of 3,035 conference papers or 48% of the total sample (Table II.).¹

The production of these specific rubrics directly corresponds to strong membership affiliation in divisions and interests groups. Other rubrics, garnering 100 or more conference papers—Magazine (2.1%), Media Ethics (2.9%), Media Management and Economics (3.3%), Minorities and Communication (3%), Radio-TV Journalism (2.8%), Visual Communication (2.3%), Entertainment Studies (2.9%), Religion and Media (2%), and Science Communication (2.6%), but less than 200 were responsible for 1,520 papers or 24% of the sample, while the remaining rubrics, Scholastic Journalism (1.5%), Civic Journalism (1.2%), Community Journalism (.03%), Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual



Graph II. Interest Groups Papers Over Decennial Years

	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	Total
Advertising	66	61	58	68	55	43	45	42	42	39	519
Communication Technology (CTEC)	68	60	57	68	60	55	32	28	33	24	485
Communication Theory and Methodology	57	55	59	58	52	60	44	51	43	43	522
Critical and Cultural Studies	48	44	39	47	32	32	32	36	38	40	388
History	42	33	34	30	25	33	40	27	33	28	325
International Communication	53	53	52	53	46	62	43	48	40	37	487
Law and Policy	31	32	26	30	27	28	25	22	18	27	266
Magazine	10	12	16	8	11	14	18	14	12	18	133
Mass Communication and Society	83	74	71	80	66	52	38	36	38	42	580
Media Ethics	22	22	20	19	16	17	12	35	11	12	186
Media Management and Economics	23	25	23	20	22	21	21	18	20	17	210
Minorities and Communication	22	25	22	15	6	19	24	20	19	20	192
Newspaper	48	38	50	35	47	35	32	44	30	31	390
Public Relations	90	70	62	51	41	39	41	31	17	23	465
Radio-TV Journalism	19	18	15	16	20	20	26	22	10	10	176
Scholastic Journalism	18	19	10	8	8	8	5	4	9	6	95
Visual Communication	18	15	15	13	15	15	17	15	14	6	143
Civic Journalism	15	7	10	8	7	5	7	6	5	9	79
Community Journalism	5	5	5	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	25
Entertainment Studies	29	28	20	25	16	14	18	14	19	0	183
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender	4	8	4	4	4	4	0	0	0	0	28
Graduate Education	23	13	17	6	3	3	3	2	3	7	80
Internship and Careers	6	6	5	2	2	3	2	3	0	2	31
Media and Disability	0	0	2	3	4	4	6	4	4	5	32
Religion and Media	9	12	15	12	14	15	16	15	9	12	129
Science Communication	23	22	18	19	14	14	16	15	12	15	168
Small Programs	3	2	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	11
Totals Per Conference	835	759	727	706	618	615	563	552	479	474	6,328

Table I. Annual Production of Conference Papers

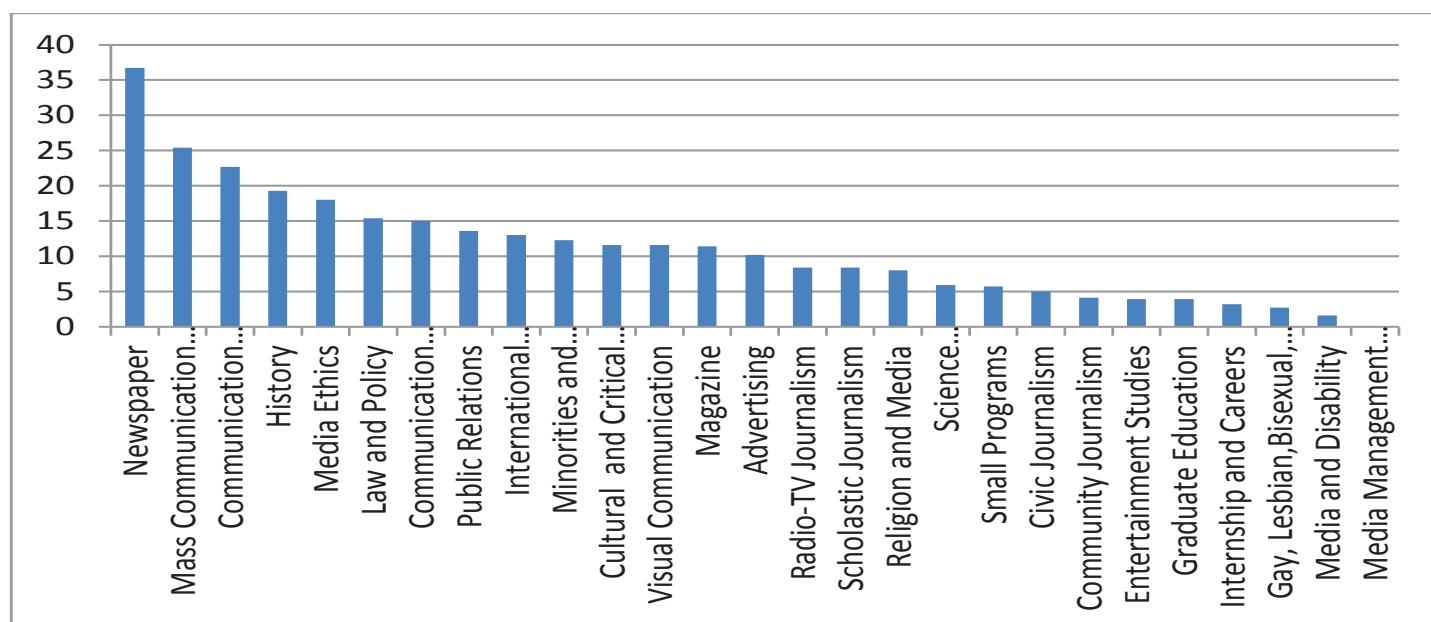


Table II. Membership in Specialization

Transgender (.04%), Graduate Education (1.2%), Internship and Careers (.04%), Media and Disability (.04%), and Small Programs (.01%), claimed 381, or 6.% of the total sample.

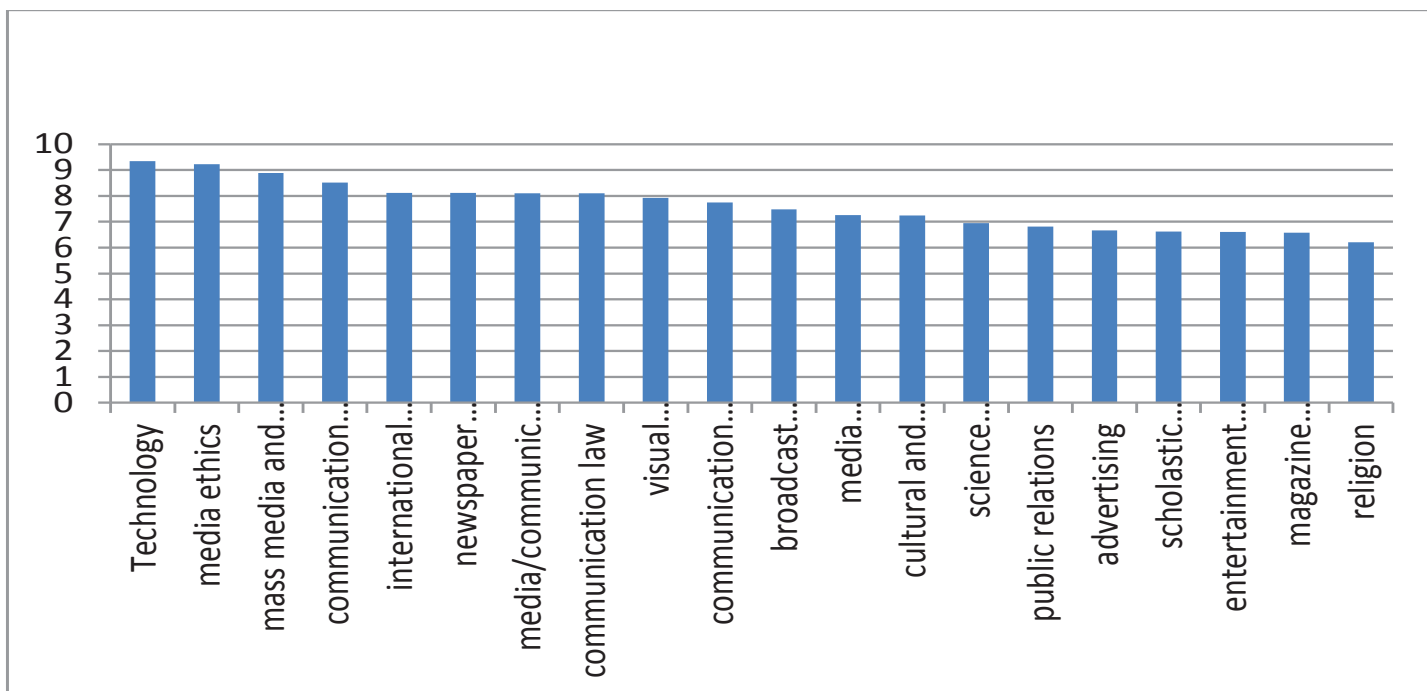
Upon *de visu* examination of paper abstracts, emerging themes and preoccupations of AEJMC concerns revealed major loci of activity as well as marginalized interests and emphases. Clearly, the data supports the observation that Mass Communication and Society studies dominate the research agenda, with critical emphasis devoted to Advertising and Communication Theory and Methodology, from advertising analyses and media content to the interconnections and mediated relationships within societal and media systems, research in these domains continue unabated. As global communication and events, both economic and political, as well and cultural, the examination of international media within individual and cross cultural contexts magnifies complementary interests in mediated images, texts, and legal institutions as well as the commerce of ideas and entertainment studies. Newspapers as well as Magazine studies constitute a very significant 8.3% of the sample. As ubiquitous media systems, newspapers and magazines offer many opportunities to examine popular culture as well as distribution of massive daily content of mediated information and forms of contextualized social, political and cultural phenomena.

A number of interesting findings include the strength exhibited by media ethics and history research. Media Ethics form a compelling locus of research that easily complements law and policy issues in journalism and media studies. Here case studies and qualitative studies open new areas of research. Although seemingly present oriented, AEJMC seriously entertains the historical dimension in research in journalism and mass communications, as History constitutes a particularly pronounced venues for AEJMC activity. Heavily predicated upon historical methodologies, studies indicate an attempt at maintaining historiographical perspectives, as well as treating discrete research topics. Not to be neglected, AEJMC maintains a strong orientation to explicating the nuances and theories as well as examination of content the vagaries of Public Relations, in all its complexities. Both theoretical as well as practice-based these

studies offer emerging perspectives and techniques of analysis as public relations continues to be a major facet of media related professions and scholarship. Radio-TV Journalism forms another area where research attempts to frame the various aspects of societal intersections with emerging technologies of communication, content studies of programming, mediated information and news distribution, as well as other phenomena within a contextualized mediated environment. Not be overlooked, Critical and Cultural Studies serves as an arena of compelling, innovative, theoretical and methodological drivers, exploring configurations of human activity and its multifaceted, contextualized environments, with or without technologies, but within the scope of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives deriving from the social sciences and theoretical breakthroughs in the humanities, e.g. literary theory, or philosophical criticisms.

Closer examination of paper abstracts, revealed certain approaches, theoretical perspectives, methodologies, as well as common themes that animated the constellation of research breadth and focus. Among these would be content analysis, with its capacity to investigate any form of media, especially newspapers, magazines, and television or radio programming. Studies of gender, or political persuasion, advertising agendas or the exploration of emerging fronts of contents are open to such analysis. An especial subject is the representation of women, or children or ethnic identities in mediated environments.

Examination of news is often a fruitful subject for such study as well as framing studies of any number of possible news or programming media. Critical theories and cultural studies methodologies if not perspectives are emerging as acceptable approaches in J & MC research. Among the many quantitative and qualitative studies, the ethnographic narrative offers fruitful insight into complex media and human relations. It is not surprising that quantification exerts considerable influence in J & MC studies as it articulates social scientific veracity so well absorbed by J & MC researchers. Without these approaches, both tried and tested and newly-articulated perspectives and approaches, the prerogatives expressed in these abstracts serve to profile and accentuate the intellectual and creative vitality inherent in J & MC conference research.



Graph III. Areas of Interests & Research Activity of Importance to Researchers

For librarian purposes, this knowledge is necessary in the provision of targeted services. The underlying methodological perspectives, and theoretical innovations inherent in J & MC research and scholarship range across many of the interests considered important to J & MC scholars and may not always represent uninformed perceptions of garnered through other channels. Production of knowledge may not always be representative of profession of that knowledge. However, in stating this, analysis of the data proved to offer heretofore unknown insights necessary for an extended and in-depth exploration of these preliminary findings.

These findings illustrate the usefulness of using conference tools as an additional awareness tool in the repertoire of library aids in supporting the activities of faculty and students in J & MC studies; indeed, librarians engaged in reference, instruction, and collections can gain valuable insight into the research fronts and preoccupations at the heart of J & MC or any professional and scholarly conference by monitoring conference abstracts or even available proceedings, often via the internet. Moreover, from the perspective of academic librarians charged with the necessity of maintaining critical resources, e.g. collections, including data streams, as well as journals and books, monitoring this professionally sponsored information source provides equally valuable information and knowledge of disciplinary and professional interests of J & MC. Critically vital to sound

and creative services to J & MC faculty and students, whether undergraduate or graduate students, knowledge of where J & MC is moving as a whole, and especially which areas of emphases are gaining or losing momentum amplifies effectiveness of delivery of services. As an *awareness tool*, this approach offers an expeditious and sound avenue to better understanding J & MC research and its general and specialized characteristics.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This exploratory discussion of the usefulness of utilizing conference websites for gaining additional information and perspectives on a given discipline, demonstrated how librarians can avail themselves of timely and, at times, longitudinal information and knowledge. Often conference disciplinary-based websites can provide the librarian conference papers full-text or, abstracts of papers accepted and delivered, as well as a multitude of data, professional concerns, and position statements as well as suites of data, depending upon a discipline's willingness to offer such information for public consumption. Often, the librarian can peruse these websites for conference papers information that will benefit their daily activities, from collections to information literacy, to keeping abreast of where a discipline is going. For AEJMC, the usefulness of examining conference abstracts permitted an open window upon the intellectual and professional research landscape occupied by AEJMC for J & MC studies. As a decidedly

multidisciplinary, if not interdisciplinary constellation of research prerogatives, emphases and orientation, J & MC conference abstracts of papers offers valuable insight into the major configurations that animate J & MC, especially as it appears annually in AEJMC conference. Without exaggerating the importance of using conference information situated on scholarly and professional websites, regular perusal of AEJMC will reward librarians seeking and wishing to maintain awareness of what is transpiring in J & MC.

1. As an example of research treating this subject, see Buchanan, A. L., Goedeke, E. A., Hérubel, Jean-Pierre V. M., (1996). Scholarly Communication Among Academic Librarians: An Analysis of Six ACRL Proceedings." *Behavioral & Social Science Librarian* 14, 1-15.
2. Consult <http://www.aejmc.org/>.
3. For a sound introduction to J & M C as a discipline and concerns for professional and research preparation, see Dickson, T. (2000). *Mass Media Education in Transition: Preparing for the 21st century*. Mahwah: Erlbaum; Murray, M.D., Moore, R. L., eds. (2003). *Mass Communication Education*. Ames: Iowa State Press.
4. Another website for monitoring J & M C is <http://www.grady.uga.edu/ANNUALSURVEYS>. This site valuable information concerning critical aspects of J & M C education, especially specializations.

About the Authors

Anne L. Buchanan is from St. Xavier University.



Jean-Pierre V.M. Hérubel is Professor of Library Science and Associate Collections Librarian at HSSE Library, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN. He is liaison for art, anthropology, archaeology, philosophy, and interdisciplinary studies. He was liaison for communication and journalism. Among his research interests are historiography and the philosophy of history; he is especially interested in the sociology and history of scholarly disciplines, their evolution, and scholarly communication.