

Charge to the AEJMC Task Force for Bridges to the Professions



By AEJMC President Paul Voakes, Oct. 24, 2016

The theme of my term is “Closing the Gap,” which refers to a number of different contexts for “gaps,” but the “gap” that chiefly concerns me is the gap between JMC educators and media practitioners. I don’t think there has ever been a time in which a symbiosis between media professionals and media educators was more urgently needed. But I don’t see it happening to the extent that it should.

Too often, for example, JMC research is ignored by media professionals, because it’s either out of date or its topic is irrelevant to professional concerns.

Too often JMC researchers have little reason to undertake applied research, because their career paths (to tenure and promotion) require theory-building work that must be published in academic journals.

It’s not just research relevance that needs help. The skills that educators are teaching in the classrooms have lost some relevance for what editors and directors are needing in professional settings. To add to the challenge, work that academics could do in building Bridges to the Professional world is considered by campus administration to be “service,” which is rewarded far less than teaching or research, in promotion or in salary increases.

But I don’t think JMC educators and media professionals are destined to live in separate worlds, so I’m forming the task force to contemplate how AEJMC, as an organization, can help increase the relevance of what its members do, and how we might engineer something approaching symbiosis for the pros and the pros.

I hereby charge the Presidential Task Force with designing a plan by which AEJMC can bring the JMC community and the media professions closer together, for the enhancement of achievement in both fields. Specifically, I am requesting this:



The task should start with an analysis of the relationship between JMC educators and media professionals. Where are the bonds already firm and strong? Where are they weak and distant? In what contexts would it make the most sense to engage closely? Please consider research, teaching and service.

What can our organization, AEJMC, do to leverage our particular strengths as an organization to improve synergies between educators and media professionals?

- * Please consider incentives that AEJMC might offer to individuals or to divisions/interest groups.
- * Please consider programmatic initiatives that might help to close the gap.
- * Please consider possible partnerships with various types of professional organizations, whose resources might combine with our own and whose interests might dovetail with our own.
- * Please consider recommendations that could be sustainable over time rather than a brief explosion of brilliance that is unlikely to be replicated.

In past communications, I have offered suggestions like these:

- * We could pursue incentives, including an “awards” structure, to effect more applied research.*
- * We could establish a system whereby academics could frequently learn which research questions managers, editors, publishers, producers and other media professionals deem important.*
- * We could pursue ways to recognize strong applied research as soon as it is peer-reviewed and presented at conferences, through fast, brief and accessible dissemination to the media professions.*
- * We could imagine and encourage more sponsored research grants from the private sector, whose findings would land in both professional and scholarly venues.*
- * We could increase number and size of programs that put professors into newsrooms during the summer.*
- * We could organize a database of tech tools and how to teach them, updated regularly and highlighted by webinars.*
- * We could encourage professional organizations to recognize JMC research, much like SPJ’s “Researcher of the Year” award.*
- * We could learn from the successes of AAF and PRSA in bridging education with professional practice.*

These thoughts comprise the tip of the iceberg. Depending on your own analysis, you may supplant these with entirely more promising recommendations.

And, finally, I ask you to consider an early pilot to demonstrate “proof of concept” for an idea that seems exciting to you, during our conference in Chicago in August 2017. This could emerge in the form of a panel or as the keynote speaker, or both (The president is authorized to create one invited panel each year, apart from the panels planned by the Council of Divisions).

Thank you for your service on this Task Force, and I look forward with great anticipation to your thoughts on this issue of relevance.