

Standing Committee on Professional Freedom and Responsibility

Standards for Evaluation of AEJMC Activities

(March 1986, revised August 2010, August 2020)

Definition

The Standing Committee on Professional Freedom and Responsibility – like the two other standing committees on Teaching and on Research – has been charged with providing annual constructive reviews of AEJMC activities. The focus of this committee can be understood by a close examination of its title.

This is the committee charged with focusing on the standards and work environments of the professions that are the focus of our teaching and research. The term "professional" in the committee's name refers to professional communicators who work in journalism; public relations; advertising; digital media; communication research; the non-profit, government and health care sectors; and entertainment media. Therefore, "professional freedom" refers to the freedom of communicators to express themselves. "Professional responsibility" refers to the standards that should exist in media and communication professions.

To help AEJMC members understand the focus of the committee, the PF&R Standing Committee has defined its mission more specifically. We believe "professional freedom and responsibility" can be translated into five specific subject areas. Therefore, when the committee evaluates the work of AEJMC and its divisions and interest groups, it is looking at performance related to:

1. **Free Expression.** Freedom of speech and of the press, embodied in the First Amendment, have played a central role in the field of communication. AEJMC has been traditionally concerned with the importance of the open circulation of ideas. Members of AEJMC should not only work to improve the understanding of free expression in its historical and legal sense; they should also promote and defend that right vigorously. Members should also encourage consideration of what that right and the value of free expression can and should mean in the work of media and communication professionals around the world.
2. **Professional Ethics.** As a key aspect of professional responsibility, professional ethics speaks to the values, commitments, loyalties, and principles of our professions. Although specific ethical issues in communication and media professions may vary, ethical concerns often relate to issues of truth telling and deception; privacy and confidentiality; conflicts of interest; diversity, inclusion and social justice; the abuse of privilege; and sensationalism. Public trust in media and communication professions depends on practice that reflects the highest ethical standards.
3. **Media and Communication Criticism and Accountability.** Our jobs as educators and scholars should include constructive evaluation of professional practice. In light of our expertise, and the perspective provided by the academic environment in which we work, we have a special role to play in conducting media analysis and criticism and fostering media accountability.
4. **Diversity, Inclusion and Social Justice.** This subject area addresses issues of marginalization, systemic racism and unequal treatment of underrepresented groups that are reflected in hiring and promotion practices; in organizational climates; and in structural policies that perpetuate racism, sexism and other forms of power and privilege. This area also includes issues of representation in media and public communication – including underrepresentation and misrepresentation – of historically marginalized groups and voices. Activities that enhance collective understanding of the core social justice demands of protest movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and the historic inequities that have resulted in structural racism in the United States are needed and encouraged.
5. **Public Service.** Educators should serve society beyond what they provide in their teaching and research, and educators concerned with media and communication should provide service related to their own professional fields. This category refers to activities that enhance understanding among media educators, professionals and the general public. In addition to serving the professions, it includes service to AEJMC and its committees, divisions and interest groups.

Expectations

1. The committee expects PF&R activities to be carried out both during the annual conference and during the year between annual conferences.

2. Divisions and interest groups need not emphasize all five categories every year. However, groups should devote effort to most of the five categories over a period of a few years. The PF&R Standing Committee believes that all AEJMC groups should have interests in all five areas, although some of the categories fit the interests of a single group more than others.
3. The PF&R Standing Committee encourages activities that cross divisions and interest groups. The committee will, however, need to know the contributions of each group. The comprehensive and accurate reporting of PF&R activities is in itself a service to AEJMC. Accuracy of the reports is extremely important. Divisions and interest groups are encouraged to check evidence presented in the annual report with appropriate persons in the group. The PF&R committee reserves the right to ask for further information.
4. Only reported activities can be evaluated. The PF&R Standing Committee cannot give credit to those activities it does not know about, and the only way to ensure that is through the annual reports that all divisions and interest groups submit. The standing committee needs to know brief details of each activity, including information about who was involved.
5. PF&R activities of divisions and interest groups must reflect the work of the groups rather than only that of individual group members. Groups are encouraged to exploit appropriate personal activities so that they do become part of the group's activities and involve more people. Groups must make clear the group's participation.
6. The quality of activities is as important as the quantity. A few activities of high quality are preferred to a long list of activities requiring little effort and producing few results. Quality can be difficult to assess and describe, so evidence of quality is helpful. Divisions and interest groups should explain the purpose and objectives of their activities. Evidence of success or completion of planned activities makes reported efforts more convincing.
7. The PF&R Standing Committee attempts to omit from consideration those activities that are more appropriately evaluated by one of the other standing committees. Annual reports should clearly designate each activity as either a PF&R, a teaching or a research activity. However, if there are activities that clearly apply to PF&R as well as at least one other area, that should be pointed out in the PF&R section of the annual report.

Suggested Activities

The ideas below are illustrations of possible PF&R activities. This is not an exhaustive list but rather a sample of activities from recent years. Divisions and interest groups are encouraged to be creative when envisioning, developing and executing PF&R activities.

Many activities lend themselves to the conference setting, and many goals can be accomplished not only during the annual conference but through regional mid-year conferences or workshops just before the annual conference.

Other activities are more project oriented. They may involve the planning, execution and distribution of a research study or report. In the case of service activities, the project itself may be the end result.

Some PF&R activities can be accomplished at least partially by developing close relations with media professionals or professional associations with common goals. Therefore, the Standing Committee on Professional Freedom and Responsibility encourages liaison activity with professional groups. This may involve shared meetings, guest appearances at each other's meetings, shared projects, etc. AEJMC units also can author resolutions, develop meaningful award presentations and contribute financially to others furthering shared goals.

REPLACE THIS SECTION WITH MORE RECENT EXAMPLES COLLECTED THROUGH REPORTS OR CONTACT WITH DIGS.

Advertising

Separate paper competition and session for PF&R topics; joint session with Newspaper on addressing gay & lesbian issues in the media; mini-plenary with three other groups on popular culture responses to 9/11; off-site presentation on anti-smoking advertising; newsletter articles on PF&R topics.

Communicating Science, Health, Environment and Risk

Co-sponsored panel on medicine marketing; off-site program on science journalism; co-sponsored panel on women's health issues; newsletter articles on PF&R topics.

Communication Technology

Panels on citizenship and the internet and computer use among the elderly; mini-plenary on freedom of information; newsletter articles on PF&R topics; PF&R sessions at mid-winter conference.

Communication Theory and Methodology

Co-sponsored panel on government and military censorship; newsletter articles on PF&R topics; co-sponsored panel on the role of institutional review boards; co-sponsored panel on coverage of war on terrorism; co-sponsored panel on importance of context in international news; awarded Lionel C. Barrow Minority Scholarship to a minority doctoral student; MAPOR panel on technology and public opinion.

Cultural and Critical Studies

Mini-plenary with three other groups on evaluation of media coverage of the war on terrorism; panel presenting annual Professional Freedom & Responsibility Award (chosen by vote of membership); co-sponsored panel on "Indigenous Ways of Knowing"; panel on the value of critical research in tenure evaluations; newsletter article on academic freedom.

History

Co-sponsored panels on media coverage of women and teaching from a global perspective; panel session at southeast colloquium on coverage of the civil rights movement in Mississippi newspapers.

International Communication

Co-sponsored panels on contribution of US-based media experts in Latin America, coverage of the war on terrorism, worldwide journalism, women and the web, Latin America press freedom, global ethics for the world press, career and internship opportunities in Spanish-language media; award for international news writing, award for distinguished service; promoted and sold documentary on Arab coverage of events; sponsorship of PF&R-related resolutions; journal articles on PF&R issues.

Law & Policy

Two panels on free expression; panel on role of institutional review boards; panel on constitutional law; mini-plenary on Latin America press freedom; PF&R articles in Media Law Notes.

Magazine

Panel on free expression; invited paper session on depictions of aging women in magazines; panel on tourism and controversy; Magazine Professional of the Year award; PF&R session at Southeast Colloquium.

Mass Communication & Society

Co-sponsored panel on attacks on freedom of speech; newsletter articles on ethics and inclusiveness; co-sponsored mini-plenary on popular culture responses to 9/11; off-site activity on science journalism; co-sponsored panel on public affairs and media coverage; co-sponsored panel on civic journalism.

Media Ethics

Co-sponsored panel and mini-plenary on free expression topics; panel on world press global ethics; co-sponsored panel on supermarket tabloids; mini-plenary on cultural differences in ethics; pre-conference Media Ethics Teaching workshop; fall colloquium on global media.

Media Management & Economics

Mid-winter conference panel on media and terrorism; pre-convention panel on crime coverage; panel on disaster management; co-sponsored panel on corporate ownership of media; co-sponsored panel on Spanish-language media market; mini-plenary on media and terrorism; newsletter articles on PF&R topics.

Minorities & Communication

Co-sponsored panel on communications law; co-sponsored panel on ethics and cultural differences; co-sponsored panel on status of women in journalism and mass communications; co-sponsored panel on effects of US experts on Latin American culture; co-sponsored panel on indigenous ways of knowing; co-sponsored panel on race reporting; luncheon presentation on importance of diversity in reporting; research paper panels on PF&R topics; newsletter articles on PF&R topics.

Newspaper

Co-sponsored mini-plenary on Latin America press freedom; panel on corporate ownership of media; co-sponsored panel on coverage of gay/lesbian issues; panel on teaching American journalism to international students; workshop on improving crime coverage; PF&R articles in Newspaper Research Journal; PF&R panels at Southeast Colloquium.

Public Relations

Co-sponsored panel on US public affairs and media coverage; co-sponsored panel on teaching PR ethics; articles in research journal on ethics and activism; panel on marketing medicine; panel on risk communication; panel on Spanish-language media market segmentation; regional conference panel on attracting and retaining minority grad students and faculty; provided funding for 20 minority students to attend annual convention.

Radio Television Journalism

Pre-convention workshop on crime coverage co-sponsored with three other groups; co-sponsored panels on disaster management, communication law, professional-academic partnerships, and civic journalism; PF&R articles in newsletter; use of group listserv to discuss topical PF&R issues; participation in mid-winter conference on media issues dealing with terrorism.

Scholastic Journalism

Co-sponsored panel on challenges to student media; provides financial support and volunteers for Student Press Law Center; co-sponsor of mini-plenary on ethics; co-sponsor of panels on teaching journalism to students who don't follow the news and youth media; variety of PF&R topic sessions at midwinter meeting at The Poynter Institute; Robert P. Knight Multicultural Recruitment Award; workshop for high school journalism teachers; co-sponsored mini-plenary on needs of diverse learners.

Visual Communication

Mini-plenary on coverage of minority communities; mini-plenary on how covering wars and disasters affect journalists; articles in Visual Communication Quarterly on PF&R topics; PF&R column in newsletter; panel on military and government censorship; panel on tabloids.

Civic & Citizen Journalism Interest Group

Mid-winter mini-plenary on media and terrorism; co-sponsored panel on civic journalism; co-sponsored panel on race reporting.

Entertainment Studies Interest Group

Newsletter articles on PF&R topics; co-sponsored panel on religion in entertainment; co-sponsored panel on Hollywood's view of history; co-sponsored mini-plenary on minority coverage in news; co-sponsored mini-plenary on representations of patriotism; pre-conference panel on crime coverage.

Internship & Careers Interest Group

Co-sponsored panel on war, terrorism and trauma; co-sponsored panel on media convergence.

Small Programs Interest Group

Newsletter article on student media and 9/11; co-sponsored panel on developing study-abroad courses; co-sponsored panel on academic life at small and medium-sized colleges.

For questions and support

Members of the PF&R Standing Committee see themselves as resources to AEJMC and are enthusiastic about connecting with divisions and interest groups, particularly the PF&R chairs within each division and interest group.

Each division and interest group will be assigned a liaison from the PF&R Standing Committee, who is happy to answer questions, provide advice and offer support.