

Ethica

The Newsletter of the National Communication Association's Communication Ethics Division

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Message from the Division Chair: Pat Gehrke University of South Carolina

What is the Value of the Communication Ethics Division?

What value do members get from checking that little box to affiliate with the Communication Ethics Division? What does this division do that sets it apart from the numerous other divisions to which you might belong? What motivates people to associate with the Communication Ethics Division?

These were questions the officers of the division were asking each other two years ago and the attendees of the 2008 communication ethics conference at Duquesne University discussed at some length. Certainly we are a robust and especially engaging intellectual body with diverse interests and a strong commitment to asking tough questions about ethics and communication. Due to this, the panels at the National Communication Association convention have not only been fantastic but only improving in quality over the past decade.

Additionally, our division's members have a commitment to nurturing graduate students and young scholars that I believe is unmatched (and to which I owe much of my own professional development). So, we can say with some confidence that the quality of the members has been the greatest asset of the division. However, all of that exists as something of a loose and mobile set of connections that wax and wane dependent upon individuals or a single institution. So we know the members of the division offer each other an

In this issue:

<u>Subject</u>	<u>page #</u>
* Message from the Division Chair—1-2	
* 95 th Annual NCA Convention— 3	
* List of Divisional Panels and Business Meeting—4-7	
* Honoring Clifford G. Christians—7	
* NCA Comm. Ethics Preconference—7-8	
* National Communication Ethics Conference—8	
* National Communication Ethics Conference Call— 9	
* Submitted Review—Spoma Jovanovic—10-11	
* Comm. Ethics listserv explained—11	
* Division officer contact list—12	
* Committee lists and emails— 13-14	

Editor for this issue of Ethica: Christina L. McDowell

Written contributions for Ethica REQUESTED and ENCOURAGED!

Send articles, notes, news, requests to the Editor!
The next edition is tentatively scheduled for spring 2010.

Christina L. McDowell, Duquesne University
mcdowel338@duq.edu

enormous value in their association and fellowship, but can the actual formal division itself be of some benefit?

The answer, I believe, is yes, but only for so long as the members continue to provide the intellectual, scholarly, and academic basis of that value, and do so generously. We are a professional guild of teachers, researchers, scholars, and investigators who all share a common commitment to the study and teaching of communication ethics. We may differ greatly in what ethics we advocate, our political commitments, or even whether we advocate an ethic at all, but, to a person, every member of the division I have met and spoken with over the years communicates and demonstrates that the continued study and teaching of communication ethics is vital. As I prepare to step down as chair of

this division, I can say with both hope and concern that the current moment and the coming times may well define the meaning and value of our division and one's affiliation with it. We do not need grand aspirations, unified principles, common purposes, or even shared values, but we do need a commitment to engage one another, to share our ideas with each other, and to re-commit ourselves daily to the value of our choice to identify as a part of this community of scholars. Easy platitudes, I know, but what I am talking about is not the simple act of checking that little box on the NCA membership form, or saying, "I am with you," or even being listed as a member of one of our many committees. What I mean is making a concrete and active demonstration of one's commitment to communication ethics as a field and to one's fellow teachers and scholars as colleagues.

I am asking for every member to commit just three hours over the coming year to the division. That is a mere fifteen minutes a month, or roughly thirty seconds a day. I am not looking for grand sacrifices or huge service commitments from division members, just a mere three hours a year which you will spend putting something into the division. I have no doubt we are all spending far more than that every year contributing to the teaching and studying of communication ethics, so all one needs do is direct a bit of that back into the division. That could be as simple as attending two division panels at NCA at which you are not a presenter or respondent. Or, you could spend that time sharing your teaching materials with colleagues through the community resources section of our website,

www.commethics.org. Have a great bibliography of sources on a topic in communication ethics?

There is a place on the website for that, too. These are just a few of the small ways that each of us could take a very small amount of time and make a substantive and meaningful contribution to the division. If every member posted just one item from her or his teaching materials to the website we would have an incredible library of resources for teaching communication ethics. If every member attended just one division panel upon which she or he was not a presenter all our panels would be overflowing.

If you want to get ambitious, consider signing up to review submissions for a conference or take an active role on a division committee (and I should

emphasize "active role"). However, ambition and big commitments are not what my call is really about, because we all know that only a small fraction of any group will take up the big tasks. We can't all dedicate scores upon scores of hours to the division each year and, indeed likely none of us can do that every year. A small number of members keep the division running and spend an enormous amount of time to arrange preconferences, get out this newsletter, handle our annual awards, and organize our conferences. Those duties will always be taken up by a small fraction of the members, but every single one of us can spare just three hours each year to do something for the division, something beyond just checking that box. After all, if that box means something other than a vague expression of camaraderie, it ought to mean enough to be worth that mere three hours a year. In the end, the truth of that claim is really the determinant of what value people get out of affiliating with the division. I have hope that the membership if this division will, as it has so many times in the past, prove itself to be a truly inspiring body of people who dedicate themselves to each other not only in their claimed association but by the gifts they give to one another. The value of the division as a formal entity, I believe, is its ability to facilitate those gifts. That is why I have dedicated the past year to making our website a place that can enable the offering and receipt of such gifts. It is far from perfect, but I hope you find it helps you to give your gifts to fellow members of the division and the broader body of teachers and scholars committed to communication ethics.

With gratitude for the opportunity to serve as chair for this past year and anxious anticipation of our meeting again in Chicago, I thank= each of you for all you have done and all you will do to make this division what it is and what it will be.



**The 95th Annual Convention of the
National Communication Association
Thursday November 12-
Sunday November 15, 2009
Chicago, Illinois**

**Message from Vice-Chair:
2009 Convention: "Discourses of
Stability and Change"**

Spoma Jovanovic

The University of North Carolina — Greensboro

The 2009 Chicago NCA Convention promises interesting, informative, entertaining, and thought-provoking papers and panels at the Communication Ethics Division sessions. You'll have access to discussions this year of angels, "juicy ethics," forgiveness, organizational citizenship, and more! Each of the sessions has been designed to showcase a different aspect of communication advocacy, research, theory, pedagogy and/or practice.

Of special interest every year is the **Top Papers Panel** so mark your calendars now to attend on **Friday, November 13, 2-3:15 p.m.** We have reserved extra time for the commentary and dialogue the papers are sure to inspire. **Craig Maier** of Duquesne University presents, "A Communicative Ethics for an Uprooted Age: Simone Weil and Community." **Brian Kanouse** of Purdue University will discuss, "On Discursive Performativity: The Limits of Dissent and Ethical Agency in Critical Existential Phenomenology." **Rebecca Ann Lind** of University of Illinois at Chicago, along with **Tammy Swenson Lepper** of Winona State University offer their findings in "Measuring Sensitivity to Conflicts of Interest: A Preliminary Test of Method." No doubt **Ken Chase's** quips and comments as respondent will jump start other reactions from the audience. Each of these top papers received excellent ratings and unanimous support from the reviewers, resulting in the Top Paper Honors. You will not be disappointed by the depth and detail of what is to be presented.

Other panels and papers to be offered in sessions throughout the four-day conference were gleaned from more entries than we could accommodate, so be sure to review those sessions as well as you plan your 2009 schedule. See the full listing of sessions included here in the newsletter.

We're pleased that one of NCA's Spotlight Panels featuring the "Five Years Out" theme includes a Communication Ethics Division contribution organized by Melissa Cook and entitled, "Our Foundation and Our Future." On Saturday, November 14 at 8:00 a.m. you can hear **Melissa Cook, Clifford Christians, Ronald Arnett, Pat Gehrke, and Annette Holba** discuss the historical development of the division, including contributions to the academy and the community, as well as a conversation of challenges ahead in this time of change.

A big **thank you** to this year's paper and panel **reviewers**. To expedite the process of alerting us all of our paper acceptances, reviewers were charged with reading and ranking papers in record time. Reading and commenting on the papers (many of you received their feedback) required many, many hours with the only real reward offered by way of a sneak peak at what's to come at this year's convention. Thank you to the ones who made our program slate so exciting this year: **Melissa Cook, Tom Duncanson, Janie Harden Fritz, Annette Holba, Stephanie Houston Gray, Stephen Kriss, Tammy Swenson Lepper and Melba Veldez!**

List of Communication Ethics Divisional Panels and Business Meeting

Communicating Forgiveness Through Dialogue

Sponsor: Communication Ethics Division
Session Submission type: Panel Discussion
Time: Saturday, November 14 -9:30-10:45am
Building/Room: Hilton Chicago
Meeting Room 4I
Session Organizer: John Amankwah
(College of Mt. St. Joseph)

Session Participants:

Presenter: John Hatch (Univ of Dubuque)
Presenter: Elayne Shapiro (Univ of Portland)
Respondent: John Hochheimer
(Southern Illinois University, Carbondale)
Presenter: Linda Welker
(Grand Valley State University)
Presenter: Andrew Tollison
(University of Texas, Austin)
Presenter: Joey Pogue (Pittsburg State Univ)
Presenter: Kristopher Paal (Malone Univ)

Chair: John Amankwah
(College of Mt. St. Joseph)

Abstract: Forgiveness seeks to restore breached relationships between the aggrieved and the aggressor(s). Through dialogue based on the “between” those involved in the dialogue struggle to reveal themselves to each other. However, in the normal processual stream of engagement, the aggrieved and the aggressor in the “act” of forgiveness oftentimes tend to engage in apologia rather than forgiveness. Both the Buberian “between” and the Levinasian ethical Alterity point us to the notion of “I am my brother’s keeper.” This paper explores the challenges inherent in balancing feelings of justice and mercy in asking and offering forgiveness.

Considering Ethics in Newspapers and Public Discourse

Sponsor: Communication Ethics Division
Time: Saturday, November 14 - 8:00 – 9:15am
Building/Room: Hilton Chicago/PDR 1
Session Participants:
Session Organizer: Spoma Jovanovic
(Univ of North Carolina, Greensboro)

Session Participants:

Title: Ethics at the End of Life: Evolving Media and Public Discourse
Presenters: Marjorie Kruvand (Loyola University Chicago), Margaret Duffy (University of Missouri)
Title: Media Law and Ethics: Intersection of The New York Times Code of Ethics and Cases
Presenter: Dianna Conley (Clemson University)
Title: The People vs. Big Business: Applying Potter’s Box to the Ethical Decision to Publish Sex Ads in Newspapers
Presenter: Siobahn Tara Stiles (Temple University)
Title: Newspaper Coverage of Warrantless Wiretapping in America During 2007: A Community Structure Approach
Presenter: Garrett DiMarco (College of New Jersey)

Respondent: Sandra Borden
(Western Michigan University)
Chair: Robert Ballard (Univ of Waterloo)

Conversations about Levinas: Communication Ethics in Justice, the Environment, and Life Studies

Sponsor: Communication Ethics Division
Time: Thursday, November 12 - 3:30pm-4:45pm
Building/Room: Hilton Chicago, Meeting Room 4I
Session Organizer: Katherine Karsnak (National Communication Association)

Session Participants:

Title: Interruptions and Echoes: Levinas on Interpersonal and Environmental Ethics
Presenter: Erik Garrett (Duquesne University)
Title: This is My Life: Engaging 'Life Studies' to Move Communication Ethics
Presenter: Spoma Jovanovic (Univ of North Carolina, Greensboro)
Title: Interpersonal Communication: Justice and the Neighbor
Presenter: Ronald Arnett (Duquesne University)

Respondent: Pat Gehrke
(University of South Carolina)
Respondent: Michael Hyde
(Wake Forest University)
Respondent: Christopher Poulos
(Univ of North Carolina, Greensboro)
Respondent: Kenneth Chase (Wheaton College)

Respondent: Robert Ballard (Univ of Waterloo)

Chair: Roy Wood (University of Denver)

Abstract: The panel continues a decade long discussion among scholars who have gathered around the work of Emmanuel Levinas and other key philosophers of communication and ethics. Three papers will serve to stimulate a discussion among audience members against the backdrop of responses from the "Levinas Group."

**Ethical journeys of stability and change:
Experiences of undergraduates in
communication ethics**

Unit: Communication Ethics Division

Time: Sunday, November 15 -9:30-10:45am

Building/Room: Hilton Chicago/Meeting Room 4H

Session Organizer: Robert Ballard (Univ of Waterloo)

Chair: Robert Ballard (Univ of Waterloo)

Respondent: Roy Wood (University of Denver)

Abstract:

In this panel, undergraduate students reflect on their "ethical journeys" of stability and change throughout a philosophically based communication ethics course. The course involved an introduction of ethical approaches and the weekly presentation of personal case studies. The personal case studies were the heart of the course, encouraging and modeling ethical reflection, deliberation, and risk-taking. The students' experiences demonstrate how teaching undergraduates communication ethics can be both an academic and a personal accomplishment for all involved.

**Juicy Ethics: Reflections on a Symposium on
Ethics and the Internet**

Unit: Communication Ethics Division

Time: Thursday, November 12 – 8:00-9:15am

Building/Room: Hilton Chicago/Meeting Room 4J

Session Organizer: Alessandra Beasley Von Burg (Wake Forest University)

Session Participants:

Presenter: Michael Hyde (Wake Forest University)

Presenter: Ashley Muddiman (Wake Forest University)

Presenter: Shelly Gravers (Wake Forest University)

Presenter: Alessandra Beasley Von Burg (Wake Forest University)

Presenter: Damien Pfister (University of Nebraska, Lincoln)

Chair: Ron Von Burg (Christopher Newport Univ)

Abstract:

Even if Juicy Campus has now officially shut down, its repercussions and its controversial implications are important subjects for scholars in communication, particularly related to the theme of 'Stability and Change.' In anticipation of future, similar spaces, we take the opportunity to share the lessons learned thus far, addressing the need for some stability in our ethical practices as we move forward with innovative online possibilities that may change our understanding of communication.

**Stability and Change in Communication Ethics:
Truth, Civility and Sovereignty**

Unit: Communication Ethics Division

Time: Friday, November 13 – 12:30-1:45pm

Building/Room: Hilton Chicago/Meeting Room 4J

Session Organizer: Spoma Jovanovic (Univ of North Carolina, Greensboro)

Session Participants:

Title: Rethinking Truth and Rhetoric for the Sake of Ethics: Examining Heidegger's Conception of Aletheia

Presenter: J.N. Sturgess (Univ of Pittsburgh)

Title: Communication Ethics and the Political: The Case of Sovereignty

Presenter: Stephen Konieczka (University of Colorado, Boulder)

Title: Unethical practices that have been conducted through the 20th and the 21st centuries

Presenter: Basemeh Rihan (California State University, San Bernardino)

Title: A Discourse of Stability and Change: Professional Incivility Meets the Communicative Virtue of Professional Civility

Presenter: Janie Harden Fritz (Duquesne University)

Chair: Annette Holba (Plymouth State Univ)

Respondent: Lisbeth Lipari (Denison University)

Teaching Communication Ethics in the 21st Century: What Remains Stable?

What Changes?

Unit: Communication Ethics Division
Time: Saturday, November 14 – 12:30-1:45pm
Building/Room: Hilton Chicago/Meeting Room 5G
Session Organizer: Katherine Karsnak (National Communication Association)

Session Participants:

Presenter: Kristie E. Bunton (St. Thomas)
Presenter: Leeanne Bell (Stevenson University)
Presenter: Sandra Borden (Western Michigan University)
Presenter: Bastiaan Vanacker (Loyola University Chicago)

Abstract: Technological developments have changed the way humans communicate with one-on-one, in groups, and in organizations. Innovation also has drastically altered mass communication – to the point that some argue that mass media no longer exist. What do these changes portend for communication ethics pedagogy? This panel will consider whether courses need an overhaul to meet the needs of the Twitter generation or can rely on universal principles and methods of ethical reasoning to provide timeless guidance.

Top Papers in Communication Ethics

Unit: Communication Ethics Division
Time: Friday, November 13 – 2:00-3:15pm
Building/Room: Hilton Chicago/Meeting Room 4B
Session Organizer: Spoma Jovanovic (Univ of North Carolina, Greensboro)

Session Participants:

Title: A Communicative Ethic for an Uprooted Age: Simone Weil and Community
Presenter: Craig Maier (Duquesne University)
Title: On Discursive Performativity: The Limits of Dissent and Ethical Agency in Critical Existential Phenomenology
Presenter: Brian Kanouse (Purdue University)
Title: Measuring Sensitivity to Conflicts of Interest: A Preliminary Test of Method
Presenter: Rebecca Lind (University of Illinois, Chicago), Tammy Swenson Lepper (Winona State University)
Chair: Pat Gehrke (University of South Carolina)
Respondent: Kenneth Chase (Wheaton College)

Utilizing Levinasian Ethics for Modern-Day Rhetorical Situations

Unit: Communication Ethics Division
Time: Sunday, November 15 – 8:00-9:15am
Building/Room: Hilton Chicago/Meeting Room 4H
Session Organizer: Kristen Roechenthaler Wolfe (Duquesne University/Pennsylvania State University Beaver Campus)

Session Participants:

Title: Infinite Responsibility, Singular Context: Levinas and the Deduction Problem
Presenter: Samuel Boerboom (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities)
Title: Intimacies of Reading: Translation as Communication Paradigm
Presenter: Margaret Schwartz (Fordham University)
Title: Ethical Internet Use Begins with Recognizing the Other
Presenter: Kristen Roechenthaler Wolfe (Duquesne University/Pennsylvania State University Beaver Campus)
Respondent: Ronald Arnett (Duquesne University)
Chair: Margaret Schwartz (Fordham University)

Abstract: Emmanuel Levinas's work in communication ethics and understanding of the Other has provided a foundation for much communication scholarship. This panel will examine multiple applications of Levinasian philosophy in today's communication society.

“I Believe There Are Angels Among Us”: How Stability and Change Are Produced by Integrating Faith and Ethical Beliefs in the Communication Classroom

Unit: Communication Ethics Division
Time: Thursday, November 12 – 12:30-1:45pm
Building/Room: Hilton Chicago PDR 7
Session Organizer: William Mullen (Liberty University)

Session Participants:

Presenter: Penni Pier (Wartburg College)
Presenter: Richard Falbo (El Paso Community College)
Presenter: Faith Mullen (Liberty University)
Presenter: Stephen J. Lind (University of Phoenix)
Presenter: Emily Langan (Weaton College)
Respondent: William Mullen (Liberty College)

Abstract: Integrating faith based issues and ethical beliefs into the classroom is a pedagogical risk. Personal beliefs, values, and ethics tend to be volatile issues for class discussion. Are the rewards worth the risks? Or, are we doomed once we venture into the spider's web of integration? This panel discusses the intellectual and communicative value of creating a safe context within in which to introduce ethical beliefs and faith based issues into the communication classroom. The panel represents a broad spectrum of approaches, worldviews, and beliefs about how to successfully accomplish the integration of ethical convictions and faith related issues in class discussion

Communication Ethics Division Business Meeting

Unit: Communication Ethics Division

Session Submission type: Business Meeting

Time: Friday, November 13 - 3:30-4:45pm

Building/Room: Hilton Chicago/Meeting Room 4I

Title Displayed in Event Calendar:

Communication Ethics Division Business Meeting

Session Organizer: Spoma Jovanovic
(Univ of North Carolina, Greensboro)

Session Participants:

Presenter: Pat Gehrke
(University of South Carolina)

Presenter: Robert Ballard (Univ of Waterloo)

Presenter: Annette Holba (Plymouth State Univ)

Presenter: Kenneth Chase (Wheaton College)

Presenter: Brian Kanouse (Purdue University)

Presenter: Craig Maier (Duquesne University)

Presenter: Tammy Swenson Lepper
(Winona State University)

Presenter: Rebecca Lind
(University of Illinois, Chicago)

Honoring Clifford G. Christians' Retirement

In honor of Clifford G. Christian's retirement the Communication Ethics Division is hosting a reception at the 95th Annual National Communication Conference on Friday, November 13, from 7:30-8:30pm in room 4F of the Hilton Chicago.

Announcing: Campaign Ethics: Lessons from 2008 for 2012 NCA Preconference Seminar Wednesday, November 11 1:00-5:30PM

Roy Wood
University of Denver

A year ago the presidential campaign was raging forward and there were members of our profession who were deeply concerned about what were unethical campaigning. Worse, such communication seemed to be taken for granted or written off as politics as usual.

In the midst of that, Professor Ed Schiappa wrote to several dozen department chairpersons urging that we get involved to make a point on behalf of ethics. He wanted us, as experts, to take some kind of public stand against lying, exaggeration, and personal attacks. As he put it,

“Making decisions in a democracy requires an informed electorate. The health of our democracy and our ability to make a good decision about who should lead our nation require the very best in communication practices, not the worst.”

In the end, over 150 departmental chairs and other professors signed a document decrying attempts to label Barack Obama a terrorist. Some others were heard to be concerned about media bias around Sarah Palin. These matters have surfaced off and on in the Communication Ethics division as well as among the rhetoricians and people in the debate community. And of course there is no division in our association in which people do not care about and teach about ethics.

But, for all of that concern, for all of the fact that it is often our alumni who are intimately involved in politics, we have no collective voice to offer any kind of national conscience on the way communication is used to the political process. And, I believe Ed learned that, if we speak out on our own, far too many of us fear reprisals from our institutions and our legislators.

This NCA seminar is in direct response to Ed and also the all of us who care about how politicians

position themselves to get elected. The vision for this preconference seminar is to begin a dialogue that could progress through the next two conventions to consider what we might do, if anything, to put us in a position to exercise a collective voice of ethics during the presidential campaign in 2012.

This first seminar will address two questions:

- 1) What is the state of ethics in presidential campaigning in America?
- And
- 2) What, if anything, should this association and/or its members do to advance the cause of ethical campaigning

The seminar will be organized as follows:

1:30

Facilitator: Roy Wood, University of Denver

Keynote: Edward Schiappa,
University of Minnesota

Charge: Tammy Swenson Lepper,
Winona State University

Charge: David Zarefsky, Northwestern University.

2:30 Discussion

3:15 Sub Group Meetings

4:00 Considering an Action Plan

5:30 Adjourn

We need you! Please join us in Chicago!

**11th National Communication
Ethics Conference
Call for Papers, Graduate Fellows,
and Panels
June 3-6, 2010
Duquesne University,
Pittsburgh, PA**

In 1990 a small group of scholars gathered at Western Michigan University's Kellogg Biological Station in Gull Lake, Michigan for the first National Communication Ethics Conference. This conference originally was sponsored by Western Michigan University's Department of Communication and Ethics Center. Since its inception the conference has sought to sustain an intimate atmosphere that earned it the nickname of "the conference with a soul."

In 2004 the conference moved to Duquesne University and has been proudly sponsored by its Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies. At Duquesne the conference has continued its focus of dealing with the vital ethical issues of our age.

This year's Eleventh National Communication Ethics Conference will feature three keynote speakers each addressing the relationship between communication ethics and philosophy of communication, communication theory, or international corporate communication.

For more information about the Eleventh National Communication Ethics Conference, contact: Maryl R. Roberts, Conference Co-Director (email: marylroberts@gmail.com), or Dr. Erik Garrett, Conference Director (email: garrette@duq.edu), at the Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15282.

National Communication Ethics Conference, CALL for Papers:

Deadline: January 15, 2010

The Communication Ethics Division of the National Communication Association will hold its eleventh national conference from June 3-6, 2010 at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, PA. Scholars from all related disciplines are invited to submit papers and panel proposals for inclusion in the conference.

The general theme of the conference is **“Communication Ethics as Loving Struggle: Love, Family, and Social Responsibility in the Technological Age.”** The conference seeks to have broad application to human communication while immersing itself in current ethical questions. Papers may address a variety of contemporary issues and arise from multiple fields. We welcome papers addressing all facets of communication ethics. Of particular interest are papers relating to communication ethics in three threads which will be led by visiting scholars:

- Philosophy of communication/ethics
- Communication theory/ethics
- Corporate communication/ethics

Papers: Submissions should be double-spaced, with a maximum of 30 pages including references. Any citation style is permitted (e.g., MLA, APA) as long as the author utilizes it properly and consistently. The author(s) should remove name(s) and all identifying data from the manuscript. A separate title page with title, author name(s), and contact information should also be included. Please indicate on the title page if the author is a graduate student and also if this is a debut submission, having never previously presented at a professional conference. Send papers as attached files via email to cec@duq.edu.

Graduate Fellows: Single-authored papers submitted by graduate students (M.A. or Ph.D. programs) are eligible for a Graduate Fellowship at the conference. Title sheets submitted with papers should identify the author as a graduate student. Conference planners will select the top graduate student paper(s) and invite the author to participate in the conference as a Graduate Fellow(s). Graduate Fellows present their papers in a spotlight

session and are guests of honor at a special reception on the final evening of the conference. Panel Proposals: Panel proposals may include up to five participants (not including a respondent). Please include one title page with a 500-word (maximum) abstract and rationale for the panel. Each presenter should include a title, 200-word abstract, and working bibliography for his/her work. Send the panel proposals as attached files to cec@duq.edu.

The Communication Ethics Division of the National Communication Association supports and promotes teaching, research, and advocacy of communication ethics and encourages the application of ethical communication practices in society at large.

All papers and panel proposals must be received by midnight **January 15, 2010** to be considered for inclusion in the conference. Notification of decisions will begin in March. For more information, contact:

Dr. Erik Garrett; Director
Department of Communication &
Rhetorical Studies
Duquesne University
600 Forbes Ave
Pittsburgh, PA 15282
P: (412)396-1428
E: garrette@duq.edu

Maryl R. Roberts; Co-Director
Department of Communication &
Rhetorical Studies
Duquesne University
600 Forbes Ave
Pittsburgh, PA 15282
P: (412)396-5038
E: marylroberts@gmail.com

**Submitted Review:
*Transformative Communication
Studies: Culture, Hierarchy and
the Human Condition*
Edited by Omar Swartz (2008).
Leicester, UK: Troubador
Publishing**

**Reviewed by Spoma Jovanovic for NCA
Communication Ethics Division, *Ethica*,
Fall 2009**

A title like *Transformative Communication* naturally provokes questions about the authorial intent of the volume. Is communication in need of transformation? Do some modes of communication target transformation while others do not? Is the transformative question, or more rightly, charge, geared toward our use of language and other symbol-making acts or is it targeted at the discipline and its scholars who study communication? The answers to the above questions, the contributors to this volume might collectively shout, are...yes, yes, and yes! Throughout the 323 pages of the book, stories are presented and questions are raised that are intended to disrupt our complacency about communication where that exists. The book, part of the Communication Ethics series by Troubador Publishing, also aims to inspire readers to delve more deeply within their scholarship and praxis to address social issues that are deserving of our collective attention. For the seasoned communication activist and for the aspiring communication student, *Transformative Communication* reminds us that the study of communication is not for the faint of heart. The exploration of communication takes us, as the book showcases, into the world of sorrow, the throngs of joy, the camps of death, and the communities of liberation.

Transformative Communication is an important addition to the growing series of texts addressing the intersection of communication and social justice that derives from a philosophical presupposition that as humans we have an ethical responsibility to care for others, to address injustices where they exist, and to directly confront oppressive practices.

According to the volume's editor, Omar Swartz, *Transformative Communication* is at heart a consideration of how communication can undergird

a theory of liberation. Fittingly, the first essay attacks hierarchy as a tool for the ethically hindered who operate to protect self-interest, assert control, and preserve their privileges. Amardo Rodriguez argues that we are in dire need of compassionate humanity-producing expression that arises not from hierarchy but from egalitarian relationships. In what is perhaps one of the finest introductions to intercultural communication written to date, Kathryn Sorrells and Gordon Nakagama detail a number of critical cultural studies theories in the context of globalization discourse. Gripping in its simplicity, the chapter provides a thorough look at the various lenses that affect our understanding of the world, followed by a case study that while interesting, grows tedious in its voluminous detail. The decidedly international focus of the text features thought-provoking essays on ethics. From the Arab culture we learn that an ethics strong enough to transcend differences without eliminating them as is discussed by bell hooks or Emmanuel Levinas has its counterpart in the term "muruwa." The chapter penned by Hoda Al-Mutawah details how this view of ethics has sufficient leverage to spark greater harmony for all humanity. Ako Inukuda and Philip Wander introduce us to Lafcadio Hearn, an ethnographer of British and Greek descent writing on Japanese life at the end of the 1800s and early 1900s when traditions were giving way to modernization. Inukuda and Wander analyze three of Hearn's stories fiction to highlight Hearn's critique of Western missionaries, patriarchal systems that subjugate women, and the burdens of moral failings. The co-authors illustrate through Hearn's writings how literature should not try and cannot realize a separation from the political features of its times. Finally, in what is perhaps the most poignant chapter in *Transformative Communication*, Johnghwa Lee details the plight of Korean "comfort women" who were seized from as early as 1905 through WWII and then forced into sexual slavery for the pleasure of Japanese military men. Later, they would be forced into another submission--silence about their experiences fueled by shame and guilt. It was not until 1991 that the story of the "comfort women" came to light when Hak Soon Kim finally testified of her experiences on a long road to reparations. Lee describes the lasting effects of an unwritten policy to silence the women and then the impact of the eventual release of those stories to point to the power of communication to transform our understandings of

history and humanity. Also powerful, the chapter on gendered violence in Columbia by Elizabeth Lozano, recognizes how communication is actively being used to organize community resistance to specifically (accepted) practices and speech of gendered torture and rape.

Transformative Communication includes other chapters on obstacles to social justice realized through communication, perhaps foremost among them being the artificial divide between theory and activism that author Gust Yep details, along with his solution of turning to the dialectics of interventions inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin to advocate for embodied, reflexive, and engaged attitudes in communication scholarship. Phillip Tompkins' essay on the complicated philosophical and practical roots of homeless points to the necessity for us to also examine housing options, wages, and our capitalistic system he says conspires to keep a few settled in our society, and many more unsettled. Christina Pestana and Omar Swartz provide an outline of "creative democracy" in which all people actively participate to shape a society that is inclusive, fair, and just. The co-authors show that a thriving democracy depends upon a commitment to social justice and liberatory communication practices, defined as expression that seeks deep understanding and meaningful relationships. The dream of communication to change the world draws many students to our field, argues contributor Wenshu Lee, but then in graduate school, all too often we weed those students' dreams out by asserting discipline purity in our teaching that leaves out the heart, soul, and compassion of interdisciplinary understandings. She urges professors and students alike to remember that creativity and civic engagement though not so easily assessed are the needed impulses to improve the human condition. Gregory Desilet's essay on popular culture and "Deconstructing Harry Potter" suggests that the series' narrative themes of radical good and evil leave its young readers with naïve approaches to conflict resolution, unhealthy models of competition, and polarized essentialist views of people.

The volume concludes with essays of critique that serve to challenge our most basic assumptions about language. Curt Gilstrap focuses on our ill treatment of and inadequate discussion of the

environment. Omar Swartz details the fear generated and the resistance required to respond to U.S. imperial practices such as totalizing narratives, ideological visions steeped in religion and communicated in discriminatory labeling, and elite control stories. Stan Lindsay writes the final counterpoint chapter in the book to suggest an alternative consideration of hierarchy, one that is not only of human invention nor fully merciless as other authors in the chapter have argued. He suggests that even in its excess, hierarchy that creates stress is more amenable to dramatic relief, citing Kenneth Burke, than outright elimination, for hierarchy is he says a feature of the human condition.

Swartz's book is the second in a series that began with *Social Justice and Communication Scholarship* (2006, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates) and followed by the just released (and yet to be reviewed here), *Neo-pragmatism, Communication, and the Culture of Creative Democracy* (2009, Peter Lang).

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Communication Ethics Division Officer Contact Information

Chair— Pat Gehrke
Department of English
University of South Carolina
PatGehrke@gmail.com

Vice Chair-and program planner—
Spoma Jovanovic
Department of Communication Studies
The University of North Carolina — Greensboro
s_jovano@uncg.edu

Vice Chair-elect—Annette Holba
Communication & Media Studies
Plymouth State University
aholba@plymouth.edu

Secretary/Treasurer—Robert Ballard
Communication, Leadership and Social Innovation
Modern Languages
University of Waterloo
bballard@uwaterloo.ca

Immediate-Past Chair—Kenneth R. Chase
Communication Department
Wheaton College
Kenneth.R.Chase@wheaton.edu

Ethica Editor—Christina L. McDowell
Department of Communication &
Rhetorical Studies
Duquesne University
mcdowel338@duq.edu

Updated 1-2008	
Committee on Communication Ethics and the Association	
Roy Wood (chair)	rvwood@du.edu
Pat Arneson	arneson@duq.edu
Ronald Arnett	arnett@duq.edu
Ken Chase	Kenneth.R.Chase@wheaton.edu
Norma Cook	ncook@utk.edu
Jill Dishart	dishart@duq.edu
Tricia Giannone Henson	giannonehensont@duq.edu
Michael J. Hyde	hydemj@wfu.edu
Chris Johnstone	Clj3@psu.edu
Rebecca Meisenbach	rmeisenbach@concord.edu
Chris Poulos	cnpoulos@uncg.edu
Lea Stewart	lstewart@rutgers.edu
Tammy Swenson Lepper	tswensonlepper@winona.edu
Committee on Short Courses and Preconferences	
Lisbeth Lipari (chair)	Lipari@denison.edu
Spoma Jovanovic	S_jovano@uncg.edu
Michael J. Hyde	hydemj@wfu.edu
Peggy J. Bowers	powers@clemsun.edu
Melissa Cook	Melissa.Cook@email.stvincent.edu
Annette Holba	aholba@plymouth.edu
Clella Jaffe	cjaffee@georgefox.edu
Marie Baker Ohler	MarieBakerOhler@sbcglobal.net
Paula Tompkins	pstompkins@stcloudstate.edu
Debra Worley	cmdebra@isngw.indstate.edu
Committee on Research and Scholarly Practice	
Pat Gehrke (chair)	patg@sc.edu
Ronald C. Arnett	Arnett@duq.edu
Peggy J. Bowers	pbowers@clemsun.edu
Cliff Christians	cchrstns@uiuc.edu
Kathleen Glenister Roberts	robertskg@duq.edu
David Gunkel	dgunkel@niu.edu
Lisbeth Lipari	Lipari@denison.edu
Fadoua Loudiy	loudiyf@duq.edu
Tammy Swenson Lepper	tswensonlepper@winona.edu
Sanda Tomuletiu	tomuletiu@duq.edu
Committee on Awards and Resolutions	
Ken Chase (chair)	Kenneth.R.Chase@wheaton.edu
Donna Goben	dgoben@du.edu
Spoma Jovanovic	S_jovano@uncg.edu
Marie Baker Ohler	Mariebakerohler@sbcglobal.net

Committee on Instructional Development	
Bill Neher (chair)	neher@butler.edu
Ken Andersen	keanders@uiuc.edu
Leanne M. Bell	bell@duq.edu
Lori Brown	l-brown2@northwestern.edu
Melissa Cook	Melissa.Cook@email.stvincent.edu
Tammy McGuire	Tsmkr7@mizzou.edu
Paul Sandin	Sandin@butler.edu
Susan Sci	ssci@du.edu
Susan Stearns	sstearns@mail.ewu.edu
Paula Tompkins	pstompkins@stcloudstate.edu
Sanda Tomuletiu	Tomuletiu@duq.edu
Debra Worley	cmdebra@isugw.indstate.edu
Karen Zediker	kzediker@ups.edu
Reviewers for 2009 NCA Convention	
Spoma Jaovanovic (vice chair elect)	s_jovano@uncg.edu
Communication Ethics Division Officers	
Immediate Past Chair: Ken Chase	Kenneth.R.Chase@wheaton.edu
Chair: Pat Gerke	patg@sc.edu
Vice Chair: Spoma Jovanovic	S_jovano@uncg.edu
Vice Chair-elect: Annette M. Holba	aholba@mail.plymouth.edu
Secretary/Treasurer: Bert Ballard	rballard@du.edu
Ethica: Christina L. McDowell	mcdowel338@duq.edu