Entertaining Ideas

AEJMC Entertainment Studies Interest Group • Summer Newsletter • Vol. 4, No. 2

Name Change Possible

ESIG may soon become ESSIG. A resolution to change ESIG's name to the Entertainment and Sports Studies Interest Group will be introduced at the members' meeting at Toronto, 6:45 p.m., Thursday, Aug. 5. The proposed name change would underscore our group's welcome as a venue for Olympic—and all sports—research.

Call For Officers

At some point in your participation in ESIG you've probably thought of ways the group could better serve its members.

Why not put those ideas to work?

We're looking for energetic members to step forward and help lead ESIG. Whether you're interested in programming or recruiting members, we want to talk with you! We have several openings with a range of responsibilities.

Take this opportunity to get more involved with AEJMC and ESIG.

Please e-mail ESIG vice head Marie Hardin at ***mch208@psu.edu*** *if you'd like to find out more.*

Officers for the 2004-2005 year will be chosen at the Toronto convention.

Toronto Conference Update

ESIG-Sponsored Events Calendar

Wednesday, Aug. 4

10 to 11:30 a.m. Teaching
co-sponsor Scholastic Journalism

1:30 to 3:00 p.m. PF&R
co-sponsor Commission on the Status of Women

Sob Sisters: The Image of The Female Journalist in Popular Culture

Thursday, Aug. 5

10 to 11:30 a.m. Special Theme
co-sponsored with Media and Disability

Countdown To Athens: Issues In Media Coverage Of The Olympics and Paralympics

11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. ESIG

6:45 to 8:15 p.m. ESIG Members' Meeting

8:30 to 10 p.m. Off-Site Session

Friday, Aug. 6

8:15 to 9:45 a.m. PF&R
co-sponsored Radio-Television Journalism

Saturday, Aug. 7

10 to 11:30 a.m. PF&R
co-sponsored Media and Disability

11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. Research

Members Deserve Extra Thanks

By Donnalyn Pompper ESIG Head

Hello Friends!

So much has been going on behind the scenes with ESIG that I scarcely know where to begin. I'll start with thanking all the hard-working folks—from officers to paper reviewers—who are making ESIG's presence in Toronto a reality.

Most NFP organizations across the country have felt the pinch of workplace downsizing and other trends that translate to overworked employees who have less free time than ever to do volunteer work. I suspect that this also is true with academic trade organizations, such as AEJMC.

With challenges like heavy teaching loads, large classes and numbers of advisees, service, diminishing resources such as teaching assistants, and pressures to write and win grants and to publish (all in addition to home responsibilities), I recognize the value of every little bit of free time. So, I want you to know how much I really do appreciate those of you who step to the plate whether it be consistently or sporadically. Every little bit helps. And everyone benefits.

Thanks to you, Entertainment Studies is the fastest growing interest group of AEJMC. I encourage you to attend as many ESIG-sponsored panels at the Toronto conference as you can to experience first hand the diversity and quality in research. And lest we not forget our first name,

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Article ideas or submissions may be sent to **Entertaining Ideas**, Editor Heather Paige Preston at prestonhp@appstate.edu.

The Teaching Game(s): Olympics

By Anne Cooper-Chen Teaching Chair, ESIG Founder

The Athens Olympics, August 13 through 29, may engage a few of us as a research topic, but almost all of us can use the games as a teaching tool.

Our students will have watched the games, all or in part, so to start a discussion, I ask students to recall and project the locales of summer Olympics year by year. Members of a typical class can usually fill in back to 1980. For reference, the locales are:

1980 Moscow
1984 Los Angeles
1988 Seoul
1992 Barcelona
1996 Atlanta
2000 Sydney
2004 Athens
2008 Beijing

From that discussion, you can introduce varied topics and theoretical concepts.

Audience Analysis

Taking the most recent Olympics as a case study, ask each student what she or he watched. Then, using ratings data (e.g., from Variety.com), point to stunning examples like NBC's 32.5/53 household rating in 2002 when, at Salt Lake City, Sarah Hughes captured the gold in women's figure skating. The day was the highest-rated Thursday for any network since the "Seinfeld" finale on May 14, 1998.

Uses and Gratifications

From *what*, move to an examination of *why*. Ask students for the reasons that they watch the events they do. See if comments elicit examples of the classic Katz and Gurevitch list of audience uses: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release.

International Issues

Discuss the treatment of the parade of athletes. Are any nations left out? In past games, commercials were aired when "unimportant" countries' athletes marched into the stadium during the opening ceremony. Compare these cutaways to research on countries given short shrift in news coverage.

Influences On Content

The role of the government in shaping media content can be discussed in terms of the limited U.S. coverage—influenced by Cold War policies—of the Moscow 1980 games, which the United States boycotted. The role of policy extends even to coverage of venue selection. In the early 1990s, the bid of Beijing for the 2000 games—which the U.S. government opposed on human rights grounds—was covered negatively. However, the 2008 bid, on which the U.S. government took no stand, was *not* covered negatively.

Insights from the Athens games will make for lively classroom discussions or meaty topics for our interest group's sessions in San Antonio in 2005.✶

Author's Note: *Thanks to the MSJ thesis of my advisee, Linzhi Shi, for insight on U.S. media coverage of the 2000 games and the 2008 bid.*

Moore and Stern Launch Attacks on Censorship

By Ron Leone ESIG PF&R Chair

This summer, two figures—one of which may be a "shock"—from the world of entertainment are emerging as the major spokesmen lobbying against President Bush in his re-election bid.

Michael Moore, director of *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and Howard Stern, the controversial radio personality, face a loss of potential (or actual) audience and revenue through corporate maneuvers functioning as de facto acts of censorship.

Moore's story begins with his acceptance speech at the 2003 Academy Awards, where his *Bowling for Columbine* won the Oscar for Best Documentary. In the speech, Moore called President Bush a "fictitious president…sending us to war for fictitious reasons…" and, before being "played off" by the orchestra, stated emphatically, "We are against this war, Mr. Bush. Shame on you, Mr. Bush."

Moore followed up *Bowling* with *Fahrenheit 9/11*, a film that chronicles alleged connections between President Bush and both the Saudi royal family and the family of Osama bin Laden that affected events subsequent to the attacks of September 11. Unfortunately, the movie's drama only begins with its content.

In May Fahrenheit won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, which under normal circumstances guarantees some sort of U.S. distribution, even for more esoteric art and/or foreign language films that win the grand prize.

But such was not the case this year. During production in 2003 and long before Cannes, Disney President Michael Eisner made it clear that *Fahrenheit* financier and Disney-owned Miramax would not distribute the film. Moore claims that the distribution ban is because Disney does not want to jeopardize tax breaks for its theme park in Florida by angering the Bush family.

Disney sold the film to Miramax chiefs Bob and Harvey Weinstein, who joined with Lion's Gate and IFC films to distribute the film nationwide on June 25. Despite efforts to lobby theaters to not carry the film by what Moore claims is a "fake" grass roots group backed by Republicans, it will open in at least 500 theaters, a significant number for a documentary.

While documentaries are not typical summer box office fare, the difficulty encountered by an award-winning director to release an award-winning film in the United States warrants concern. An equally perturbing move was the Motion Picture Association of America's (MPAA) "R" rating of *Fahrenheit*. A move due primarily to the news footage it contains, Moore said.

Howard Stern, who at one time supported Bush and the Iraq war, is now the most important anti-Bush voice on radio. Radio giant Clear Channel dropped Stern from six of its stations earlier this year after the FCC levied fines against the company for indecent material broadcast during Stern's show.

In June, Clear Channel settled with the FCC for $1.75 million to cover indecency complaints against Stern and other on-air personalities, as well as "several dozen open investigations and pending cases" according to an AP report.

Stern claims that Texas-based Clear Channel's actions are political, noting CEO Lowry Mays's ties to the Bush family. Stern has since devoted significant airtime encouraging listeners to vote against Bush in November.

Before dismissing Stern and his audience, consider that Mark Penn, a former Clinton pollster, estimates that about 4 percent of voters are both undecided and fans of Stern. Respected pollster John Zogby agrees, noting that Stern's core audience—18- to 34-year-old men—who ordinarily vote Republican could support Kerry instead.

While Moore's and Stern's stories aren't identical, they are both representative of the contemporary media environment, where conglomerates have grown so large that no single performer or work is worth sacrificing overall corporate financial considerations.

Clearly, conglomerates are willing to give up profitable enterprises like Moore's movie and Stern's show (Arbitron ratings indicate significant drops in audience share for the Clear Channel stations, with one in San Diego going from 1st to 27th place for morning drive time) in order to maintain positive relationships with Bush, his family, and his political appointees.

What happened to letting the marketplace decide? ✦

Author's Note: *Article includes reports from The Associated Press, USA Today, Financial Times (London), Airplay Monitor, SmartMoney.com, MichaelMoore.com, and HowardStern.com.*

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ESIG'S Evening of Enjoyment, Entertainment

Information from www.Toronto.com

The Toronto Entertainment District is eight-block area full of entertaining attractions "The District," as it is commonly called, offers a variety of restaurants, shopping, accommodation, sports, and theatre.

Attractions. Numerous world-famous attractions are within walking distance throughout The District.

Television enthusiasts can take a behind-the-scenes tour of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, or tour the Chum City Building. Sports fans can check out the Blue Jays' SkyDome or the Raptors' and Maple Leafs' Air Canada Centre. Theatre buffs may want to experience the prestigious Royal Alexandra Theatre or the famous Second City. Visitors can go bowling in the multi-leveled Vinnie's Social Hall, or play golf at Citycore.

Visit the CN Tower and ride the glass elevator to the top of the world's tallest free-standing structure. Or follow the Canadian Walk of Fame and find your favorite Canadian celebrity's star.

Restaurants. Got a craving for Italian food? How about French? The District has a restaurant to satisfy any and all taste buds. From intimate bistros to trendy eateries, to English pubs, to restaurants with interactive environments, it's all here.

Music. The sounds of jazz, hip hop, rock, new wave, classical and disco can be heard throughout the streets of The District until the early morning hours.

What better way to end a perfect day of touring with a drink and a dance. Cheers from The District! ✦

Editor's Note: *For more information on ESIG's Evening in the Entertainment District please visit the ESIG-AEJMC folder at http://www.smartgroups.com/vault/esig/.*

Extra Thanks continued from page 1

Megan has put together a wonderful roster of fun things to do in Toronto.

I especially hope you will join us at the Members' Meeting Thursday, Aug. 6, from 6:45 to 8:15 p.m. Look for the agenda via our listserv *esig@smartgroups.com*. We have much to do, including officer elections, a name change discussion and vote, awards, reports on membership and finances, and more. I especially want to inspire new members to get involved. We need your energy and fresh ideas.

I have been hard at work putting together our annual report to AEJMC HQ. Highlights include a 31 percent increase in papers submitted for review as compared to last year, excellent attention to gender and ethnic diversity among officers and paper reviewers, and first-time sponsorship of a mid-winter conference.

Marie and I also have been preparing for ESIG recertification by AEJMC HQ, as is required every five years.While it is time-consuming, it offers a unique opportunity to reflect and to plan. Stay tuned for a full report at our Members' Meeting.

I look forward to shaking your hand in gratitude in Toronto!

Travel gently. ✦