

# Political Communication Report

Winter 1999 Edition

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## Message from the APSA Section Chair

*Thomas E. Patterson*

The Political Communication Section's business meeting at this year's APSA convention was distinguished by the Edelman Career Achievement Award winner, Shanto Iyengar, and the Graber Best Paper Award winners, Ann Crigler and Marion Just. Outside the Section's boundaries, Lance Bennett delivered this year's APSA Ithiel Pool Lecture. Newly voted into office at the meeting were Ann Crigler (Vice Chair), Kathleen Kendall (Member at Large), Darrell West (Program Chair, 2000), and Jarol Manheim (Nominations Chair). Appreciation was expressed to David Paletz, the outgoing chair; Holli Semetko, who organized the section's 1998 APSA program; Doris Graber and David Swanson, the outgoing and incoming Political Communication editors; Richard Davis, editor of the newsletter; Pippa Norris, who organized the dinner honoring Doris Graber; and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, who underwrote the reception, the dinner and a new book award that will be named for Doris Graber. Sympathy was directed at Bob Entman, who has yet another year to serve as Secretary-Treasurer.

James Snider of Northwestern introduced at the meeting a proposed letter for the Gore Commission

asking that it restrain broadcasters from using copyright protection in ways that would interfere with scholars' study of news and public affairs programming. The Political Communication Section took no formal action on Jim's proposal, but there was general agreement that the issue was an important one, that the section had a legitimate interest in the issue, and that the Gore Commission should be so informed. I subsequently discussed the issue with Norm Ornstein, co-chair of the Gore Commission. He indicated that the Commission was in its closing days and had decided upon a voluntary approach to broadcasters' public interest obligations. However, he said that the Commission would welcome a statement from me on the section's behalf. The text of my letter read as follows: "On behalf of the Political Communication Section of the American Political Science Association, I am writing to urge the Gore Commission to do what it can to caution or prevent broadcasters from using copyright protection to impede academic research on news and public affairs programming. Timely, full, and easy access to this programming is required if scholars are to analyze the role of the electronic media in the U.S. political system and thus to inform public discussion and debate on this important topic. We believe that broadcasters' public interest obligations should include guidelines or policies that will ensure full access to news content by scholars."

Among the business items during the coming year is the renaming of the Doris Graber Award for Best Paper on Political Communication, which is given annually during the APSA meeting. Because of the new Doris Graber book award, we need to rename our best paper award. Your suggestions are invited. Nominees should be scholars who have made a significant contribution to the field of political communication. Ithiel Pool, Murray Edelman, and Doris Graber are the only names automatically excluded since they already have awards attached to their names. If you have a suggestion, please forward it to me at Harvard's Kennedy School (Cambridge, MA 02138) or by e-mail (thomas\_patterson@harvard.edu).

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## Tips for Aspiring Article Writers

*Doris A. Graber*

*University of Illinois at Chicago*

*former editor of Political Communication*

"Oh Boy: here's another sloppy one. If these guys don't care enough to proof read their work, how trustworthy is their research?" Judging from the tone of his voice, my editorial assistant didn't put much faith in the quality of workmanship of the newly submitted manuscript. Neither did I.

First impressions are important. A manuscript that carries the marks of lack of care – multiple misspellings, poorly executed tables and figures, misnumbered illustrations, and disregard of journal rules regarding double spacing, single-sided paging, and overall length limitations – starts off on the wrong foot. It makes a bad impression on the editor as well as the referees who are going to judge it. That means that its flaws – all manuscripts have flaws – seem more serious than normal and its strengths are less impressive. So rule number one is to make a good initial impression by submitting a clean

manuscript that follows the journal's rules.

Rule number two, which is equally important, is to make sure that the substance of the manuscript and the style of writing match the editorial profile of the journal. If the main focus of a particular journal is on political communications, then the manuscript should be structured to highlight this focus. For example, an article on factors that allow public health programs to succeed does not belong into a political communication journal if it deals primarily with ways to reduce the costs of immunization or selecting sites for public health clinics. It's the central focus that counts, not the side issues. A small subsection or passing remarks about communication is not enough to make an essay suitable for publication in a specialized professional journal.

Once an editor is satisfied that the topic of the manuscript is appropriate for the journal and that the work was executed with reasonable care, a series of considerations determine whether the manuscript will be sent out for review or rejected before review. Good reviewers are a precious resource that no editor wants to waste on a manuscript that, in the editor's view, is unlikely to be published in the journal in question. The manuscript is unlikely to be accepted if it fails to present something important that is either new or viewed from a fresh perspective that is likely to appeal to the readers of the journal. All too many manuscripts plow the same overworked fields offering little that is original or a major advance of the field. The contributions made by the manuscript need to be stated clearly enough in the headnote and in the text so that they become apparent at first reading. Neither editors nor reviewers nor readers like to puzzle over a text wondering what the authors might have had in mind.

Research procedures, including experiments, should be discussed with sufficient clarity and detail in the body of the text or in an Appendix so that readers can duplicate them. The main thrust of figures and tables in the accompanying titles and legends should be clear so that the reader can understand them even without turning to the text. Major related publications should be cited to permit readers to gather additional information. Alternatively, the authors may list an address – preferably E-mail--where readers can contact them for supplemental data.

These recommendations may seem trite; but it is amazing how often authors violate them initially or even in revisions. When revision procedures require a detailed explanation about the changes that authors have made and justifications for ignoring some of the reviewers' suggestions, authors all-too-often respond with scanty, superficial notes. They meet requests to shorten overly long manuscripts with transparent typographical tricks, such as reducing the type-size and margins rather than using the editorial scalpel. It won't work! Editors know the tricks of the trade and are not amused.

Before becoming an editor, I thought that rejection rates that average above eighty percent of submitted manuscripts reflected an over supply of intellectual goods. Now I know better. More than anything else, they reflect poor quality research, unclear and unattractive writing, inattention to detail and outright sloppiness. The good part of this state of affairs is that it can be remedied if scholars are willing to invest the necessary time, energy and care. The bad part is that professional training in various social science disciplines all-too-often neglects writing skills. Time pressures on authors further mitigate against extensive page by page checking and rewriting of their work.

So, what happens if your article is rejected either before or after one or two rounds of review? It is a painful experience that is apt to recur throughout your professional life. But there is no reason to despair. Just as one swallow does not mean that spring has arrived, so one rejection does not mean that the piece is unpublishable. The first line of defense is to read the reviewers' and editors' comments very carefully. They often provide extremely helpful guidelines for revising the piece and sending it on its way to yet

another suitable journal. Also, the lapse of time between submission and rejection is generally long enough to give authors some distance from their work so that they can view it more clearly and recognize its shortcomings. If successful revision seems unlikely, abandoning the hapless brain child may be the most merciful approach. With so many problems begging for investigation, why waste time on a venture that is off to a bad start?

Most of the time, such drastic action will not be needed – careful revisions will do. And here's a little trick that will help you avoid that depressed feeling when rejection letters arrive: always keep a list of substitute journals on file. When the rejection notice arrives in the mail, you will already know what the manuscript's next destination will be. You are not at the end of your line – merely at an intermediate stop. Use it to refine your work once again, drawing on whatever help is available from the article reviews and other critics. If the article has merit, sooner or later, you will have that thrilling feeling that comes from seeing your work published so that other scholars can enjoy it and benefit from your insights.

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## **Minutes of 1998 APSA Political Communications Division Annual Business Meeting**

Minutes from the 1997 meeting were approved unanimously.

The Section voted unanimously to establish a Doris Graber book award. It will be given to the book published during the previous year that best lives up to the tradition of insight and ingenuity established by its namesake, founding Chair of this section. The award committee will be appointed by the Section's nominating committee.

The first decision requires renaming of the award for best paper at the previous Annual Meeting, which had been named for Professor Graber. Suggestions for a new name are solicited.

Section Chair David Paletz reported that the Section has 416 members. He thanked Professors Holli Semetko, program chair for 1998, Pippa Norris, and Kathleen Jamieson for their help in organizing the Section activities at the 1998 Annual Meeting.

Doris Graber, editor of the Section's journal, Political Communication, said issues for 1998, her last year as editor, had been successfully filled with good quality articles. She made her annual plea for Section members to obtain individual subscriptions to the journal. There was some talk of making the journal a perquisite of Section membership, although this would require a dues increase. At this time, according to Professor Paletz, only one other APSA section (Legislative Studies) bundles a journal with membership.

The treasurer's report showed a healthy balance of \$11,378.68 in the Section's coffers.

Awards were announced. These included the following:

1. W. Lance Bennett, University of Washington was named to receive the Ithiel de Sola Pool Award, presented triennially by the APSA as a whole to a scholar selected to explore the implications of

research on issues of politics in a global society. Professor Bennett gave his Pool lecture at this year's Annual Meeting.

2. The Doris Graber Award for the best paper on political communication presented at the 1997 University of Southern California, for "Emotional Interactions With the Campaign: A Constructionalist Approach to Campaign Effects."

3. The Murray Edelman Distinguished Career Award for lifetime contribution to the study of political communication was granted to Shanto Iyengar, formerly of University of California, Los Angeles, now at Stanford. He was cited by the award committee for his pioneering experimental work on media effects and his contributions to theory and methods of research.

The nominating committee gave its report and made these recommendations for Section officers:

Vice Chair, Ann Crigler

Member at Large, Kathleen Kendall

Program Chair for the year 2000, Darrell West

Nominations Chair (three year term), Jarol Manheim

Under new business, the following items were discussed:

1. Mary Stuckey solicited book reviews and review essays for the journal Rhetoric and Public Affairs. She is the new review editor.

2. Pippa Norris proposed that the Section sponsor short courses at the APSA Annual Meetings in the future.

3. Jim Snider proposed that the Section write a letter to the Gore Commission taking the position that copyright law should be made more favorable to academic research, especially for scholars of the news. The APSA requires that Sections have a policy on taking positions with respect to public policy issues, so it was decided that before writing such a letter, the Section should both develop such a policy and provide a version of the proposed letter for the Section membership to vote upon.

Thomas Patterson took over the gavel as Section Chair for 1999-2000, thanked David Paletz for his leadership, and congratulated the award recipients.

Submitted by Robert M. Entman, Secretary-Treasurer

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## **Political Communication Center Completes Archive Project**

The Political Communication Center (PCC) in the Department of Communication at the University of Oklahoma announces the completion of a project to enhance the preservation of its unique holding of political commercials. The PCC's collection contains over 65,000 items and is the largest collection in the world of radio and television spots used in political campaigns. The PCC recently completed a project, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, to provide a better preservation environment for many items in the collection. The project, completed in April of 1998, resulted in the cleaning and repairing of 218,441 feet of 16mm film which were then stored in a new photoarchive

chamber providing increased temperature and humidity control. In addition, over 23,000 political spots on video reels were restored in a dust- free environment. The project was completed under the direction of Dr. Lynda Lee Kaid, Director of the PCC, and Dr. Kathleen J.M. Haynes in the School of Library and Information Studies. More information on the archive and its collections and holdings can be found at the PCC's WWWsite: <http://www.ou.edu/pccenter>.

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## **Committee Assignments**

The Nominations Committee of the APSA Political Communication Section is pleased to announce the following committee appointments:

--Graber Award Committee (best paper): Professors Michael Delli Carpini (chair), Martha Kumar, and Pippa Norris.

--Edelman Award Committee (career contribution): Professors Betty Hanson (chair), Tim Cook, and Shanto Iyengar.

Jarol Manheim, chair of the Nominating Committee, also expresses his appreciation to his colleagues on the committee, Professors Ellen Mickiewicz and Scott Althaus, for their valuable guidance and assistance in making these selections and in helping to identify prospective future leaders for the section.

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## **Unimpeachable Information: Congress and the Information Revolution**

*Stephen E. Frantzich*

*U.S. Naval Academy*

While it is common to ask "How is Congress going to fare in the information revolution," it is more legitimate to ask how will the 535 individual members and the numerous congressional sub-units fare. Congress as an institution neither acts or reacts. Its members and sub-units serve as the motive forces. Even when collective action is taken, it is based on individual decisions and can better be understood by micro analysis of trends associated with its component parts more than some macro institutional analysis. The question carries even more importance as Congress approaches a number of months of high visibility as the forum for the first cyber-era impeachment battle.

In order to understand the potential impact of the new information environment on Congress'

constituent units, it is important to define the key elements of the current wave of change. What ties computers, television, talk-radio, the Web--and whatever the next wave portends-- together?

The new communications technologies share five basic commonalities with particular relevancy for Congress:

1. OPENNESS
2. SPEED
3. INTERACTIVITY
4. ABILITY TO TRANSFORM THE INFORMATION FORMAT
5. IRRELEVANCY OF GEOGRAPHIC CONSTRAINTS

Each of these inherent characteristics of the new technologies challenges a number of underlying "givens" about members of Congress' traditional communications modes.

1. OPENNESS: Members of Congress have traditionally operated on two stages, one open to the public and one behind the scenes in executive sessions and private conversations. The doors began to open during the 1970's when committee after committee required open sessions unless specifically closed by an affirmative vote of committee members. The House in 1979, and then the Senate seven years later, made major strides in openness by letting cameras cover their proceedings. The timing of Congress action and an emerging cable industry hungry for programming gave birth to C-SPAN. While many of the projections of opening the window on the congressional process seem somewhat paranoid in retrospect, the emergence of C-SPAN did change the visual nature of congressional argumentation and deeply affected a number of political careers both in positive and negative ways.<sup>1</sup> In the fall of 1998, the House Judiciary Committee presented the seemingly ironic position proposing a closed meeting to debate whether they should open the Starr Report to the public. Members of Congress have no experience with a full impeachment process of a President, especially one that will be covered gavel-to-gavel by C-SPAN and other networks. Unlike 1974, the availability of numerous cable channels will assure that even the marginally interested citizen will have numerous opportunities of watching the hearings in their entirety at different times of the day and night. The VCR, which was not readily available during the last impeachment process offers viewers and additional opportunity to become their own programmers by viewing the hearings in a time-shift mode and editing them in any way they like. Members of Congress have lost control of when its proceedings will be heard and how they might be edited.

2. SPEED: Congress is not known for speed. As the old joke goes, "it takes Congress a week to make instant coffee." Traditionally members of Congress viewed information as an important power resource to be parceled out judiciously as a threat or a reward. The Founders were of mixed mind, recognizing the need for an informed public, but fearing the passions such information might engender. George Washington's view of the Senate as the "cooling saucer"<sup>2</sup> for popular passions reflected many member of Congress' position that delaying public access to information is both a right and a responsibility. In the new information environment, information delayed is information denied. C-SPAN coverage creates the potential for "real time" politics, priming constituents with information allowing them to communicate with their representatives before key decisions are made. Delay in the disclosure of information is still a tactic, but a harder one to justify. The Democrats fought a battle with both the Republicans and public opinion over the decision to immediately release the Starr Report using high tech vehicles such as the Web.

Once all the information was distributed, defense of the President took the form of attacking the

messengers and how they handled its delivery. Still accustomed to the mediated era, Members of Congress will continue to struggle with the speed at which they send out messages and the speed with which the new technologies can deliver facts, opinions, rumors, and threats.

**3. INTERACTIVITY:** The new technologies encourage interactivity offering information receivers considerable control over the material they acquire. Surfing the Web or scanning home pages involves information acquisition paths uniquely tailored by the user. Members of Congress speak passionately about interacting with their constituents, but have largely viewed such activity as a one-way phenomenon controlled by themselves as the sender. Members have become accustomed to passive and static instruments such as newsletters and press releases in which they control the substance and content. While most members now have Web sites, they often offer few levels of interactivity and limited updating. Congressional Web sites often look like those for businesses with products to sell. In this case there is only one product, the Member. A number of Member Web sites require users to use traditional mail, rather than e-mail, to communicate. Many members of Congress fear e-mail both because of the potential to overwhelm their offices and the fact that it is perceived as so low effort that offices lose the ability to equate level of effort with depth of concern about an issue. Internet discussion groups and, particularly, talk-radio add a human dimension to interactivity creating a cadre of Cyber-pen pals sharing both their knowledge and their ignorance. There is considerable potential that Members of Congress will be faced with a number of conflicting measures of public opinion on impeachment. What they hear from traditional mail and phone messages is likely to be quite different from what they hear on the Internet and from national polls.

**4. ABILITY TO TRANSFORM THE INFORMATION FORMAT:** The new technologies blur the lines between text, graphics, video, and audio. Members of Congress will increasingly need to master new information formats and delivery systems both as consumers and as disseminators. Even a cursory review of Member Web sites reveals a relatively low-tech emphasis on textual material alone. The integration of effective graphics and video is almost non-existent. The challenge for Members of new technology is increased because of the institution's rules and traditions. For example, Congress has traditionally been an oral environment, committing its orally tested messages to paper. Both the House and Senate allow Members to "revise and extend one's remarks." Congress is one of the few places one can say, "Gee, I wish I had said that," and then do so. While the courts have ruled that these revised statements reflect official legislative intent, the availability of a video record confronts members of Congress with the danger of being charged with duplicity when they change their remarks. As the technologies converge, members of Congress will need to learn how to both absorb and transmit information in a variety of formats. With the impeachment process garnering a significant audience of non traditional C-SPAN viewers unfamiliar with Congress' arcane rituals such as revision and extension, Members will end up spending more time explaining that what you see and hear is not necessarily what you officially get.

**5. IRRELEVANCY OF GEOGRAPHIC CONSTRAINTS:** The new technologies make geographical location or distances insignificant barriers to communications. E-Mail addresses can not be correlated with congressional districts like zip codes. In our single-member-district system, members of Congress have little need to know the views or set up electronic "pen-pal" relationships with individuals having no control over their political well-being. Members of Congress are accustomed to dealing with that small number of individuals from their districts who write or call and with groups of individuals largely organized geographically. The new technologies allow the creation of virtual interest groups whose

members may be separated by hundreds of miles, but whose interests and views coincide. Widely dispersed interests lacking the concentration to be of much importance in any one congressional district, now have the potential to find each other and put pressure on all or any members of Congress. On impeachment, the likelihood of organized attempts to sway members of Congress is very high, as will be the difficulty Members will have in sorting out messages to which they need to listen.

To a large degree, the 1974 impeachment process resulted in a "national debate," since much of the most dramatic information emanated from the three national television networks. Most citizens experienced the same mainstream information. The explosion of information venues, with the introduction of cable T.V., talk radio, and Internet chat rooms, has considerable potential for fragmentation. The tempering of views emanating from a relatively common information base and exposure to competing ideas could turn the national debate into competing "echo chambers" where like-minded individuals reinforce increasingly more extreme ideas.<sup>3</sup> For many citizens, repetition means reliability. To the degree that individuals choose their information sources based on support for their existing views, the catharsis of a national debate on a painful topic leading to a national consensus will be lost. Historians may look back at the age of mass media with its tempering and nationalizing influence as a short interregnum between the era of the local partisan press, and the era of geographically unconstrained messaging among individuals sharing common preconceptions.

Will Congress survive the impeachment process and the information revolution? Without a doubt. Members of Congress have become masters at using new technologies to their personal advantage— if not always to their institution's advantage. With the introduction of televised coverage, e-mail, the Web and the like, the changes have been at the margins not at the heart of what Members do and how they do it. That does not mean the changes are insignificant. As a long-time legislative practitioner put it in the early stages of one of the new waves of technological change, "Never underestimate the power of a computer...History's most profound revolutions have been underestimated by their contemporaries."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed analysis, see Stephen Frantzich and John Sullivan, *The C-SPAN Revolution*, Norman, OK: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Attributed to George Washington in a conversation with Thomas Jefferson, but thought to be apocryphal. It is one of those thoughts that if he didn't say it, he should have. See Suzy Platt, *Respectfully Quoted*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the new media as a reinforcing factor, see Richard Davis and Diana Owen, *New Media and American Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Senator Hubert Humphrey, U.S. Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 1964, p. S9075. See also Stephen Frantzich, *Computers in Congress: The Politics of Information*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1982, p. 227.

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# New Books

- Aumente, Jerome, et al. 1998. *Eastern European Journalism: Before, During, and After Communism*. Hampton Press.
- Cate, Fred H. 1997. *Privacy in the Information Age*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Dunham, Corydon B. 1997. *Fighting for the First Amendment: Stanton of CBS vs. Congress and the Nixon White House*. Praeger Publishers.
- Grossberg, Lawrence, Ellen Wartella, and D. Charles Whitney. 1998. *Mediamaking: Mass Media in a Popular Culture*. Sage.
- Harvey, Lisa St. Clair. 1998. *Eden Online: Re-Inventing Humanity in a Technological Universe*. Hampton Press.
- Hess, Stephen. 1998. *The Little Book of Campaign Etiquette: For Everyone with a Stake in Politicians and Journalists*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Holmes, David. 1998. *Virtual Politics: Identity and Community in Cyberspace*. Sage.
- Jones, Steven G. 1998. *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*. Sage.
- Mickunas, Algis and Joseph Pilotta, eds. 1998. *Technocracy vs. Democracy: Issues in the Politics of Communication*. Hampton Press.
- Wilke, Jurgen. 1998. *Propaganda in the 20th Century: Contributions to its History*. Hampton Press.