



K A P P A T A U A L P H A NEWSLETTER

National Society Honoring Scholarship in Journalism and Mass Communication

Volume 28, No. 1, Winter 2011

Campbell leads into 2nd century

W. Joseph Campbell has been elected KTA's 41st president.

Campbell assumed the presidency following the AEJMC Convention in Denver.

Peter J. Gade will serve as vice-president and Keith P. Sanders continues as executive director. They were elected in May by vote of the National Council, which consists of chapter advisers and national officers. They will serve two-year terms.

Campbell, professor at American University's School of Communication, is the 41st KTA president. He is the author of five books, including the acclaimed *Getting it Wrong: Ten of the Greatest Misreported Stories in American Journalism*. He entered journalism education after more than 30 years as a professional journalist in a career that took him across North America and to Africa, Asia and Europe. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina (where he was inducted into KTA) and then joined the American University faculty. He has lectured at the National Press Club, the Library of Congress and the Freedom Forum. He has been adviser since 1999 of American University's chapter. In 2009 he received the William H. Taft Outstanding Adviser Award.

George Crutchfield, former president

Former KTA National President (1986-88) George Crutchfield died in March.

Crutchfield was the founding director of the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Mass Communication and the KTA chapter was named in his honor upon his retirement.

He was inducted into KTA by the South Carolina chapter in 1968.

Gade is Gaylord Family Professor in the College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma. He has been the Journalism Area Head for 10 years and the adviser of the H.H. Herbert KTA Chapter since 2001. He is co-author of *Twilight of Press Freedom: The Rise of People's Journalism* and is co-editor of *Changing the News: The Forces Shaping Journalism in Uncertain Times*, which is due out in April. He has been published in *Journalism Quarterly*, *Communication Monographs*, *J&MC Quarterly* and several other journals. He is the former head of the Media Management/Economics Division. He earned his Ph.D. at Missouri, where he became a member of KTA. He was the 2010

Taft Outstanding Adviser.

Sanders, executive director since 1991, is professor *emeritus* at the University of Missouri, where he served stints as Editorial Department chair and associate dean for graduate studies and research. He received the 2008 AEJMC Presidential Award and the 1987 Traves Professor of the Year Award from the MC&S Division. He was on the editorial board of *Mass Comm Review* (now *Mass Communication & Society*) for 34 years, 11 as associate editor, and *Journalism Monographs* for eight years. He served four years on the AEJMC Standing Committee on Research. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa and was inducted into KTA at Ohio in 1962.

KTA welcomes Indiana chapter

Indiana University is home for KTA's newest chapter. The chapter application gained unanimous support.

The awarding of the chapter comes during the centennial celebration of the founding of the IU School of Journalism.

The chapter plans a recognition ceremony for KTA members on the university's honors weekend April 8-10. Plans call for new members to receive a gift from the School of Journalism, such as a bound volume of celebrating the centennial or a biography of famous alum Ernie Pyle.

The University is classified as an RU/VH Institution (Research University/Very High Research Activity). The School of Journalism is an independent unit on the Bloomington campus. It offers a B.A. in Journalism, two tracks (professional and research/teaching) leading to an M.A. in Journalism and a Ph.D. in Mass Communications.

The School is home to 790 majors.

Students can complete specializations in global communication, digital and emerging media, strategic communication, visual communication, science and the environment, political communication, radio-television news, news reporting and writing, feature reporting and writing, and sports communication.

Journalism students rank above the campus average in SAT and ACT scores {1161 and 26.0, respectively).

The program has 31 full-time faculty and 22 adjunct lecturers. The 2008 Accreditation Report for ACEJMC indicated 20 faculty members surveyed produced 12 books, 55 refereed articles, 45 book chapters, numerous non-refereed articles and 87 research presentations at academic conferences.

Although undergraduate journalism courses were first offered in 1893, a major was not created until 1932. The M.A. program was established in the late 1920s and the Ph.D. option in 1966.

Addressing the impertinent question: 'So what?'

W. Joseph Campbell, a professor at American University's School of Communication, is KTA's president. This is the first of the president's columns he plans to write during his two-year tenure.

"Celebrating the scholarly life" was the superb and exquisitely well-named panel that KTA organized at last summer's AEJMC convention in Denver.

The panelists all are well-known and leading scholars in journalism and mass communication—Maurine Beasley (Maryland), Jay Black (South Florida), Don Shaw (North Carolina), Esther Thorson (Missouri), and David Weaver (Indiana).

All are KTA members, too.

Their insights were many. One of Shaw's comments has stuck in my mind: "I always feel my best work is ahead of me." And Weaver noted that few careers allow for the autonomy and job security of the academic life.

It was one of the closing comments that impressed me most. That came when Black noted that scholars should "never hesitate to ask the impertinent question, 'so what?'" about their research.

"We don't do that terribly well," he added.

I agree.

The descriptive tradition runs

Denver National Council meeting minutes

The annual meeting of the National Council of Kappa Tau Alpha was held Aug. 5, 2010 at the Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel. President Jane Singer (Iowa) presided. Twenty-two chapter advisers and two guests attended.

Singer welcomed new advisers Elizabeth Hansen (Eastern Kentucky), Shayla Thiel-Stern (Minnesota) and Jane Marcellus (Middle Tennessee). She congratulated Peter Gade (Oklahoma) for earning the Taft Outstanding Adviser Award. She presented Keith Sanders with a list of the first year's recipients of the newly named Keith P. Sanders Outstanding Service Award.

Singer encouraged everyone to attend the afternoon's "Celebrating the Scholarly Life" panel honoring the Society's 100th anniversary.

Sanders presented a financial

report that anticipated an end-of-fiscal-year balance of about \$40,000, despite the large expenses incurred in celebrating the centennial. The proposed budget of \$47,850 for 2010-2011 was approved.

fairly deep in journalism and mass communication research. Despite not-infrequent reminders and occasional prodding over the years, research in journalism and mass communication too often fails to address what it all means. It fails to consider the significance of the research topic. It fails to address "so what?"

Granted, this observation is impressionistic and anecdotal. But I often address this point in reviewing prospective convention papers and journal article manuscripts. The submissions invariably address interesting topics. They're often earnestly researched.

But too often they leave unstated the significance of the findings; they fail to confront or discuss "so what?"

And I find myself writing such commentaries as: "So what does this research tell us? What is the significance here? Why should media scholars devote time and attention to reading this paper?"

Scholars have an obligation to go beyond the descriptive and provide an interpretative analysis of their work. They have an obligation to identify and explain the significance of their research, and do so clearly. It's not enough to assume that their audiences will do that for them.

So Black's point at the KTA panel was telling, and on-target.

In his annual Executive Director's Report, Sanders noted the addition of chapters at Middle Tennessee State University and the University of Miami.

He praised Singer's Kappa Tau Alpha Lecture presented as part of the March 10 "birthday party," noting that many people watched it on the internet.

Sanders noted that, thanks in part to Jennifer McGill and the AEJMC staff, KTA was very visible at the convention. From the KTA ribbons on badges to the tote bags (described by AEJMC President Carol Pardun as "the best ever") to the superb panel of superstar scholars, KTA was "everywhere."

It wasn't necessarily new, though. Back in 1997, the newsletter of AEJMC's History Division published a lengthy article drawn from interviews with four journal editors who discussed trends in journalism and mass communication research. It's an issue that I've kept in a readily accessible file.

John Soloski, then editor of *Journalism & Mass Communication Monographs*, specifically addressed the importance of the "so what?" question.

"The single most common weakness in submissions," he said, "... is the problem of significance. We get articles that are well written and that tell a great story with great details--but in the end, you have to ask, 'So what?' The manuscript goes into great depth but is limited conceptually."

"So what?" is essential in scholarly research: It's an impertinent-sounding question, as Black noted. But it's a question that encourages deeper thinking in journalism and mass communication research and, in turn, brings analytical depth and dimension to the field.



The Kappa Tau Alpha Newsletter

is published by

Kappa Tau Alpha
National Honor Society
School of Journalism
University of Missouri
Columbia MO 65211-1200

573-882-7685

umcjourkta@missouri.edu
www.KappaTauAlpha.org

Bill Taft's KTA legacy will live on forever

by Keith Sanders

William Howard Taft died Feb. 21. His impact on KTA will be everlasting.

He was born Oct. 24, 1915 in Mexico, Missouri to parents who named him after the former president of the United States. He received a bachelor's degree from Westminster College, journalism degrees (BJ and MA) from the University of Missouri and a doctorate in history from Western Reserve University.

He taught at Hiram, Youngstown and Defiance Colleges in Ohio before joining the Memphis State University faculty, where he established the department of journalism.

In 1956 he moved to the University of Missouri, hand-picked by Dean Frank Luther Mott to succeed him as the teacher of the legendary course in History and Principles of Journalism. He retired from MU in 1981 as associate dean, graduate studies.

In 1962 Mott, who had been in charge of the national headquarters of KTA since its permanent establishment at Missouri in 1944, again hand-picked Taft to succeed him. He continued in that capacity until the annual meeting in Boston in 1991.

During Taft's "watch," KTA expanded from 31 to 93 chapters. He created, edited and wrote the *KTA Newsletter*. He overhauled a cumbersome membership certificate processing system.

At the 1984 National Council meeting, the Outstanding KTA Adviser of the Year Award was renamed the William H. Taft Chapter Adviser of the Year Award. He became its third recipient in 1985.

In 1991 Taft received the AEJMC Presidential Award for Distinguished Service. In 2001 the Missouri Press Association, for which he served as historian, inducted him into the MPA Newspaper Hall of Fame. In 2004 he was awarded the Missouri School of Journalism Distinguished Service Medal.

Those are the facts. Let me tell you about the man.

Bill cared deeply about things that mattered to him. He cared about the successes of his students, be they one of the 10,000-plus who experienced the History and Principles of Journalism course (known more simply as H & P, or even "hell and



purgatory") course or one of his more than 100 M.A. thesis or 25 doctoral dissertation advisees. He had a never-ending supply of jokes, mostly one-liners. He was quick-witted and could be sharp-tongued. He seldom passed on the opportunity to chide a frequently married/divorced former student and later colleague that he (Taft) had been married for 70 years--to the same woman.

He seldom passed, either, on the chance to speak. I asked Bill to present the Taft Award at the 2003 AEJMC Awards Luncheon, urging him to keep it to five minutes. Good luck at that. He went for 15, almost forgot to present the award, and sat to a standing ovation. At KTA's 100th Anniversary Luncheon in 2010 he leaned over and said "I hope I'll get a chance to say a few words. Although illness had sapped his strength and unable to walk on his own, he made it to the podium, recounted some KTA history, reflected on his ties with Mott and impressed everyone.

He loved to tell how he became a KTA member. He wrote, "At the initiation banquet in spring 1938 I made some comments to the effect that 'never had I earned such good grades with so little work.' The Dean's secretary was upset. She never processed my initiation. Fortunately, I saved the invitation letter and Mott made it official when I showed it to him in 1956."

He wrote a Last Lecture and of

course gave it several times, adapting it to the situation. He quoted Walter Lippmann: "Leaders are the custodians of a nation's ideals, of the beliefs it cherishes, of its permanent hopes, of the faith that makes a nation out of a mere aggregation of individuals." And Taft concluded, "Who but our honor society members can become the needed potential leaders of the future."

I have been asked many times why I agreed to become executive director. My answer has always been: "Because Bill Taft asked me to." To be asked to take over something that meant so much to him was one of the most humbling moments of my life. I did not hesitate.

WHT, as he signed memos, was a gentle man, a gentleman and a scholar.

A life fully lived.

Normative

(continued from page 4)

meaningful portraits and not statistically precise formulations derived from artificially fixed conditions. Theorizing in these terms is not an examination of external events, but the power of the imagination to give us an inside perspective on reality. Our theories are rooted in our worldviews rather than in epistemic certainty, and in this way they offer a moral framework for understanding and critiquing professional practice.

Examining Normative Ethics

Normative Theories of the Media won the Mott / KTA Research Award for the best scholarly book of 2009. Authors Clifford G. Christians, Theodore L. Glasser, Denis McQuail, Kaarle Nordenstreng and Robert A. White recount here how they collaborated.

How do five people write a book together?

Very slowly.

Various configurations of the five of us — typically two or three at a time — began as early as the mid-1980s to discuss, in an ad hoc and very informal way, the importance of the topic of press roles and responsibilities. We'd meet whenever and wherever we could, usually before, during, or after the annual conventions of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the International Communication Association, and the International Association for Media and Communication Research. By the mid-1990s we were more or less a team, though without a coach, committed to a project we hadn't quite defined but about which we were unequivocally enthusiastic.

The task of defining our project — its scope, its vocabulary, its framework — kept us busy for literally years. Often interrupted by the commitments and obligations that any five academics would have over an extended period of time, we stayed focused by shifting our meetings to locations — a hotel lobby in Chicago, a cabin in the woods of Finland — away from the distractions of the conventions or conferences where we had been meeting.

Normative Theories of the Media was chosen as the title of our book to show continuity and discontinuity with an earlier University of Illinois Press book, *Four Theories of the Press*, published in 1956. Though the first word "normative" is the heart of the book's distinctiveness, the marketing staff at the Press demurred and called for a new title without it. A polysyllabic term of amorphous meaning apparently is no way to promote a book, whether it's written for a scholarly audience or not. The judgment of the authors prevailed, however, and "normative theories" opens the bay window on the book's contents.

Norm as a noun means rule for

right action or standard for judging proper conduct. As an adjective, normative means ideal formation or regulative. It's the opposite of an empirical statement. *Four Theories of the Press*, in our judgment, was confused about the nature of theories. It assumed that libertarian and social responsibility were descriptive theories about the state of affairs in democracy, whereas Authoritarian and Soviet Communist theories were normative and objectionable. The enormously influential *Four Theories* reflected an Enlightenment view of theories that they are clean, decontextual, theorems about reality. *Normative Theories of the Media*, by contrast, argues that all theories are value laden, that all of them are saturated with beliefs about the world. Think-

"In normative ethics, principle and practice are integrated, each feeding off one another."

ing begins with presuppositions, though human knowing is not restricted to them. Chapter 2 provides a historical review of the way theories — also called paradigms — emerge in history and bring together the claims and debates of society's opinion leaders.

Therefore, while the liberal-democratic theory of the press appears to be self-evident in many Western democratic societies, it actually is a historical statement embodying the opinions of theorists and public voices. It is not a truth across time and space similar to the law of gravity which holds everywhere under all circumstances. Since all theories promote norms and none is neutral, the task of all cultures, East and West, across generations, is to develop credible theories that meet the tests of internal and external validity in the context of which they are formed. For those concerned about the condition of the media today and their viability given today's technological revolution, working on the theoretical level is vital for the press's long-term flourishing. Chapter 3 outlines the various features of a viable theory as indicated by the generative, powerful

theories of the past and present.

"Normative" also positions this book in the field of media ethics. The study of ethics is normally divided into three parts: metaethics, normative ethics, and descriptive ethics. Metaethics philosophically examines the nature of the good and right, the problem of evil, and the validity of ethical theories. Descriptive ethics reports on the moral behavior of specific groups or persons and studies the way ethical decision-making functions de facto.

Normative ethics gives us the biggest challenges at present, and to this domain *Normative Theories of the Media* wants to contribute. Normative ethics fuses actual morality with principles, concentrating on the justice or injustice of institutions such as the media. It concerns the best ways for professionals to practice their craft and the principles to be promoted. Normative ethics seeks to establish norms and guidelines, not merely to describe details or deal with formal abstractions.

In normative ethics, principle and practice are integrated, each feeding off one another. The traditional idea that application follows theory, that theories are superior and application inferior, is demonstrably false in *Normative Theories* and therefore helpful to normative ethics. It warns us against uncritically assuming that ethical theory is to media ethics as theoretical physics is to engineering or as microbiology is to medical practice. Particular knowledge does not depend on generic knowledge for its existence. The dualisms of academics versus professionals, learning versus doing, theory versus practice are overcome. Real life conundrums demand further theorizing, and normative theories in context integrate professional values into their principles.

Normative theories as the book defines them are not *ex nihilo*. They do not arise out of nothing. Theories are not abstract theorems, but oppositional claims about the world. We identify inconsistencies and conundrums in existing thinking and theorize how to start over. Theories are not objective, ahistorical foundations of knowledge. They need to be redefined as

(see *Normative* on page 3)