

WJEC HIGHLIGHTS DEVELOPMENT OF JOURNALISM AROUND THE WORLD

By Joe Foote, University of Oklahoma

The next few years will see more and more American journalism programs celebrate their centennials. These events are important maturation markers for a field that still relatively young. While we in the United States may feel like newcomers in the American academic sphere, we clearly are the senior citizens on the global stage. For most of the 20th Century, U.S.-based journalism programs dominated the field. Even in Europe, teaching journalism and mass communication widely at the university level is less than 40 years old. American journalism education still has the most well developed professional support structure, but the center of gravity is shifting. The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and the Association for Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication had no peer. The Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication stood alone as an accrediting body.

The 2010 World Journalism Education Congress in Grahamstown, South Africa and its predecessor, the 2007 World Journalism Education Congress in Singapore, have shown how much the landscape has changed. Each meeting, which drew more than 300 delegates from more than 40 countries, demonstrated the palpable vibrancy of this emerging field on a global scale. These efforts are being backed by 29 different journalism education organizations ([Table 1](#)) that have come together during the past decade to form the World Journalism Education Council. The effort began as an initiative of an AEJMC task force appointed in 2001. The idea for a World Journalism Education Congress came from a joint AEJMC/ASJMC mid-winter meeting in London in 2002 with the Association for Journalism Education in the United Kingdom. Since 2002, the effort has grown from two organizations partnering together to a dozen to twenty to nearly thirty. Each year, a new partner emerges, and the effort gets stronger and stronger.

The 2007 meeting in Singapore was intended as a one-time effort to draw attention to the field, develop a statement of principles for journalism education, launch a global census,

and provide a forum focused exclusively on journalism education from both a professional and academic perspectives. The host partner was the Asian Media Information Centre, which blended its annual conference with WJEC. Much of the horsepower for these early efforts came from AEJMC and its members. Both AEJMC and ASJMC were solidly committed to this effort, providing both financial and in-kind support. ASJMC was particularly well represented in Singapore and sponsored a successful program for administrators. Out of Singapore's glowing success came permanence for the WJEC Council and an appetite for more global gatherings.

A WJEC planning meeting in Boston in 2009 became an important inflection point for this global movement. Rhodes University from South Africa boldly proposed that the Council back a bid for a 2010 World Journalism Education Congress that it would host in Grahamstown, South Africa on less than a year's notice. The Council had polled its member organization before the meeting. All voiced approval for moving forward except for the AEJMC Board of Directors in the United States. Its Board had serious reservations about the short planning time, the timing of the event to coincide with the World Cup, and AEJMC's lack of resources in tight budgetary times to devote to such an effort.

In the run-up to the first world congress, not having the support of the world's largest, oldest, best-resourced professional organization would have been a severe, perhaps fatal, blow. In 2009, however, the other organizations felt strongly enough and confident enough to move forward without AEJMC's official backing, a major step in the maturity of the movement.

The willingness of WJEC organizations to move forward so deliberately and so confidently showed both the hunger of the field for more communal activity and the lessened dependence on any one country for success. The lack of AEJMC official support, however, did not mean a lack of support from American journalism educators. ASJMC was a strong backer of the 2010 effort from the beginning. The In-

ternational Communication Division of AEJMC ran the global paper and panel competitions. A former head coordinated the small-group syndicates.

The broad-based strength shown by WJEC organizations is reflected in the programs they represent. During the past 30 years, there has been an explosion of new programs and strengthening of existing ones. Unlike in the industrialized countries, media consumption is growing rapidly in much of the developing world; traditional media organs have yet to reach their peaks. Correspondingly, the demand for new entrants to the professions has been exceptionally strong. From Asia to Europe to Africa to Latin America, journalism education is surging. The first global census of journalism education conducted by the University of Oklahoma in 2009 showed that there is a relative balance between North America, Europe and Asia with each having roughly a quarter of the programs. (wjec.ou.edu/census). Massive growth in China and India alone are moving these numbers significantly.

It was against this backdrop of rapid worldwide growth that the 2010 World Journalism Education Congress convened in Grahamstown. The regional role that WJEC plays on a global scale was particularly apparent. The congress became a magnet for African educators. Rhodes University had primed the pump by holding a pan-African journalism education meeting in 2009 on its campus. A year earlier, the UNESCO model curriculum for Africa had been released.

In many ways, WJEC-2 served as a coming-out party for African journalism education. It was an opportunity for African delegates to show the significant progress they had made over the past two decades and to sample the range of offerings from other continents. I particularly remember the delegation from Ghana basking in the excitement presenting their research to a global audience, being tuned-in so intently to the bounty of quality panels and relishing the chance to chat with stimulating colleagues at every turn. It was a reminder of how much Americans take for granted they progress through the routines of annual AEJMC and ASJMC meetings.

To those traveling to Africa, WJEC-2 was a fascinating window on a continent that few outsiders knew about firsthand. Just being at Rhodes University, one of Africa's most impressive programs with facilities to match, was an education in itself. Likewise, it was sobering to hear about some African programs and educators operating in isolation with practically no resources.

For the sizable group of Americans who travelled to Graham-

stown, WJEC-2 was an opportunity to take stock of the dynamism of journalism education globally. In many cases, we could see issues playing themselves out that peaked long ago in the U.S. The trust and respect between professionals and academics, which has advanced so far during the past generation, is a severe and pressing handicap for the majority of programs in developing countries. Likewise, the angst over decline of the mainstream media, that dominates thinking in the West, isn't even on the radar in many parts of the world. Americans saw directly what the global census has been telling them—that the world of journalism education is a much more balanced environment today than it was 30 years ago and that other players are ready to participate in global leadership in the 21st Century.

The sizzle in WJEC meetings came from the interaction of so many different perspectives and experiences. Sessions that looked quite ordinary on paper turned into a rich tapestry of stimulation. Nowhere was this so more than in the small group “syndicates” that have become a hallmark of WJEC. Robyn Goodman explains some of that magic in another article. Reports from the thoughtful input of many nationalities can be found at the WJEC website (wjec.ou.edu/syndicates2010).

The syndicates underscored that the problems of journalism education are universal, but the perspectives are not. It was truly fascinating to spend two or three days with the same group of concerned colleagues, batting around the issues and best practices of the field. In the syndicate on media literacy in which I participated, I was energized by persuasive, informed views from five continents each with its own rationale and cultural imperative. Our steady migration to a common understanding and appreciation of the issue was a tangible reward in itself.

As ASJMC President Paul Parsons wrote in the Fall 2010 ASJMC newsletter, the Grahamstown meeting also underscored the hunger of administrators globally for more programming, training and connections. The content presented in the sessions he organized and the informal interaction at the conference must become a more prominent part of any WJEC meetings.

With the successes of Singapore and Grahamstown reverberating around the globe, the World Journalism Education Council is not waiting for inspiration to strike to organize another congress. In Grahamstown, the Council issued a call for proposals for a third WJEC in 2013. From the initial level of interest, there will be a strong set of bids from which to choose. The Council will meet in July 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey, to decide the site.

The global march of journalism education continues. Conferences like the World Journalism Education Congress validate that reality and provide a surge of energy for the field. That ASJMC has been a strong supporter of this effort is a

tribute to its global perspective and leadership.

Dr. Joe Foote is the dean of the College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma

TABLE 1

World Journalism Education Organizations

African Council on Communication Education (ACCE)
Arab-U.S. Association for Communication Educators (AUSACE)
Asian Media Information Centre (AMIC)
Association for Education in Journalism & Mass Communication
Association for Journalism Education (U.K.)
Association of Schools of Journalism & Mass Communication (ASJMC)
Brazilian Society of Interdisciplinary Studies in Communication - Intercom
Broadcast Education Association (BEA)
Canadian Committee for Education in Journalism (CCEJ)
Chinese Communication Association (U.S.-based)
Chinese Journalism Education Association
European Journalism Training Association (EJTA)
Global Network for Professional Education in Journalism and Media (JourNet)
International Communication Association
Latin American Federation of Social Communication Schools (FELAFACS)
Israel Communication Association
Japan Society for Studies in Journalism and Mass Communication
Journalism Division, International Communication Association (ICA)
Journalism Education Association (Australia)
Journalism Education Association (New Zealand)
Journalism Research and Education Section, International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR)
Korean Society for Journalism and Communication Studies
Latin American Association of Communication Researchers (ALAIC)
Nigerian Association of Journalism and Mass Communication Teachers
Philippine Association of Communication Educators (PACE)
Russian Association for Education in Journalism
Russian Association for Film & Media Education
Saudi Association for Media & Communication
South African Communication Association
Theophraste Network