



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

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A different look at media history

The beginning of the internet began in sixteenth-century Europe during the scientific revolution, argues Marshall Poe in "A History of Communications: Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet."

He reasons that the "systematic collection, classification and dissemination of knowledge" that arose in the period set the stage for the web. It is an intriguing argument, one of many Poe presents in his book, which is the winner of the Mott / Kappa Tau Alpha Research Award for the best scholarly work on journalism/mass communication published in 2011

Poe's book proposes a theory of media that attempts to explain how different forms of communication, from speech to the electronic media, impact culture.

This is a different kind of media history, organized around periods of

dominant forms of communication. "This is a smart book, full of big questions, which provides a well-reasoned historical framework for understanding media," writes finalist judge Peter Gade, (University of Oklahoma).

Poe takes a whack at some of the prevailing theorists suggesting that they are "a bit too fond of high-blown ideas and not fond enough of the solid facts. They propose theories that are at once hard to understand, difficult to test, and sometimes just plain wrong."

For more on the book, see the President's Column on page 2. Cambridge University Press is the publisher.

Runnerup in the Mott contest was Lawrence Allen Eldridge for *Chronicles of a Two-Front War: Civil Rights and Vietnam in the African American Press*.

Other finalists were John McMillan for

Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America; Carolyn Bronstein for *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement 1976-1986*; and Susan Carruthers for *The Media at War*.

The award is in honor of Mott, Pulitzer Prize winner, educator and long-time leader of Kappa Tau Alpha. The competition has been held annually since 1944. The \$1000 prize will be presented Aug. 10 in Chicago at the KTA/AEJMC Awards Luncheon during the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Judges are KTA chapter advisers and officers. The 2012 deadline is Dec. 9. See www.KappaTauAlpha.org/mott.html for information and list of previous winners.

Turk named adviser of year

Judy VanSlyke Turk (Virginia Commonwealth University) has been named the 2012 William H. Taft Chapter Adviser of the Year.

The award, named after the late executive director who served the Society for 30 years before retiring in 1991, will be presented at the KTA/AEJMC Awards Luncheon Aug. 10 in Chicago.

Dr. Turk founded the Kent State University chapter in 1989 when she was director of the journalism/mass communication program. She later advised the University of South Carolina chapter when she served as Dean of the College of Journalism and Mass Communications. For five years she has been adviser of the George Crutchfield Chapter at Virginia Commonwealth University, where she was director of the School of Mass Communications. She was initiated into KTA in 1970 at Northwestern University. Her Ph.D. is from Syracuse University.

Prof. Turk was president of AEJMC in 1995 and is a recent past president of the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication. She was founding dean of the College of Communication and Media Studies at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates.

She is the 28th recipient of the award. Previous winners, most recent first, include: Andrew Mendelson (Temple), Peter Gade (Oklahoma), W. Joseph Campbell (American), Margaret Patterson (Duquesne), Al Stavitsky (Oregon), Mark Popovich (Ball State), Jane Singer (Iowa), William Click (Winthrop), Karen List (Massachusetts), James Whitfield (LA-Monroe), Tony Rimmer (Cal State-Fullerton), Sam Riley (Virginia Tech), Thomas Schwartz (Ohio State), Emmanuel Onyedike (Hampton), Gil Fowler (Arkansas State), Milt Hollstein (Utah), Luther Sanders (Arkansas at Little Rock), George Abney (Georgia) and Marion Marzolf (Michigan).

Judging book entries a major perq

It's a perquisite of being a KTA officer, being called on to review the finalists in the annual Mott-KTA book competition. It's a perq I'll miss as I conclude my two-year term as president.

This year's Mott-KTA Research Award winner, *A History of Communications* by Marshall T. Poe, is outstanding. It's a rich, expansive, and confidently written book that utterly belies its pedestrian title.

It's one of the most supple and imaginative book on media history I've read

in a long time. And it's as ambitious as its subtitle suggests: "Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet."

Poe, an associate professor of history at the University of Iowa, opens his study provocatively, observing that the most influential thinkers in communication studies these days are "a bit too fond of high-blown ideas and not fond enough of the solid facts. They propose theories that are at once hard to understand, difficult to test, and sometimes just plain wrong." Fair enough. (His favorite media theorist is

Harold Innis.)

Poe organizes his work not in a linear assessment of great events and great people, but in what he calls periods of dominant "historical media" — speech, writing, print, audiovisual, and the Internet.

The discussion of the Internet is notably intriguing. Poe takes an exceptionally long view of the emergence of the Internet and the World Wide Web, writing: "The story of the Web properly begins in sixteenth-century Europe during the scientific revolution, for it was then and there that the project that would end in the Internet was conceived in its modern form."

He's referring to the "systematic collection, classification, and dissemination" of knowledge. It's an intriguing argument — one of several that Poe advances — and it is argued persuasively.

Less persuasive is his argument that exposure and access to media have contributed to declining fertility rates in developed and developing countries.

Still, it's an interesting point and *A History of Communications* certainly is a worthy recipient of the Mott-KTA award. And it's a worthy addition to the collections of media scholars.

Another perq of being KTA president is in writing this column, thus offering a modest contribution to the KTA newsletter. I began doing so at the outset of my term, with the support of Keith Sanders, KTA's executive director.

I got to know Keith much better during my term as president, during which I deepened my appreciation for his tireless commitment to KTA. It has been said by outgoing KTA presidents over many years, and it is quite true: KTA is very fortunate that Keith is executive director. His commitment spans more than 20 years, and is deeply appreciated. He made my service as a KTA officer much smoother.

So did my immediate predecessor, Jane Singer of Iowa, who helped plan and presided over KTA's centenary celebration in 2010. Jane set a very high standard for her successors, the next of whom will be the hard-working Peter Gade, head of the journalism program at Oklahoma.

W. Joseph Campbell is KTA president and a professor of communication at American University.

Honor Societies promote excellence in scholarship

Honor societies have existed in the United States since the founding of Phi Beta Kappa in 1776. They exist primarily to recognize the attainment of scholarship and leadership of a superior quality. To the degree that they make such recognition a thing to be coveted, they encourage students to strive toward meeting high standards.

The Association of College Honor Societies (ACHS) is the coordinating agency for collegiate honor societies. Membership in the Association of College Honor Societies is a certification that an honor society has met high standards. On its web site, ACHS (www.achsnaatl.org) provides a list of criteria on "How to Judge the Credibility of an Honor Society." ACHS was founded in 1925 and has 67 member societies.

Kappa Tau Alpha, founded in 1910 at the University of Missouri, is the seventh oldest national college honor society.

Membership is by invitation only by one of the Society's 94 campus chapters and is based solely on scholarship and character.

Journalism/mass communication juniors, seniors and graduate students must rank in the upper 10 percent of their class (based on overall GPA). Outstanding doctoral students also may be eligible. Chapters may set higher standards for membership.

Chapters are located at four-year degree-granting institutions accredited by the appropriate regional agency (e.g., New England Association of Colleges) that offer a major in journalism or mass communication.



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Kappa Tau Alpha
School of Journalism
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65211-1200
e-mail: umcjourkta@missouri.edu
www.KappaTauAlpha.org

Executive Director:

Keith P. Sanders