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President's column for ICA Newsletter, April 2008

ICA's publication activities – what's new?

Sonia Livingstone

It can be hard to keep track of ICA's many activities. For this column, I thought I'd overview ICA's publication activities, partly because lots of things are happening, partly because people tell me they don't know which, among the vast number of publications available, ICA is responsible for.

First, how are our journals doing? Blackwell presented a detailed report to the May 2007 Board of Directors' meeting which revealed significant achievements for ICA journals in 2006-7. Notably, there was an explosion in circulation. Through inclusion in consortia sales, the number of institutions with access to the ICA journals almost doubled. Important for our internationalization agenda, 568 institutions in the developing world now have access to the ICA journals free or at a group discount rate, expanding the international readership of JOC, HCR, CT and JCMC.

For JOC, HCR and CT together, there were 1,512 institutional subscriptions in 2005, plus 1,934 sites with consortia access, 4,271 membership subscriptions and 93 personal subscriptions. In all, institutional subscription revenue is very close to our projections and consortia revenue is higher than anticipated. As for readership, the publisher's report shows that in 2006, *JOC* articles were downloaded 124,791; *HCR* articles were downloaded 49,198; *CT* articles were downloaded 37,680; and *JCMC* articles were downloaded 12,054 times through *Blackwell Synergy* and other online hosts.

Rankings (among communication journals) and impact factors for 2005 (with 2004 figures in brackets) were as follows:

- *Journal of Communication* (ranked 7/42): 1.134 (1.213)
- *Communication Theory* (ranked 2/42): 1.472 (1.263)
- *Human Communication Research* (ranked 8/42): 1.080 (1.526)

This is a pretty healthy situation, not least because lots of ICA members work hard to make our publications successful. This is a good moment to thank all the submitters, reviewers, editorial boards and, especially, the editors, for their considerable efforts over the past year.

There's all kinds of other things happening too. The ICA Board of Directors has just welcomed Charles Salmon as the incoming editor of *Communication Yearbook*, and it warmly thanks outgoing editor, Christina Beck. The publication committee, chaired by Mohan Dutta, is now searching for new editors for *Communication Theory*, as Francois Coren prepares to step down.

The mammoth task of producing the 12-volume *International Encyclopedia of Communication*, edited by Wolfgang Donsbach, is now completed and about to arrive in the bookshops any day. I'm delighted to note that the inaugural issue of ICA's newest journal, *Communication, Culture & Critique*, edited by Karen Ross, will be on the stands at the upcoming annual conference in Montreal, as will the first ICA

conference theme book, *Participation and Media Production*, edited by Nico Carpentier and Benjamin de Cleen). The first *Handbook in Communication*, a series edited by Bob Craig, will appear later this year.

Last, on publication titles, since last summer I've been very keen that we reinstate a content editor for the ICA Newsletter, to add some intellectual and communication-related content of one kind or another. I'm very pleased that Mohan Dutta has agreed to undertake this role (he will step down from the publication committee at the end of May). There are lots of possibilities for content here.

This could include conference reports from international conferences around the world. Updates on communication researchers' input into key policy issues would also be valuable - current controversies in the public eye such as advertising an obesity, journalism and blogging, paediatricians' recommendations not to let toddlers watch television, privacy on MySpace and Facebook, regulatory dilemmas facing the FCC – all these and others come to mind. Also, divisions and interest groups may wish to contribute short pieces on pressing or controversial issues within their field. Perhaps we can have some debates between ICA members who disagree on an important research topic? I'd certainly like to give space to progress or outcome reports from ICA's committees and task forces.

Probably, there's other possibilities too (I note, however, that it isn't the intention to use this space for promoting individual research or researchers). Mohan will act as content editor for three years, and the Publication Committee then has the charge of finding a replacement. I have no doubt that Mohan will be in touch with members to recruit content! And watch out for his first issue of this newsletter, in September.

As part of the internationalisation agenda, the last meeting of ICA's Board of Directors (held in January 2008) held a discussion about ICA's continuing endorsement of APA style for its publications. For some, this is a vital indicator of the standardisation essential for a truly professional organisation. For others, it is a subtle and unfair means by which 'others' (especially those from disciplines or countries in which APA is far from standard, perhaps not even heard of) are excluded. And for yet others, it's a 'take it or leave it' issue of minor interest. I shan't open up the wider discussion here but, instead, report on the board decision.

First, the principle of consistency across ICA publications was reaffirmed – APA remains the house style. However, it was also agreed that, contrary to some practices in the past, article or conference submissions that do not adhere 100% to APA style would not be rejected out of hand. While hardly endorsing sloppiness among those with ready access to the APA manual, it should be recognised that, as ICA becomes more international, some scholars are simply unaware of the many prescriptions of, arguably, the most pedantic book in the world. Their intellectual contributions should be considered by ICA publications on a fair footing. After all, publication style can always be adjusted – by authors, editors or copyeditors - once a piece has been accepted. So, the specific board minute reads: "Manuscripts will not be rejected solely based on issues of style, but will need to adhere to the style guidelines before final publication". Note that, to help those who don't have access to the full manual, the ICA website now includes a quick crib to APA style, which we hope is helpful.

Another recent decision reflects the fact that scholarly research and teaching is so heavily reliant on electronic networks and was triggered by the introduction of ICA's new journal, making five in all. This was to provide members with two printed journals of their choice, plus free electronic access to all five (see minutes for the board meeting in January 2007). Emeritus and life members still get all the paper journals, unless they request otherwise. Most of you will have made your choices by now, and I hope you agree that while our electronic resources are enhanced, our offices are less cluttered, with benefits to the environment also.

But this raises the more difficult issue of electronic access to academic work across the range of communication scholarship. Partly because electronic access is easier in some countries, especially wealthy western ones, than others, and partly because of changes in the business model in the publishing industry, there is a growing call for open access or creative commons publishing. As keynote speaker John Thompson argued in his address at ICA's last annual conference in San Francisco, not only is the academic monograph at its last gasp, but publishers are mainly surviving through revenues raised by journal publishing. While there is much intellectual passion and political justice behind the challenge to commercial journal and book publishing in favour of public access to public knowledge, as advocated also at the last annual conference by John Willensky, it should be noted that ICA too derives significant revenues from its publishing deal with. Indeed, around 40% of ICA's income comes from publications, and this helps considerably to keep membership and conference fees lower.

Of course, as the publishing landscape changes, ICA's strategy may also change – it is certainly kept under review (see Michael Haley's article on scholarly publishing in a recent ICA newsletter). In June 2006, the ICA Board of Directors voted to keep the Journal of Computer Mediated Communication open access. Last month, Harvard's Faculty of Arts & Sciences voted to mandate open access to articles published by faculty, though this may not be so easy to implement in practice. In the UK, the major funder of medical research (Wellcome) has made a similar demand, perhaps following the US National Institute of Health. It seems, relatedly, that the University of Southern California's International Journal of Communication, freely available online, is doing very well, as too are institutional repositories – starting up in many universities – that upload pre-publication versions of faculty research papers. Recently the Association of Internet Researchers' mailing list has been buzzing with discussions of the merits or otherwise of non-profit, open access journal publication, though I note that fewer call for a move away from peer-review (already happening, however, in the natural sciences), and many await the consequences of open access publication for their citation rates and other standardised indicators as used by promotion committees.

While larger changes are in the air, it's business as usual on the ground. If you want to get involved in reviewing for any of the journals, do email the journal editors to let them know of your expertise and willingness. And fill out your online profile to say you're ready to review manuscript submissions. Indeed, given the effort Sam Luna has put into creating the opportunity for online profiles and networking among scholars, please fill it out anyhow – it doesn't take a minute! Again, thanks to everyone who works to keep ICA's journals and books at the forefront of communication scholarship.

Note: you can find all board minutes on the ICA website now!