*State of the Discipline:  Communication Studies*

# Communicating with Communication Studies: An Analysis of the Discipline

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## Acknowledgements

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study conducted between 1999 and 2001 was to review the state of communication studies with special emphasis on research performance and education at higher education institutions in South Africa. The study was commissioned by the National Research Foundation (NRF) (Tomaselli and Shepperson 2001).

## DEFINITIONS

`Communication studies' broadly includes communication and mass communication studies, intercultural communication, journalism, development communication and development support communication.

`Media studies' generally refers to neo-Marxist analysis which studies texts in relation to their contexts. In line with subsequent institutional developments, `media theory' here refers to that trajectory of post-structuralist media analysis mainly taught in literature departments.

`JMC' refers to the broad field of journalism, media and communication teaching and research. `JMC practitioners' refers to both academics and professionals in the field.

## A NOTE ON METHOD

The principal sources for this study are a series of questionnaires administered to JMC academics, both in South Africa and internationally. Institutions were first approached between December 1986 and February 1988, and the results form the basis of Tomaselli and Louw (1993).

An open-ended survey was conducted in early 1999. Most

replies were received from overseas respondents, scholars who have worked in and on South Africa on topics relating to South African communication, journalism and media studies. A structured questionnaire piggy backing on the 1999 survey, administered by Arnold De Beer, elicited a more detailed assessment (De Beer and Tomaselli, 2000).

## PARADIGMATIC EMPHASES

Pieter Fourie's response to the original 100 page 1999 Report circulated to the JMC community may well reflect the broader perspective from South African communication scholars who, while alert to political issues, do not consider them primary:

... in general [the report] runs the risk of being a one-sided perspective in which the practice of a discipline is evaluated mainly in terms of its political involvement and its contributions mainly in terms of exposing, analysing and interpreting, or not exposing, analysing and interpreting "the role of communication in [South Africa's] oppressive past". It becomes a document about preferred paradigms and the discussion of paradigms amongst academics, or the lack thereof in South Africa, with the purpose of pointing a finger to those who have not emphasised the critical paradigms. Evaluating the practice of a discipline can and should involve more than a reflection on its political involvement, even in a politicised country such as South Africa.

The general drift of the responses received suggests that theories about journalism, media and communication practices must treat each of these related disciplines

individually. A clear relationship exists between the three disciplines - which we will treat as *presuppositional* in essence. There are three ways in which JMC inquiry can order these presuppositional relations. We will treat *journalism* as basic, *media* as presupposing journalism, and *communication* as presupposing both. This relationship is based on C.S. Peirce's (1902-1903) classification of the sciences, and simply means that *communication* presupposes a *medium*, which in turn presupposes some manner of *representation*. Thus communication must account both for its medium and what is represented. Media study does not assume communication, but must account for a representation. Finally, every representation *is what it is*, irrespective of the medium in which it asserts itself, or of whether communication has in fact taken place.

In general, we treat each dimension of JMC as a fully scientific area in its own right, which on the same Peirceian basis, presupposes an *ethic* (a theory of right action) which in turn presupposes an *aesthetic* (some theory of what is right in its own sense). As a preliminary comment, the *general* relationship between journalism, media and communication has historically not received the same attention as has the *specific* relations between practice, ethic and aesthetic. We will consider this phenomenon in detail as the report unfolds.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

*Lack of Objective Historical Perspectives:* responses to the question, "The present seminal SA JMC trends are ...?", elicited widely divergent perceptions of where JMC professions stand in relation to the institutional and political

changes occurring around them.  Some imply that all existing JMC teaching and research must be replaced with a new paradigm.  At the other extreme respondents are of the opinion that their present curricula and research are only now coming into their own.  In between these poles are responses which assume or imply that JMC training and research are not in question but that industrial or economic factors need to change (or have changed) while JMC institutions need to only respond to whatever changes have occurred or eventually do occur.

Responses the question on JMC trends suggest that the JMC sector has become subject to a *confusion of professional allegiance*.  The responses suggest that the distinctions between journalism training, media research, and communication studies are not clearly delineated.  This leads to the appearance of a discipline that is factionalised along so-called `paradigm' lines, whereas in fact the respective objectives of journalism, media and communication research and knowledge are very different despite the presuppositional relationship between them.  Research focus, and the response to research findings, is thus blurred by researchers and respondents frequently collapsing JMC categories that should be viewed separately and in terms of relevant criteria.  Degree and diploma structures, as a result, lack the kind of focus that enables graduates to progress from the learning to the working environment.

Viewing the JMC field as a whole, and comparing with responses to questions on professional and disciplinary publications, there is no evidence that JMC can claim to

have a *defined intellectual home for research*.  Professional publication and research accreditation and review procedures do not reflect the theoretical and professional needs of the broader communications-oriented field of inquiry.  For example, the CSD research proposal review process lumped much JMC-related research with the field of psychology.  This historical link became less and less valid as communication weaned itself from this discipline with regard to propaganda studies, organisational communication, marketing and advertising, and began to flirt with the more critical approaches offered by sociology, cultural studies and finally, literary studies.

## OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

We consider these findings from the point of view that although reality, following Peirce, is "independent of what you or I think", the *institutions* of inquiry into knowledge and reality are products of their history (political and social). South Africa's JMC institutions, and their practitioners, form part of a fractured social and political past that inevitably shaped the ways these institutions and intellectuals carried on their business.  In part, this is an outcome of the political control of education that characterised the apartheid and pre-apartheid governments, which is one reason why a political concern with paradigm is important.

However, we also acknowledge that many practitioners made choices among the available options, based on a greater or lesser commitment to the practical development of JMC professionals.  They worked to train and educate journalists; public relations, marketing and advertising practitioners;

propagandists or communications and media researchers; in the best ways possible under the circumstances. That these choices required people to work within the structures of the time must therefore be accepted as a factor, as must be the tendency for the `public' (in terms of the available student body) to have reflected the demographics of separation and the politics of resistance and co-option that accompanied this. One point worth making about this caveat, though, comes from Alex Holt (Natal) who noted that:

One must be careful that "legacy of apartheid" thinking does not get in the way of objective assessment, creative utilisation of our many experiences and resources, and movement forward rather than regression. In fact, course content and research topics at some of the best JMC schools in South Africa was (*sic*) calculated to destroy apartheid: does this also amount to a "legacy of apartheid" in some way? Diversity of approaches amongst different JMC schools in South Africa should not be seen as a problem but rather as a very valuable resource that is likely to enrich and stimulate the field; uniformity leads to stagnation and contraction.

In general, then, it is to be expected that in the period since 1994 many practitioners' responses to our research would have been based on their experience within their institutions, and upon the experiences of the institutions themselves.

We will consider the institutional aspect as primary, in that universities and technikons had to operate within the statutory frameworks of the period. They have had to respond not to any major demographic changes but to the changes in the

statutory environment.  The new statutes place less of a burden on institutions that previously sought to resist the oppression of apartheid. But they do exert on these institutions a shift (in teaching and research programmes) from resistance to critique that demands different relationships between them, the state, and their constituencies (students, industry, and the broader social realm).  This report is thus about whether JMC practitioners and departments have, or are, successfully recognizing and negotiating these changes.

Historically, some JMC departments or schools were perceived as supportive of apartheid. It is arguable whether or not such institutions actually had policies which explicitly stated that their work was to be of this nature.[i]  What was clear, however, was that curricula and research appeared not to take sufficient critical account of the hegemonic social and political environment within which students and teachers interacted, and into which graduates entered the journalism and media professions.  Whatever the actual situation, such institutions and practitioners equally had to accommodate shifts to a different set of student, state and constituency relationships.  The section below unpacks these issues in more detail:

***Lack of objective historical perspective:***
The qualifier `objective' does not mean `measurable' or `materially effective' as traditionally used in the natural sciences.  Rather, we use it in the sense of `logically qualified' so as to take account of one's participation in, or close proximity to, events that are (or may be seen as) historically important.  All this means, in effect, is that responses to requests for self-evaluation require reflection on one's own

conduct within and/or in relationships towards the events or processes that have been carrying on around one's life. The reality of one's relation to the historical environment, in other words, has facets, and it usually takes more than our own lifetimes to find, explore and describe all of these. Self-reflexively locating ones' self inside the relations being studied requires contextual consciousness (cf. Tomaselli and Louw, 1997; Masilela, 1997).

Below we discuss the problem of just how little consensus there was on just what constitutes JMC. Local practitioners who returned the questionnaires frequently had very different ways of understanding their profession, compared with their overseas counterparts. *Chris Paterson* of Leicester University commented that to the outside observer:

the effort and resources dedicated to publication and research across SA communications programs is admirable and results in good international visibility (perhaps a necessary consequence of sanctions era isolation), but seems extreme to the outsider, who must suspect a consequent lack of resources going to basic JMC education at the graduate and post graduate levels.

The JMC persona that South African practitioners present to their international counterparts thus appears closed in upon itself, despite its high profile. The discussions we present to the world could be a reflection of the self-ascribed `insider conflicts' that marked the last decades of apartheid intellectual politics, in the sense that there is something *uniquely South African* about the problems and their solutions. Australian Frank Morgan noted, "the real need is for new and relevant

foci, rather than orthodox uniformity."  This is echoed off a different issue in *Mark Deuze*'s comment from The Netherlands:

Another focus in research I am missing is SA in cross-national comparison; esp. relevant since the issue of `multiculturalism' or 'polyethnicity' is so relevant for Europe these days, international comparative JMC research is called for and SA can play a leading role therein.

There is little equivalent by South Africans of the comparative work done by Americans like Louise Bourgault (1995) and James Zaffiro (1992) for example, or Africans like Francis Nyamnjoh (1999).[ii]  There clearly is no reason to conceptually isolate South African media and journalism from that of the rest of Africa, as if the former operates in a different category of JMC compared with the latter.  It seems more likely that JMC experiences in other countries undergoing crises of democracy could profitably draw on the South African experience.

Responses by South Africans appear to minimize the actual consequences of four decades of increasingly ineffective education on the majority of prospective JMC students and trainees.  Although many JMC intellectuals and academics take some cognizance of the `dumbing down' inherent in the apartheid state's educational policy and provision for blacks generally, they avoid confronting the more recent negative after-effects of the `no education before liberation' strategy in the 1970s and 1980s.

Before 1994, prospective entrants to the field could draw on

the training offered by NGOs like the Film and Allied Workers Organization (FAWO, now the Open Window Network) and the Durban Media Trainers' Group, amongst others  These organisations' approaches were strongly influenced by the work of educators like Paolo Freire (1970) and media activist/theorist Armand Mattelart (cf. 1986). With the effective demise of the NGO education sector as a result of the new state's post-1994 political economy, the old divide between `mainstream' and `resistance' JMC has all but dissolved.  Thus the response by Pedro Diederichs of Technikon Pretoria hardly does justice to the conflicts within which his institution once worked, and in some ways still works:

Technikon schooling will stay true to the basic journalism traits such as freedom of speech, news reporting, language ability, fairness, frame of reference, an open mind and general education. How that relates to "liberal_democratic" is a mystery to me. If "Africanisation" refers to news angles with cultural differences in mind: yes, the school's already adapted to that.

Many of the more specific JMC problems have arisen alongside, and possibly as a result of, the broader shifts in tertiary education.  These kinds of developments include, for example, the flight of students from the historically black universities, and the state's steady rationalisation (which for Historically White Universities, now mainly black in student populations, is usually tantamount, ironically, to a reduction) of the subsidy system.  Contemporary students are no longer revolutionaries but have more job-related objectives. Nevertheless, black and white students continue to evidence

very different understanding of the world, and therefore of the roles of JMC within it (cf. Claasen  1995;  Berger 1996). Thus, as a number of respondents indicted, those universities and technikons which have benefited from the changed profile of the higher-education sector, seem to overlook the `intellectual demographics' of their student bodies by offering flashy-sounding `Journalism and Communication' modules", which are thought to inevitably lead to jobs on graduation.

The responses in this context suggest that, as Raymond Louw commented, there is insufficient awareness or research into "attitudes to media and communication in schools. Lack of understanding in schools of democratic values which form a basis for entry into communication spheres in later life."  On the other hand, others have taken a more distanced position from their own institutional involvement; some respondents appear to have more nuanced reservations about the `received wisdom' concerning the kinds of changes required. However, there are other issues that, even if JMC practitioners were to adopt a more objective stance toward their own positions, hinder JMC.

***Confusion of professional allegiance:***
Although the present report is dealing with South African JMC education and training, this problem is something that is present in much of the English-speaking intellectual humanities.  The most noticeable and recent evidence of this was the exchange in *Ecquid Novi* between Australian journalism educator, Keith Windschuttle (1998; 1999), and several South African interlocutors (Tomaselli and Shepperson, 1998; Shepperson and Tomaselli, 1999; Strelitz and Steenveld, 1998).  Although this exchange took account

mainly of South African trends, using these both to concur with and object to Windschuttle's arguments, the topic itself and the attendant controversy has a longer provenance. Indeed, the polemic has taken on quite an edge in Australia, leading to reviews of the affair that attempt largely to reduce Windschuttle to examples of the very writing he criticises (Hodge, 2000).

Windschuttle's oft repeated argument begins with two strands in the Australian intellectual fabric: the influence of philosopher David Stove, and the reaction the so-called Sokal Hoax. Alan Sokal is a somewhat iconoclastic analyst of the philosophy of science, who took a sometimes highly polemical stance against what he saw as the "irrationalism" in Humanities Faculties. Windschuttle has nailed his colours to the mast of Stove's campaign, to the point of setting himself up as a radical `dissenter' against accounts of Aboriginal marginalisation and oppression (see Kimball 1997). The latter (which has more direct relevance for the present research) occurred when physicist Sokal (1996a) published an article that purported to provide evidence from the physical sciences for radical postmodernist cultural relativism. Directly after the release of the issue in which his article appeared, Sokal (1996b) published a detailed rebuttal of his own article in another journal in which he `revealed' the incapacity of media and cultural studies intellectuals to dissociate their internal debates from the wider issues of scientific communication.

Sokal's article is a parody of one kind of trendy leftist discourse. Sokal's (1996b) objective was to demonstrate that the attempt to develop a radical social critique from the

sociology of knowledge and certain approaches in the philosophy of science, is to privilege a kind of irrationalism that actually does no good for the radical project. We have gone into some detail in order to clarify some of the issues that arise from the responses to our inquiry. Principally, as already noted, there are differences between the conceptions of journalism, media and communication that do not always get the respect they deserve; and, secondarily, the heat generated by the exchanges between Windschuttle and his hundreds of cultural studies critics has to some extent masked the broader need to locate *critical* JMC inquiry in terms of both media studies and media theory.

In many responses to different questionnaires, there is evidence that some practitioners are aware of the need to distinguish the parts of the JMC sector, while others approach the sector as unitary but suffering from being divided. Thus Eve Bertelsen from Wits responded that academic JMC had become too focused on short-term results, to the detriment of the longer-term issues that a critical dimension brings:

A case needs to be made for media studies being a developed and constituted field of academic study with a considerable literature and established (if contested) ways of doing things. The general attitude tends to be rather *laissez-faire*, with curricula made up of whatever modules already happen to be institutionally available. While this may answer the need to redirect staff into an area which promises growing student numbers, one has to ask what sort of training this will issue in. If `media studies' is understood as the academic scrutiny of media culture, institutions and products, and `journalism' as hands-on

vocational training, then it is crucial to identify the core curriculum needs in each of these areas and develop them in a systematic and cumulative way to ensure optimal cross-reinforcement throughout the degree.

In the technikons, journalism and media are generally taught as professional or vocational courses.  As Diederichs points out, research or theory is aimed at bolstering this approach.  However, Graeme Addison notes that in non-academic JMC bodies like the Institute for Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) and Independent Media Development Trust (IMDT),

... most of the important work is not classical research or academic theory at all. It is in-service training for government departments, unions, corporates and NGOs – call it RDP stuff, to help newcomers to mass communication understand their role.  Many come from backgrounds in politics, NGO work, and trade unionism.

The reality of JMC thus involves more than either journalism or media, or journalism or communication, or media or communication, but elements of all three fall under the rubric of one leading requirement.  Some academics were aware of the need to maintain some element of pluralism in JMC, but most, like Johannes Froneman, did not care to elaborate further: "... we should stop trying to force all aspects of the field into a unified discipline."  Others, like Holt, offered some elaboration in the discussion on method.  Yet again, Izak Minnaar of Potchefstroom took the approach that to speak of "Journalism, Media and Communication" as a whole was something of an anachronism:

Isn't `mass communication' as part of the description of the
    study field a bit old hat for the reality of communication
    options in the information age?  The very fact that the study
    field is still called "jmc" indicates to me that it has lost
    (some?) relevance for the practitioners who are struggling
    to adapt their old mass communication habits to fit the
    technology that makes communication possible with both
    `audiences of one' and defined groups – based on the ability
    of members of these audiences to select content and interact
    in a structured way with the content providers.

Minnaar's comment reflects a general shift in communications
studies away from a trend of subsuming all Humanities and
Social Sciences inquiry philosophically under a single
"megadiscipline" (Maras 1998).  This was a trend, drawing on
the teachings of logical positivism, the early Frankfurt
School's critical philosophy, and Deweyan communications
studies of the 1940s and 1950s (Hardt 1993), that has
thankfully subsided (if only to become the fashion in cultural
studies).

The influence of technology, however, tends to be clouded by
the sometimes incoherent misinterpretations of science by the
Gurus of literary post-modernism (see Sokal 1996b; also
Haack 1997).  For the present, it is worth noting that `medium'
in modern society presupposes some technological
infrastructure, and that the basic conception of
`communication' that Claude Shannon proposed back in 1948
(before Warren Weaver muddied the waters with a too-literary
interpretation of the engineering-physical concept of `entropy'
in 1949; see Shannon and Weaver 1949) has more than
passing relevance in the South African context.

### *Lack of Defined Intellectual Research Home:*

As noted by Bertelsen's response, aspects of JMC are being appropriated by language and literature departments as a means of marketing Humanities faculties.  This did not occur out of the blue, however.  Experience with reviewing proposals for the former Centre for Science Development (CSD) shows that with some exceptions, the quality of research applications received during the late 1990s were indicative of a far more serious state of affairs than the problems being faced with appropriation by other disciplines (see Tomaselli 2000a).

A perusal of funding applications to CSD suggests that `media studies' and `media theory' proposals were considered by a wide range of multi-disciplinary Advisory Committees.  Conventional `communication studies' proposals, on the other hand, were usually forwarded to the Committee on Psychology and Communication.  Of the proposals received there, psychology proposals by far outstripped those from communication.  Among the comments made by the committee was that too many ill-prepared and opportunistic proposals were getting through internal university evaluation procedures.   The implications for the media industry are serious. Mary Papayya of East Coast Radio, for example, remarked that "... fly by nite journalism institutes are degrading the fabric of our field and must be eradicated quickly. There should be more control and criteria about who is qualified to teach journalism and whom not."  The establishment of these kinds of institutions is greatly facilitated if the formal education and training sector is itself fragmented and uncertain of its conceptual and professional

foundations.

The rise of the fly-by-night journalism and media institutions mirrors the broader situation in the universities and technikons. Drawing on glamorous television soap-opera images, such schools are hardly distinguishable from the university which approves the setting up of a `sexy' marketable media and/or communication major on the grounds that "anybody can take on this sort of stuff", as one of a number of respondents indicated. The commercial operators make their profits and run, at worst; in the academy the new courses draw in students and consequently fill out the department's or faculty's FTE quota. Aside from the influence of dot.com economics in the post-Thatcher era (see Tomaselli 2000a), we suggest that this situation is also a long-term consequence of the lack of defined JMC research review procedures or bodies within national research bodies like the CSD.

While we do not support the notion that JMC is a professional field that is subject, like medicine, to national professional control, it is clear that there is insufficient clarity within the field – including within the corporate media sector – about what criteria should govern JMC. As Papayya comments further:

Based on the tons of applications I have received in KZN the major problem is the inability of radio journalists to write for the medium. All too often graduates are unable to write entry level English, can't communicate properly or haven't a clue about what makes news and what doesn't.

Even among those who do not find language a problem, entrants to the field are not, as Addison comments, always `hungry' enough to knuckle down to the rigours of professional training:

I took two photojournalism students with me on an adventure assignment. They couldn't get up before the sun, they did not prepare properly by studying magazines containing adventure pictures, so the results were disappointing ... The point is that students like these are funded as of old by relatively wealthy parents and they simply don't have to prove themselves. In time to come they may have to but I reckon the jobs will be there for them because they come from traditional white liberal backgrounds, and what editor would question that?

Leaving aside the question of JMC entrants' family origins, and any ideology associated therewith, Addison's point is clear: students frequently appear not to appreciate that the field requires application and skills acquisition, and is more than just another step in the process of passing examinations. Although Addison's students were learning inside accepted JMC subjects, other responses suggest that in many cases there are quite serious JMC enterprises that simply "fall off the radar screen" for academic JMC.  Environmental communication practitioner Rob O'Donaghue complains, for example, that the way the JMC terrain is constituted closes off the kinds of partnerships that are so necessary for environmental communications: "the transdisciplinary is usefully undisciplined but that makes it uncertain and fringe without strategic alliances which are processes which are very hard to sustain."  It appears, therefore, that non-JMC

communications specialists encounter problems with the way that *journalism* seems to define the ground for media and communication in general: "of course the academics will persist in seeing the terrain as a `discipline' which was part of the scientising trajectory that shaped techno-communications and a critical arts counter hegemony in this country".

The point is, quite simply, that in the period following 1994 JMC education had yet to resolve formally some of the tensions that actually sustained it during apartheid but which no longer have quite the same level of relevance beyond apartheid. Before the political resolutions of 1994, media studies did produce work that drew attention to the pitfalls of treating the apartheid JMC environment as the South African norm. The Anthropos /James Currey *Studies in the South African Media* book series was especially noted for this among foreign scholars in their responses. Thus Signe Byrge Sorensen (Denmark) noted that the:

The type of analysis contained in the books and in the articles coming out of the CCMS was a result of a mixture of the various traditions within cultural studies (historical materialism, hermeneutics, critical theory, semiotics and some post-Marxist theory). The early ones were more Althusserian than the later ones, which remained Neo-Marxist in spirit, but toned down the rhetoric a lot and emphasised the documentation of events, actors and positions and the development of policy alternatives rather than the structuralist analysis. All the titles were very well researched empirically. They built on semi-structured qualitative interviews and document studies (see also Soresen 1998).

Although there were sometimes, even frequently, polemical underpinnings to this kind of research, these remarks support their findings that journalism training during the 1970s and 1980s did not produce graduates who were uniformly critical or objective about their craft. The corporate sector of that period did not need to rock the boat too severely, and the saga of newspapers like the *Rand Daily Mail* and *Sunday Express* tends to support this. Even in the period after 1994, too radical a media organ can find itself out of business as did the *New Nation*.

The overarching problem is that the university system has, as Bertelsen and Morgan point out, appropriated Media, Communications, and Journalism as topics that fall under an essentially Humanities and Arts rubric. The placing of new JMC-major courses in such departments and faculties follows a global trend in treating communication-related teaching as literary-interpretive in nature. Yet media and journalism practices require technical and research expertise based in disciplines like ethnography, sociology, economics, information technology and engineering, politics and public ethics, specialisations often lacking in the comparative literature specialists who get to teach JMC in the new courses. The question of teaching staff expertise becomes even more pointed when related to responses like that of O'Donoghue, where preparation of practitioners capable of writing and communicating on the increasingly important ecological and environmental field appear to be in short supply.

***Consideration of these responses***:
The above responses gives some weight to the issues that

Windschuttle (1997, 1998) raises in connection with the turn to Media Theory in Australian JMC education. Clearly, many practitioners, both professional and academic, are concerned with the possibility that some of these trends will lead to South Africa's media industries not transforming in line with the expectations generated by developments since 1994. Some are concerned that developments are stifling debate, or placing new limits on expression in ways that duplicate the past. Others seem to be of the opinion that changes have already occurred which have adversely affected JMC in the broad sense. Still others look forward to dynamic and positive changes based on developments in the social, constitutional and political arenas.

However, the variety and scope of these different expectations are indicative not of *disunity* in the field, but of the variety and scope of the disciplinary and professional sectors that actually make up the edifice of JMC in general. The noticeable focus on South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) issues indicates to us that some respondents are, in effect, more focused on defending their turf against non-academic or perceived unprofessional interference from statutory institutions, at the expense of taking this intervention as an opportunity for reviewing and building on global best-practice. If the elements or categories that make up JMC are viewed as continuous with each other and not as discrete `properties' to be defended against intruders, things can be handled differently.

The problem is therefore not how to define JMC, but how, now that practitioners no longer need to wear their ideological hearts on their sleeves, to bring South African JMC into international developments from which it had until relatively recently been excluded. As the range of responses to the South African

Human Rights Commission's Inquiry into Racism in the South African Media demonstrated, there is much that members of the JMC professions – those who teach, practice, and carry out research – have yet to accommodate in getting to this state. In the following recommendations, we are not attempting to achieve the full integration of South African JMC into the global structure. Instead, we hope to offer some ways that its practitioners can draw on what is available to organize themselves to be able to accomplish that for themselves.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

South African JMC practitioners need to acknowledge that their disciplines are part of, and subject to the stresses being suffered by, a global and technically very rapidly expanding activity. In summary, then, we recommend the following:

***Professional organisation*:** South African JMC practitioners need to strengthen the fora within which the discipline "speaks to itself" (Fourie 1997). This could entail an existing structure like SACOMM, redefining itself around a non-divisive conception of how media, journalism and communication are continuous with each other instead of being mutually exclusive. Practitioners in the academic, professional and corporate JMC sectors should thus be encouraged to constitute at least one organisation within which the interests and needs of the South African JMC field can be identified, promoted and consolidated. This should *not* be constituted in a way that excludes already existing bodies like the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF), media workers' unions, and other such bodies.

JMC practitioners need to speak to each other directly in some recognized space of discussion and inquiry, and not (as Addison put it) via "blerrie vraelyste" (bloody questionnaires). Our recommendations in this regard, therefore, basically build on those made to SACOMM (Tomaselli 2000b), with a view to the broader JMC research sector coming to be in a position in which to add to them.

*SACOMM*. JMC needs to take a cue from the disciplines it represents: organisational communication, marketing and advertising, communication, and media and journalism management. SACOMM members teach these subjects but do not seem to apply them to their own disciplinary organisation. Whether from within existing (remaining?) SACOMM structures or independently, a committee should be appointed and tasked with reconstituting the Association. This committee would use existing resources and infrastructure to start a new strategic planning process.

The new association needs to be totally repositioned. The committee should circulate a one page mission statement after a consultative process within and beyond SACOMM. A preamble should explain why a steering committee was constituted and request feedback. The strategic planning exercise should emerge from this consultative process. Many existing SACOMM members have excellent credentials in devising such a plan, and a small group with such expertise should be tasked with developing such a plan in implementing the mission statement. In this way the field can draw on the strengths of existing SACOMM members and beyond. A new name for the Association is needed, as "Southern" was originally intended to mean South Africa and the bantustans.

***Membership:*** The domination of the organisation by academic Heads of Department needs to be tempered by a more horizontal structure where office bearers see a professional benefit in holding office (tenure, promotion, community service etc.) Students should be incorporated into the new organisation. This last occurred at a conference at UOFS many years ago, when student sessions were organised as part of the main conference. At Pretoria in 2000, a separate conference was held by students. Unfortunately, the students never interacted with lecturers or vice versa. Student membership should be encouraged, and a student conference should be organically linked to the main event, with plenaries in which lecturers and students interact in structured environments.

***Affiliation:*** the new structure should provide a home for a variety of approaches, in which followers of all JMC paradigms feel comfortable. This necessitates the inclusion of *all persuasions* of the intellectual side of JMC. Critical approaches to communication studies not normally taught in professionally-oriented departments, like cultural and media studies, should be in a position to interface freely *and willingly* with functionalist, professionalist and other approaches – "a house with many rooms", as Froneman put it. Although some, like Fourie, suggested that the new association should *not* try to be all things to all people – that it should be academic, so as to consolidate and organise a natural constituency – professional organisations and occupational groups (eg SANEF, MISA, PRISA) and non-academic training institutions like IAJ, and their members, should not be automatically excluded.

***Publications:*** JMC journals need to reflect the shift in

circumstances since 1994, without falling into the trap of ahistorical embrace of the new and structural neglect of the past. In the case of the current `flagship', *Communicare*, this would reflect the a move to producing knowledge rather than just waiting for submissions to turn up in the mail. Thus *Communicare's* editorial board should be reconstituted to include coordinators of working groups, rather than then present HOD's. Co-ordinators are more likely to coordinate and drum up membership and articles than are overworked HODs, some of whom possibly want to retain their status without appropriate effort.

***Communications:*** an internet userlist should be established so that members can talk to each other. A moderator might be required to manage the discussion, but this should not be confused with *control* of discussion. A fine example of this kind of discussion forum can be found at the Peirce-L discussion forum hosted at http://door.net/arisbe. An even more vibrant use of the internet is that found at the Los Alamos National laboratory in the US (http://www.lanl.gov/), where the Physics division runs a pre-publication forum that archives submissions automatically for accessing by peers. A second userlist of all known communication scholars should be developed for public relations and development purposes. An audit should be undertaken of all tertiary institutions to find out who is teaching communications, media and PR. This would include the private sector, which currently has more students than the public universities and technikons. Strategic plans and proposals should be circulated for discussion on a userlist The web page should become a clearing house for all the South African journals via the publication of contents pages with links to their respective home pages.

***JMC qualifications – research, education and training.*** The recommended reorganisation of the JMC sector must take place with a view to providing unambiguous guidelines about what constitutes valid JMC education and training. Some of the mushrooming `media and communication' offerings in university language and literature departments are very strong on purportedly critical knowledge, but do not by virtue of this prepare graduates as professionals in any established corporate, NGO, or professional JMC enterprises. By the same token, there is no guarantee that the purportedly practical grounding in journalism offered by dot.com style media training companies will enable graduates to distinguish between genuine accounts of events, spin-doctoring, and outright news hoaxing.

These guidelines must also give due recognition to well-established in-house and in-service training programmes, many of which give hands-on learning experiences that far exceed the on-again off-again experience that students get with campus newspapers or faculty newsletters. The majority of respondents had two concerns in common, no matter how highly divergent their political or paradigmatic positions. These were: a) methodology; and b) SAQA issues. The new organisation suggested should therefore capitalise on this commonality to ensure, on the one hand, that graduates are capable of adding value in their chosen careers; and, on the other, that the processes of learning and inquiry permit the sector to keep pace with, and even better to anticipate, developments in the global professional, social, and technological environment.

There is some room to consider JMC education as a graduate-level endeavour, instead of as an undergraduate university

degree or technikon diploma course as is customary at present. Although the present research did not focus on this aspect of the status of JMC education, other research indicates that undergraduate degrees need to be structured in ways that empower the kind of post-graduate learning and research that equips graduates for the requirements of specialist reporting, such as on the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Shepperson 2000). Thus to structure JMC education as an Honours-level and higher qualification would be to open the profession up to more already-qualified and experienced graduates who can become dedicated and competent science, technology, health, political, legal and other journalists.

***Research priorities***: inquiry must distinguish between interdisciplinary *research* projects that bring together specialist researchers from disciplines, and `interdisciplinary' undergraduate *teaching* courses that provide limited and highly selective readings of disciplines to undergraduates who themselves possess no specialized disciplinary training. Partial exposure to the broader tradition of sociology through a single-term `sociology of media' second-year module cannot introduce media studies undergraduates to the complexity of a field that covers Comte, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Tönnies, Dewey, Parsons, Habermas and Giddens as the minimum representative tradition upon which sociologists draw. Similarly, the very conception of `media' – as a plural term covering more than one *medium* – needs constantly to be reviewed.

At the very least, therefore, JMC researchers must endeavour to open up their activity to include the relevant specialists from other fields. The object of research is to pursue a line of inquiry to its logical conclusions, and these conclusions may well form

the premises of not only further lines of inquiry, but also of subsequent teaching curricula. The point is that the conclusions of inquiry are always subject to revision, but the subjects presented in student curricula are not presented in this light. The highest priority is thus to engender a shift of JMC inquiry from topic-specific projects (monitoring or distribution, for example) towards broadening the field such that findings both incorporate and add value to the theory and practice of other disciplinary fields (for example: sociology, social anthropology, politics, history, gender studies, and so on).

***Research review and funding*** need to be based on a specialised proposal review and grading procedure, geared to JMC's methodological and epistemological requirements. The field has become wide enough with the growth of the Internet, for specialist proposal review and adjudication bodies in funding agencies. Similarly, communication research needs to be viewed alongside media and journalism without any of the sub-fields coming to dominate in the long term. The NRF's JMC reviewers should not exclude psychologists or sociologists (or, for that matter, hard science practitioners); instead, the objective is to have at least one review panel on which reviewers are conscious that proposals under consideration will come from the various cognate fields in the broader JMC stable. They should be in a position to appreciate the specifics of the field, but also to have the interests of the broader community of inquiry in view.

## CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest that the present state of the discipline is one where practitioners lack a collective direction, both

professionally and intellectually. We have offered recommendations, in turn, on the understanding that the issue is not that JMC intellectuals and academics must present a consensual front in some imagined conflict with other disciplines. Instead, we have proceeded on the assumption that vocational, professional, and critical branches of the field must recognize the general continuity of their specialisations within a *broader social activity* of information and communication. Each branch may thus take conflicting viewpoints about specific aspects of JMC theory and practice, but the general constitution of the field must be to work toward a greater grasp of the *broader unity* of social information and communication. Within such a general longer-term information and communication environment it becomes possible for the broader public to recognize information as newsworthy and not merely as spin-doctoring.

South African JMC studies sector is not moribund, nor in any danger of immediate collapse into that state. The number and variety of centres is indicative of a robust tradition, one that like all traditions, however, must face up to the stresses of adaptation to different external circumstances. One of the effects of global tendencies that JMC still needs to confront is the need for a coherent approach to professional and academic organisation, especially in the light of the organisational incapacity of regional players to sustain their representative bodies without external funding. Another is for the sector to develop a strong research identity that will avoid the kind of embarrassment suffered during the South African Human Rights Commission's inquiry into racism in the South African media (cf. Tomaselli 2001).

Finally, the sector needs to avoid the pitfalls of megadisciplinarity, the tendency for every Arts or Humanities Faculty to appropriate the terms `Media' or `Communication' as catch phrases for attracting fee-paying students. The short-term gains from increased subsidies will not survive changes in the subsidy formulae. The tendency for institutions to dress up cultural studies versions of literary criticism as `media and communication' is of some concern. Although on the face of it JMC achieves a higher profile, the intellectual, professional and research focus becomes blurred and the field loses its specificity. Greater inter-disciplinary research, but also more subject-focused teaching is required. The former is of great benefit not only to JMC practitioners, but also to scholars from other fields who engage in such research. The latter is little less than an ethical commitment to the students, who cannot be expected to become capable of interdisciplinary work if they have not in themselves come to the forms of intellectual and communicational self-control entailed by the very concept of a Discipline.

In closing, we mention that our recommendations are not exclusively directed at any practitioner or institution, either in the tertiary sector or at the NRF. The relationships between institutions should not be of such a nature that one has permanent control or pre-eminence over the others. Instead, there are clearly some areas where institutions need to act, as in the field and in curriculum development. Practitioners are obviously the best for dealing with professional organisational issues, while they would probably benefit from interaction with institutions and the NRF in dealing with publications and communications. In research funding and accreditation the NRF would clearly have pre-eminence under the present

dispensation. All this could change under a different approach by government, funding agencies, and the tertiary sector itself. That, however, is a matter that falls outside the ambit of this research.

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**Notes**

i. In an undated 66 page document circulated via SACOMM in the 1980s, "Die Kommunikasiekunde as Vakwetenskap", p. 1 states: "'n Belangstelling in en 'n noodsaak vir die sistematiese en gestruktureerde bestuurding van vyandige propaganda kan as een van die direkte motiverings vir die ontwikkeling van hierdie vakwetenskap aangedui word". The allegiance is clear.

ii. A start is the international research seminars on media and identity, and political economy of the Southern African media, conducted at the Universities of Zimbabwe and Natal, since 1993 (cf. Teer-Tomaselli and Roome, 1997; Waldhal 1998; Zhuwarara et al, 1997; and Thomas and Lee, 2001).