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ABSTRACT

Alliances between members of the visual communication division of the Association for Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) can be strengthened without sacrificing the basic liberal arts principles promoted by R. O. Blanchard and W. G. Christ in their book "Media Education and the Liberal Arts." For example, a new journal, "Visual Communication Quarterly," seeks to increase interest among both professionals and scholars and helps to build alliances that benefit all parties, photojournalism educators, students, and practitioners. "Visual Communication Quarterly" was launched for several reasons, but one reason was to increase the flow of information from photojournalism educators to practitioners, since no journal was fulfilling that role exactly. Two potential problems that faced the founders of this journal were: (1) obtaining funding; and (2) finding a sufficient supply of quality research. The first problem was solved when the editors of "News Photographer" agreed to absorb the costs and bind the journal as an insert in their magazine. The second problem did not seem formidable, but in fact finding quality articles is no small task. To address this problem, only 9 articles will appear in each of the 1995 issues instead of 12, though the overall length of the journal will not change. (Includes 13 notes.) (TB)

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Building Alliances: Photojournalism Educators and Members of NPPA

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The relationship between colleges of communication and traditional communication industries is being re-examined. Reformers are challenging the assumption that "communication undergraduate programs exist primarily to serve the narrowly defined, short-term needs of media industries by producing unquestioning, industry-socialized, job-specific, entry-level, plentiful, cheap labor," write Robert Blanchard and William Christ in their influential book, *Media Education and the Liberal Arts*.¹ They want to replace "unquestioning dependence" on the culture of the market-driven communication industry with a concern for public service. They believe students need more liberal arts and conceptual courses and fewer specialized, occupation-specific courses that emphasize craft over concept and practice over analysis. Blanchard and Christ call for a New Professionalism:

In the New Professionalism, students are encouraged and offered opportunities to obtain familiarity with and understanding of media technology, either in the media workshop environment or other media centers or organizations on or off campus. Occupational training is neither mandatory nor the center of the curriculum. It does not absorb a great deal of faculty time and effort, and only a little of it, if any, is for academic credit; it is mostly co-curricular. Students seek this experience on their own extra-curricular, "rest and recreation" time. By so doing, they demonstrate their interests, initiative, and motivation--attributes that cannot be taught in required, lock-step courses but that media practitioners profess to prize so highly.²

The idea of New Professionalism, however, has not been universally accepted. Some schools continue to offer a curriculum that emphasizes skills courses in the fields of reporting, television production and photojournalism. They are very proud of their relationships with media employers and their ability to place graduating students in entry-level communications jobs.

Another important issue currently debated inside and outside colleges of communication concerns the value of academic journals. Last October the *New York Times* reported a declining interest in journals devoted to the arts, humanities and social sciences. Apparently, neither policy-makers nor scholars read the often trivial articles. Three explanations for declining interest were offered. One, knowledge has fragmented to the extent that few people know or care about the subject matter of an article. Two, an emphasis upon number of publications has led many scholars

to use the "salami method--slicing every paper into six or seven separate papers prior to publication." Three, publication is delayed for years because of the referee system and the lack of a single person who is responsible for the publication.³

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the relationship between educators and professionals in one area of communication--photojournalism. I will explain how alliances between members of the Visual Communication division of the Association for Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) can be strengthened without sacrificing the basic liberal arts principles promoted by Blanchard and Christ. I also will explain how a new journal--*Visual Communication Quarterly*--seeks to increase interest among both professionals and scholars and helps build alliances that benefit all parties--photojournalism educators, students and practitioners.

Building Alliances Through Teaching and Service

NPPA certainly reaches out to college photojournalism students. The organization gives at least eight \$1,000 scholarships to undergraduate students. It provides a listing of internships and jobs across the country. It holds student photo contests. Professional photojournalists hold portfolio critiques that help students assemble an effective portfolio. NPPA encourages newspaper and magazine photojournalists serve as guest lecturers. At many universities, NPPA sponsors student chapters of its organization, which provide additional opportunities to build bridges between the educators' and the practitioners' worlds. In addition, students receive the same benefits as others when joining NPPA, including the monthly magazine *News Photographer*, a regional newsletter, *The Best of Photojournalism* book, seminar discounts, group rates on life, medical and equipment insurance, etc. Photojournalism educators have welcomed the help of NPPA and news photographers.

To a lesser extent, photojournalism professors help professionals. They may run special workshops on ethics, picture editing, or the newest technology and computer software. They may provide leadership and advice by serving as officers in state or national offices. They may edit regional publications. They may help conduct, or judge, annual photography contests. And, of course, professors write articles that (hopefully) inform and inspire photojournalists, but more about that later.

In the past, news photographers generally didn't want too much help from educators. That trend, however, slowly may be changing. Michael Morse, Photo Sequence coordinator at Western

Kentucky University, recently served as president of the NPPA, the first time that a person working in academia held the office. This summer James McNay, a professor at San Jose State University former director of Region Ten of NPPA, won the election for vice-president of NPPA. He'll likely become president in 1997.

The "socialization-indoctrination" excesses of "occupationalism" mentioned by Blanchard and Christ are likely to occur when the relationship between educators and professionals is out of balance. From my observations, the relationship still generally favors news photographers, who freely advise colleges and their students, but who seldom welcome advice from the "ivory tower." In other words, people (whether journalists or educators) think that what is good for newspapers is good for news sequences, but not vice versa.

Occasionally, an educator will have a chance to be heard. In the first issue of *Visual Communication Quarterly (VCQ)*, professor Rich Beckman criticized the type of jobs waiting for photojournalism students: "They know that when they leave their protective university nests, they will most likely begin their careers as under-paid, over-worked, motor-driven, button-pushing, deadline-crazed, robotic clones, working for a visually-illiterate editor. . . ." To avoid this fate, Beckman called for passion, and he looked to *VCQ*, a joint publishing venture between NPPA and AEJMC, to tackle tough issues facing photojournalism educators and the profession.⁴

Sandra Eisert, director of photography at the *San Francisco Examiner*, champions more of a liberal arts education for photojournalism students. As the liaison between the Visual Communication (VisCom) division of AEJMC and NPPA, she embraces integration of media subfields because convergence and integration are occurring in the real world. Reporters and copy editing students must learn more about visual communication, and photojournalism students need more reporting, video and business courses to prepare for freelance work for multimedia and on-line service companies.⁵

Tom Kennedy, director of photography at *National Geographic*, also believes photojournalism students must learn more about the economics of their profession in order to combine business acumen with traditional skills. He wrote, "Self-discipline and self-promotion will be necessary adjuncts to photographic skills. Negotiating with others, project management and marketing and production skills normally the province of others in a corporate setting may all sit on the shoulders of photojournalists in the future."⁶

Kennedy foresees a decline of specialists and the need for employees who can either help

media companies eliminate their internal rigidities or who can work across several media, including news and entertainment media. He wrote: "Distinctions between roles, as well as between media will break down. Rather than fielding huge teams of specialists, I look for media to utilize a small but multi-talented team of generalists to produce and edit the information distributed in media."⁷ Like liberal arts advocates, he wants more self-directed professionals who can think and act independently.

I think employers should consider photojournalism students as more than their portfolios. Look at their transcripts for courses in history, law, and theory. Look for extracurricular activities that indicate dedication to public service. When viewing a picture story, question the student about his/her commitment to ethics. Ask students to analyze current events. Students with strong liberal arts educations should be able to think clearly and express themselves orally as well as in writing and photographs. Be wary of students who used all their electives inside and outside the college of communications to take internships and skills courses.

The public is losing confidence in the ethics of photojournalists and in photojournalists' commitment to public service. The increased availability of computers and software that can quickly, easily manipulate photographs without detection has generated innumerable articles about the credibility of photographic images. The public also has been reading about, and presumably is concerned about, the motivations driving photojournalists. Is a picture of a drowning/fire/car accident victim published to warn others, or is it published as a sensational means to sell publications? What about pictures of grieving people? When a photographer stays at the scene of a demonstration despite being warned by police that his/her presence might encourage violence, is it because the photojournalist feels a responsibility to document events, or because he/she hopes to win a contest? When a photographer refuses to give a court pictures of a protest rally, does his/her desire to remain independent of law enforcement outweigh the community's rights to a fair trial?

Professional photojournalists want to increase public trust and respect in their work. Photojournalism educators can help. They have critical thinking skills for understanding how photojournalism routines, advertisers, sources, and consumers influence the content of pictures. They can integrate knowledge from anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics and art to understand how photographs affect viewers. They have the time to ponder philosophical issues related to ethics. Photojournalism educators can help, if practitioners let them. Blanchard and Christ wrote, "The starting point, then, for new media industry-academic relationships is to establish and maintain their common, long-term priority of advancing clear, accurate, responsible

expression in the public service."⁸

Both groups must recognize that alliances are built upon two-way flows of information. To increase this flow, Paul Lester recently established a Visual Communication Division home page on the World Wide Web. The address is: <http://www5.fullerton.edu/viscom/vishome.html>. The page includes links to the NPPA as well as the following: conference papers, essays, images that instructors can use in classes, home pages of members and non-members, special projects, the logo contest, syllabi, editions of *ViewPoints* (newsletter of the VisCom division) and (soon) the contents of *Visual Communication Quarterly*.

Visual Communication Quarterly Builds Alliances Through Research

Visual Communication Quarterly (VCQ) was launched for several reasons, but one reason was to increase the flow of information from photojournalism educators to practitioners. The VisCom division of AEJMC primarily consists of professors who teach courses in photojournalism, design, information graphics, and introduction to visual communication. In general, these people worked as professionals for a number of years and then decided to teach at the college level. For example, a 1989 survey by Rob Heller found that 58 percent of full-time photojournalism faculty had ten or more years of professional experience. He found that 67 percent had earned a master's degree and only 27 percent had a doctorate degree.⁹ In other words, many photojournalism educators remain as close to working professionals as to their fellow faculty members.

Photojournalism educators must maintain close ties to both groups of colleagues. They cooperate with professionals by teaching undergraduate skills courses, recommending students for internships, and supervising the school newspaper or magazine staffs. Educators also are expected by their peers and administrators to conduct research. To satisfy all constituencies--undergrad and grad students, faculty colleagues and practitioners--photojournalism educators have tried to publish relevant research that is widely accessible.

But often they couldn't. In the past, one problem was the lack of a suitable journal. If one looks in *The Iowa Guide*,¹⁰ which lists scholarly journals in mass communication and related fields, the absence becomes obvious. Of course members of the VisCom division would want a journal that focused on photojournalism, design, graphics and visual communication because these are the areas taught by VisCom members. To be suitable, a journal also must be refereed

(otherwise tenure and promotion committees will not recognize the article as research), it must publish photographs and other images (otherwise readers could not see the images under discussion), and it must focus on questions relevant to practitioners (otherwise no one except other visual communication scholars, a small group, would read it).

No journal met these criteria. *Design Issues* is not refereed and it focuses on criticism, history and theory of design. *FRAME-WORK* is not refereed and it focuses more on art photography than journalism or communications. The other journals listed focus on film, video, television, written language or book printing. Closely related journals include *Visual Sociology*, *Visual Anthropology*, and *Journal of Visual Literacy*, but they do not primarily focus on photojournalism, design, graphics and visual communication. General mass communication journals such as *Journalism Quarterly* and *Journalism Educator* as well as psychological journals such as *Journal of Visual/Verbal Language* and *Journal of Applied Psychology* occasionally published articles by VisCom members. All too often, however, the manuscripts were rejected because they were more applied than theoretical. Even if accepted, the editors seldom could/would publish photographs or other images.

As editor of *News Photographer* magazine, sponsored by NPPA, and a photojournalism professor at Bowling Green State University, James Gordon had recognized this problem for a long time. He knew that interesting, relevant research was being produced but not published, or at least not published in a publication targeted towards professionals. In 1983, he asked Dr. Jack Hillwig to write a column about research in photojournalism. Jack's initial response was positive but hesitant. He wrote:

After all, research is a pretty negative word to most people, working news photographers included. The tendency is to say, "Who cares?" or, "It's not relevant to me or to my job." or even, "That stuff is just for academics."

Not many of my colleagues read much research (not in the profession or in academia) and especially not research into photojournalism. But today, much more research is being done about photojournalism. And much of it is not only more interesting but also more relevant. The problem is it's still hard to find. This column is intended to provide a service not only to those educators who read *News Photographer* but also to those working photographers who might not think research is important.

What you get here is sort of a digest of research findings that seem (to me) relevant to you. Some will be more interesting than others. But they all will have something to say to you and/or your editors.¹¹

Unfortunately, only four columns were published.

Eight years later, however, I approached Gordon about resurrecting the idea, and he agreed. From November 1991 until October 1993, I wrote twelve columns called "Research for Photojournalists" for *News Photographer* magazine. Simply continuing what Hillwig began, I summarized conference papers written by VisCom members, unpublished theses and dissertations, current books as well as articles published in *Journalism Quarterly*, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* and others. Many readers, I'm sure, quickly skipped over this research column on the way to viewing the Monthly National Clip Contest winning photographs. A few people, however, especially graduate students busy writing papers or theses, called to express their appreciation.

The National Press Photographers Foundation also supported research by providing up to \$2,000 of grant money for various research projects each year. Winners of the grants sometimes had their work published on heavy-stock paper as an insert to *News Photographer* magazine. For example, James Bissland's survey of news photographers' job satisfaction was an insert in the October 1984 issue.¹² This grant money and subsequent publication certainly were welcomed by VisCom members, but they were not enough.

Ever since I joined AEJMC (1986), VisCom members had talked about the need to start a journal. In 1991, as I was writing the "Research for Photojournalists" columns, I also began to seriously explore the feasibility of launching a journal sponsored by the VisCom division. I formed a committee, sent out surveys, and talked with editors of other communication journals. I wrote an editorial statement for the prospective journal and then rewrote it at least 30 times. The idea seemed sound. Other AEJMC divisions recently had started publications, including the International Communication, Newspaper, Mass Comm & Society, Public Relations, Law and the Community College Journalism Association, so why not VisCom?

The two primary concerns of other division editors, as well as people within the VisCom division and NPPA, were obtaining funding and a sufficient supply of quality research. These concerns were legitimate and probably will continue to be challenges for many years.

Gordon single-handedly solved the financial problems, at least for the present. Because of his support for visual communication research, and because of his uncanny ability to cut production costs, Gordon agreed to absorb the costs of printing *VCQ* and to bind the journal within *News Photographer*. So every January, April, July and October, a 16- or 24-page *VCQ*

appears in the NPPA's magazine and is distributed to 12,000 news photographers and editors at newspapers and television stations as well as the 250 members of the VisCom division. As long as *News Photographer* continues to escape the all-too-prevalent budget cuts, and as long as the NPPA Board of Directors continue to support the journal, *VCQ* will have a publisher.

The other problem--obtaining a steady flow of quality research articles--seemed as if it would be easy. After all, there were hundreds of visual communications professors and they had been complaining for years that no one would publish their research. Given that each issue of *VCQ* would include an essay written by a practitioner, two book reviews, a two-page "Darts & Laurels"-type column, (Ken Kobre analyzes examples of photojournalism and responds in a positive or negative way), an annotated bibliography of current articles, front and back covers, and a table of contents page, how many research articles would be needed?

The first year, 1994, *VCQ* published 12 research articles, and if there had been space for 13 articles, I would have been in trouble. I quickly learned it would NOT be easy to obtain a steady flow of quality articles. Scholars do not want to take a chance submitting to a new publication that their tenure & promotion committees may neither know about, nor value. Attempting to raise awareness of the new journal and to generate interest, I mailed free copies with cover letters to all administrators of AEJMC. I promoted the journal in newsletters of the VisCom and Radio-TV divisions of AEJMC and the Visual Communication special interest group of ICA. I mailed free issues to members of the Radio-TV division and spoke at their business meeting during the 1994 AEJMC convention. I wrote brief articles for *Quill*, *Photo District News*, *American Journalism Review*, *AEJMC News*, and *American Journalism*. When people read such articles and expressed an interest in *VCQ*, I mailed them free copies (about 65 people, mostly practitioners). I wrote letters to everyone who had recently completed a dissertation in the visual communication area or who had presented a relevant paper at the AEJMC convention and asked them to submit their research (about 28 people). Of course, I pleaded with colleagues to spread the word about *VCQ* and I gave them some copies to distribute at other conferences they attended. These efforts should begin to bring rewards.

What Didn't Work and What Did

In addition to the actions noted above, I'm doing the following to increase submissions. First, instead of publishing 12 articles, only 9 will appear in 1995. The total number of pages of the combined issues will remain the same, but each research article will receive more space.

Following standard journal procedure, authors submit full-length manuscripts for blind review by three prominent researchers. If their manuscripts are accepted, however, authors submitting to *VCQ* are required to deviate from the normal procedure. They are asked to take extra time and rewrite their articles to ensure the readability of their texts for an audience of practitioners and to meet strict space limitations. The first year I asked them to submit 2,000 word summaries. Now I accept 2,500 words, or even more. I also run more pictures.

My second strategy to increase quality submissions is to invite leading scholars who are not members of the VisCom division to write articles for *VCQ*. People working in the fields of political science, cognitive psychology, anthropology, film studies, art, education and sociology may not have heard about *VCQ*, but once they know the journal exists, they may want to share their work with this new, large audience. At the same time, readers of *VCQ* may not be aware of research from other disciplines, but they would be interested in such work if it was presented in an easy-to-understand manner that emphasized the value of the research to practitioners. Besides, editors of new journals cannot simply sit back and wait for quality manuscripts to arrive--they must be proactive and seek out the best scholars.

Another problem, maybe, is the creative projects. At the AEJMC convention, the VisCom division sponsors the standard research paper sessions as well as teaching and PF&R sessions. The division is unusual, however, in that it devotes two convention sessions to creative projects by faculty and their students. The justification for these sessions is that many VisCom faculty do not have a Ph.D. degree and do not conduct standard research. Instead, they have an MFA degree or an MA degree and their scholarship commitments are met through creative activities such as producing a documentary video, developing a software program, creating a multi-media CD-ROM or presenting a photographic exhibition. The creative projects sessions provide an outlet for their work, and they're fun to attend. I thought that *VCQ* could publish the best projects presented at the AEJMC conventions, but few projects have been submitted, and *VCQ* lacks sufficient space to properly display some types of projects.

Now for the good news. People enjoy reading *Visual Communication Quarterly*. Unlike complaints mentioned in the *Times*, the research is neither fragmented nor trivial. In 1994 we published articles about the credibility of digital photographs, the effects of picture size, the effectiveness of "how graphics," and the photography of combat photojournalist Dickey Chapelle. This year we published articles about differing ethical standards at magazines and newspapers, the

softness of newsmagazine photographs of the Gulf War, and the blurring of advertising and editorial photographs. Judging from letters-to-the-editor and messages posted on the Internet, people find the information valuable.

In addition, the information is current. The *VCQ* reviewers usually can comment about articles and let authors know if their manuscripts are accepted within one month. If accepted, because I don't have a backlog, I can publish their research within another four months. This is very timely for research journals.

I'm also proud of our standing features. Commentary columns have been written by Tom Kennedy, director of photography at *National Geographic*, Bob Steele, director of the ethics program at the Poynter Institute, and Sandra Eisert, NPPA's education liaison with AEJMC. These columns are provocative think pieces. The book reviews (edited by James Kelly) and annotated bibliography (called VizBib and edited by Julianne Newton) help everyone keep abreast of current books and articles related to their professions. Ken Kobre, director of the photojournalism program at San Francisco State University, has bravely critiqued examples of photojournalism in his Positive/Negative column. Practitioners read his column and think about his comments.

The Future

The next step is to make *VCQ* more visible. The Mass Communication Bibliographers (MCB) group brought the problem to my attention. An article in their July newsletter reads:

Many of MCB's members are librarians and some of that lot are cataloguers. They are given to weeping and gnashing their teeth when periodicals appear in strange formats or go undercover within some other publication. Such is the case with *Visual Communication Quarterly* appearing inside *News Photographer*. . . . I am summoning the courage to report this manifestation to our cataloging department because I have yet to see it reported in our national online databases such as OCLC or RLIN. Never mind the joint appearances. That is understandable, a savings on postage, a scholarly publication is finally getting in contact with the professional/applied audience. That is a noble endeavor and much to be applauded. Media researchers will find gold in *VCQ*'s articles. . . .¹³

VCQ was getting into the hands of practitioners every three months, but if someone read a footnote referring to an article in *VCQ*, they couldn't go to the library and find the article because they wouldn't know it was inserted in *News Photographer*. If someone wasn't a member of the

VisCom division, and if they didn't see *VCQ* cited in another journal, they wouldn't know it existed.

Obviously, the answer to the first problem is have *VCQ* appear outside of *News Photographer*, but it should be just as obvious that this recourse has drawbacks. *VCQ* would lose most of the 12,000 professional readers, and it'd have to find a new financial sponsor. The answer to the second problem is to have *VCQ* appear in numerous indexes. To be indexed, however, *VCQ* needs an ISSN, and to have an ISSN, *VCQ* needs to be freestanding. Again, if *VCQ* breaks away from *News Photographer*, then it breaks its ties with the National Press Photographers Association.

The true solution lies in creating an additional publication, tentatively titled *Visual Communication Annual*, while continuing to publish *VCQ* as part of *News Photographer*. Professionals would continue to receive *VCQ* in a timely manner, and scholars would have ready access to the same articles, essays, etc. in *Visual Communication Annual*, which would be indexed in several places and easy to find in libraries.

I am currently looking for someone to edit *Visual Communication Annual* and assume the following responsibilities. First, the editor would combine the contents from the four issues of *VCQ* published in 1994, delete the extra table of contents pages and other redundant material, add a few pages of introduction and an index, and print the material as *Visual Communication Annual, 1994*. Then the editor would do the same for 1995. Meanwhile, the editor would apply to the Library of Congress for an ISSN. With an ISSN in hand, he/she would contact media databases such as *Standard Periodical Directory* (Oxbridge Communications) and *The Serials Directory* (EBSCO) and request that they add *Visual Communication Annual* to their databases.

Finally, the new editor would need to market *Visual Communication Annual* to libraries. The 1994 and 1995 volumes could be sold together for the regular price of a single volume. Subsequent volumes could be offered at very reasonable prices. The goal is not to turn a profit, but to ensure that the research originally published in *VCQ* is preserved in libraries and can easily be found by anyone with an interest in visual communication. The AEJMC offices in Columbia, South Carolina, may be able to maintain a database on individual and library subscriptions. The office also could accept payments and mail volumes.

The costs for printing and mailing *Visual Communication Annual* would be sustained by the members of the VisCom division of AEJMC. These costs, however, would be outweighed by the benefits. VisCom members have a journal that matched their research agendas. They would be

reaching an audience of professional news photographers as well as scholars both inside and outside the visual communication field. Their research would appear in print twice--first, and most timely, in *News Photographer* magazine, and later in *Visual Communication Annual*. As more people become aware of the journal, the number of quality submissions should rise. After regular publication of quality articles, the reputation of the journal, and VisCom members' articles, also will rise.

My other proactive plan for the future is to expand the range of content in the journal to better match its name--*Visual Communication Quarterly*. Most of the current content primarily concerns newspaper photography, which is proper since the journal is sponsored by NPPA. To reach a greater audience of readers and to draw upon a larger pool of potential authors, however, the journal must publish more articles about television news photography, publication design and graphics and other fields. *VCQ* must not only build bridges to professional news photographers, but it also must help build bridges between news photographers and people working in visual sociology, visual anthropology, visual literacy, visual perception, and aesthetics.

Conclusion:

The VisCom division of AEJMC and the NPPA have worked well together to bridge the gap between scholars and professionals. News photographers have supported education through scholarships, student chapters of NPPA, student photo contests and workshops. Photojournalism teachers have served as officers of NPPA, editors of regional magazines and judges of photography contests. Both groups communicate via the Visual Communication Division and the NPPA home pages on the World Wide Web. NPPA sends its liaison, Sandra Eisert, to the AEJMC convention each year. Jim Gordon publishes news notes about photojournalism faculty members in *News Photographer* magazine. The National Press Photographers Foundation supplies \$2,000 of grant money for research projects each year.

Perhaps the most important tie between photojournalism educators and members of NPPA has been publication of *Visual Communication Quarterly* within *News Photographer* magazine, which is sent to ALL members of both NPPA and the VisCom division. Both groups can read both the timely research articles in *VCQ* and the articles of photo contest winners, new technology and legal/ethical issues characteristic of *News Photographer*. Both groups contribute to a sharing of knowledge.

Endnotes

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