

# Professional Freedom and Responsibility Committee Standards for Evaluation of AEJMC Activities

(March 1986, slightly revised Dec. 1989)

## A. Definition

This standing committee, like the two others, has been charged with providing annual constructive reviews of AEJMC activities. The focus given this committee by the organization as a whole can be understood by a close examination of the title.

This is the standing committee that has been instructed to pay attention to the working environment and standards of the professions that are the focus of our teaching. The term "professional" in the Committee's name refers to professional communicators such as those in print and broadcast journalism, public relations, advertising, communications research and government agencies. Therefore "professional freedom" refers to the freedom of communicators to express themselves. "Professional responsibility" refers to the standard that should exist in the work place.

To help AEJMC members understand the focus of the committee, the PF&R Committee has tried to define its mission more specifically. We believe "professional freedom and responsibility" can be translated into five specific subject areas. Therefore, when the committee evaluates the work of AEJMC, it is looking at performance related to:

**1. Free expression.** The freedoms of speech and press, embodied in the First Amendment, have played a central role in the field of communications. AEJMC has been traditionally concerned with the importance of the open circulation of ideas. Members of AEJMC should not only work to improve the understanding of freedom of expression in its historical and legal sense; they should also promote and defend those rights vigorously. Members should also encourage consideration of what those rights and values could and should mean in the work of media professionals around the world.

**2. Ethics.** Ethics is a major aspect of professional responsibility. The ethical issues in each of the communications professions will vary somewhat. However ethical concerns most certainly include such topics as individual privacy, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, sensationalism, truth-telling, deception, social justice, news coverage of terrorism and tragedy, pornography and violence. Communications professionals should be encouraged to seek the highest ethical standards possible.

**3. Media Criticism and Accountability.** Our jobs as educators should include constructive evaluation of the professional marketplace. We have a special role to play in light of our professional concern coupled with the perspective provided by an academic environment. We should encourage media analysis. We need to facilitate the search for appropriate mechanisms to foster media accountability.

**4. Racial, Gender and Cultural Inclusiveness (formerly minority affairs).** This area addresses issues of unequal treatment of women and minorities reflected in hiring and promotion practices, institutional policies and stereotyped portrayal in the mass media. One of the functions of the PF&R Committee is to monitor the divisional programming within AEJMC to make sure it includes women and minorities (in the interest of fairness, white males should not predominate as moderators, discussants, invited guests, etc.). Cultural inclusiveness means that efforts should be made to include segments of the population historically excluded from public communication because of discrimination and lack of opportunity.

**5. Public Service.** Educators should serve society beyond the service provided in their teaching and research, and educators concerned with communications should provide service related to their appropriate professional fields. This category refers to activities that enhance understanding among media educators, professionals and the general public. It includes service to AEJMC, AEJMC committees or divisions, institutions represented in AEJMC and communications professionals.

## **B. Suggested Activities**

The committee wants to avoid the mental paralysis that could occur if all AEJMC members looked to this document for PF&R activity ideas. We can take advantage of the vitality of AEJMC members only by encouraging their creativity and initiative. The organization needs to take advantage of the imagination and experiences of all organization members. Hence, the ideas below are presented only to provide illustrations of what is possible. They can only begin to suggest ideas among the infinite possibilities. Many topics, of course, lend themselves to convention or conference settings. Many goals can be accomplished by regional mid—year conferences or workshops just before the annual convention.

Many topics are more project oriented. They may involve the planning, execution and distribution of a research project. Other projects might result in reports. In the case of service activities, the project itself may be an end result.

Some of the subjects treated by the committee can be accomplished at least partially by developing close relations with media professionals or professional associations with goals common to the division. Therefore, the committee encourages liaison activity with professional groups. This may involve shared meetings, guest appearances at each other's meetings, shared projects. etc.

AEJMC units also can author resolutions, develop meaningful award presentations, and contribute financially to others furthering shared goals.

## **C. Expectations**

1. The committee expects PF&R activities both during the convention and during the year between conventions.

2. Each division need not emphasize all five categories every year. However, divisions should devote effort to most of the five categories over a period of a few years. The committee believes that all AEJMC divisions for example, have interests in all five areas although some of the categories fit the interests of a single division more than others.

3. The PF&R committee encourages multi-division activities. The committee needs to know the contributions of each division. The comprehensive and accurate reporting of PF&R activities is in itself a service to AEJMC. Accuracy of the reports is extremely important. Check evidence presented in the report with appropriate persons in the division. The PF&R committee reserves the right to ask for further information.

4. Only reported activities can be evaluated. The committee cannot give credit to those activities it does not know about, and the only way to insure that knowledge is through the written annual reports. We need to know the division contribution, the number of members involved, and what concrete action was taken.

5. PF&R activities of divisions must reflect work of the divisions rather than only that of individual division members. Divisions are encouraged to exploit appropriate personal activities so that they do become part of the division's activities and involve more people. Divisions must make clear the division's participation.

6. The quality of activities is as important as the quantity. A few activities of high quality are preferred to a long list of activities requiring little effort and producing few results. Quality, of course, is difficult to assess and describe. Any evidence of quality is helpful. Divisions and committees should explain the purpose and objectives of their projects. Evidence of success or completion of planned activities makes reported efforts more convincing

7. The PF&R committee attempts to omit from consideration those activities which are more appropriately evaluated by one of the other standing committees. It helps to have annual reports clearly

designate the appropriate committee. However, if there are activities that clearly apply to PF&R as well as at least one other committee, that should be pointed out in the PF&R section of the report.

#### **D. A final, but most important word.**

The members of the PF&R committee are enthusiastic about the improved relations between the divisions and the standing committees within the last few years. An important key to continued improvements is continued communication. Divisions are encouraged to contact members of the PF&R committee with questions. Divisions are encouraged to contact the PF&R committee member designated to work most closely with the division. Divisions are encouraged to work to elect one of their members to the committee. PF&R committee members see themselves as resources to AEJMC. PF&R committee members are committed to a constructive dialogue that will enhance the PF&R activity of AEJMC as a whole.