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Several Initiatives on Media and Conflict Under Way

By Susan Hackley and Richard C. Reuben

The media and conflict connection has long gone unnoticed. But not any more, as a number of important institutions are beginning to make this an area of focus.

At **Harvard**, the **Herbert C. Kelman Seminar on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution** has focused for the last two years on the theme of "Negotiation, Conflict, and the News Media." The seminars, which are open to the public, typically pair an international journalist with an expert on conflict resolution for an in-depth discussion of how particular conflicts are reported. They are cosponsored by the Nieman Foundation for Journalism; the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School; the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy; the MIT-Harvard Public Disputes Program; and Boston-area members of the Alliance for Peacebuilding.

At a recent seminar on "Bridging the Divide Between Conflict Management and Journalism," for example, CBS News producer Joshua Yager and Deepak Malhotra, assistant professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, examined the issue of whether there is a "conflict bias in the media." Do the media over-represent just one side of reality, the violent and inherently dramatic side? As Yager acknowledged, media coverage is about "the deviation from the norm," and journalists too often make broad generalizations. When trying to tell a story in just a few paragraphs or minutes, journalists often lock people into roles and simplified caricatures. Malhotra suggested that the media have a quota for "good news" or news of nonviolent responses to conflict. Like affirmative action, the nonviolent news quota would help make up for past excesses in violent coverage. For more information about the Kelman Seminar series, see www.wcfia.harvard.edu/res_activities/seminars/oconflictres.htm.

The **University of Missouri at Columbia** has established the **Center for the Study of Conflict, Law & the Media** in part to foster greater understanding of the connection among these institutions so that media coverage and the societal management of conflict can be improved. The center is a partnership of the Missouri School of Journalism and the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law. It coordinates several dual-degree and certification opportunities for journalism and law students, and is also spearheading an initiative to develop a better empirical understanding of the news media's impact on the conflict it covers.

This effort kicked off in September 2006 with a major gathering of scholars from a wide range of disciplines—including journalism, dispute resolution, conflict theory, media studies, psychology, communication, political science, and strategic communications—and schools, including Harvard, University of Southern California, Wisconsin, Purdue, and Missouri. The papers were published by the *Journal of Dispute Resolution* in Summer 2007. The center

has also led a partnership of the Missouri journalism, law, and medical schools seeking National Science Foundation funding for the study of the news media's coverage of conflict over HIV/AIDS treatment in South Africa. For more information about the Center for the Study of Conflict, Law & the Media, see its website at www.csclm.org.

At the **University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication**, media scholar and lawyer Philip Seib has begun to coedit a new journal called *Media, War, and Conflict* that will be published by Sage Publications. The new journal, which is expected to premiere in April 2008, will be published three times a year. The journal will map the shifting arena of war, conflict, and terrorism in an intensively and extensively mediated age. It will also explore cultural, political, and technological transformations in media-military relations, journalistic practices, and new media, and their impact on policy, publics, and outcomes of warfare. It is the first journal to be dedicated to this field and will publish substantial research articles, shorter pieces, book reviews, letters and commentary. It will also include an images section devoted to visual aspects of war and conflict. The journal will bridge communications, political science, sociology, history, and other disciplines.

For more on the new publication, see www.sagepub.com/uk/journalsProdDesc.nav?prodId=Journal201796.

Search for Common Ground, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization that works in a variety of innovative ways to "transform how the world deals with conflict," has developed media programs that include radio, TV, film, and print. Recently, the organization launched a program in Nepal that uses radio soap operas to connect with young people, portraying people with different views who connect in their personal lives. Young Nepalese musicians recorded an original song for the radio soap opera, called "Taking a New Path," and a music video is being produced. In Nigeria, Search has produced a 52-part dramatic TV series, "The Station," which has attracted a great following, showing through drama how ordinary people

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Further Study

Both in Arizona and in other jurisdictions, both in long-standing and newly implemented programs, both currently and more than a decade ago, court-connected arbitration does not appear to reduce, but also does not substantially improve, the effectiveness and efficiency of dispute resolution. It does, however, seem to increase litigants' access to a hearing. How aspects of program structure could enhance arbitration's performance warrants further study. ♦♦

Note

This article was adapted from a report to the court and a forthcoming article, Roselle L. Wissler and Bob Dauber, Court-Connected Arbitration in the Superior Court of Arizona: A Study of Its Performance and Proposed Rule Changes, 2007 J. OF DISP. RESOL.

Endnotes

1. Although the general structure is the same statewide (see Ariz. R. Civ. P. 72-76; A.R.S. § 12-133), there are differences among the counties in how they administer the program.

Initiatives on Media and Conflict

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can make a difference in their communities. For more information about these initiatives, see www.sfcg.org/programmes/Nepal/nepal_soap.html.

At **Boston College, the Movement/Media Research Action Project (MRAP)** is a group of scholars and activists whose mission is "to strengthen progressive social movements working towards social justice and inclusive, participatory democracy: locally, nationally, and globally." The group, which has a weekly seminar, focuses on the interface between media and social movements. Building on more than twenty years of experience and partnerships with social movements working for various social change goals, MRAP seeks to foster a more comprehensive, strategic approach to media. Social movements that have been supported through MRAP's work include welfare rights, global justice, anti-intervention, environment, immigrant rights, antiracism, labor, bilingual education, peace, and antidomestic violence. For more on this initiative, see www.bc.edu/bc.org/avp/cas/soc/mrap/default.html. ♦♦

ADR Calendar

ABA Annual Meeting

August 10-11, 2007
San Francisco, California
Section of Dispute Resolution Programming and Events
Hilton San Francisco
Contact: ABA Section of Dispute Resolution
740 15th St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20005
Telephone: (202) 662-1680
Email: dispute@abanet.org
Website: www.abanet.org/dispute

International Conference of the World Mediation Forum

October 9-11, 2007
Jerusalem, Israel
Binyanei Hauma (Israel's national conference center in Jerusalem)
Contact: Mariana Glesinger, World Mediation Forum
Email: marianagles@gmail.com
Website: www.mediate.com/world

6th Annual Advanced Mediation and Advocacy Skills Training

October 11-12, 2007
San Antonio, Texas
Contact: ABA Section of Dispute Resolution
740 15th St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20005
Telephone: (202) 662-1680
Email: dispute@abanet.org
Website: www.abanet.org/dispute

ACR Annual Conference

October 24-27, 2007
Phoenix, Arizona
Hyatt Regency Phoenix Hotel
Contact: Association for Conflict Resolution
Suite 1150
1015 18th Street, NW
Washington, D.C., 20036
Phone: (202) 464-9700
Email: ACR@ACRnet.org
Website: www.ACRnet.org/conferences

CPR Fall Meeting

October 25-26, 2007
Boston, Massachusetts
The Fairmont Copley Plaza
Website: www.cpradr.org

10th Annual Section of Dispute Resolution Spring Conference

April 2-6, 2008
Seattle, Washington
Contact: ABA Section of Dispute Resolution
740 15th St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20005
Telephone: (202) 662-1680
Email: dispute@abanet.org
Website: www.abanet.org/dispute

Compiled by Thomas J. Campbell. Forward information about your organization's regional, national, or international conferences to campbelt@staff.abanet for possible publication in a future issue.