

2006 – International Symposium on Online Journalism

Opening Session

Panelists:

Rosental Calmon Alves, Professor and Knight Chair in Journalism, University of Texas at Austin

Lorraine Branham, Director, School of Journalism, UT Austin

Mark Tremayne, Assistant Professor, School of Journalism, UT Austin (Symposium Research Chair)

ROSENTAL ALVES: All right, I think we are now ready to start. We apologize for the delay—we were having a problem with the Web casting. It was not a problem here, but we invited people from all over the world to follow this event and we are really happy to have this crowd here. As you know, my name is Rosental Alves: I am a professor here in the School of Journalism and I've been organizing this symposium since 1999. And it's very interesting because, when I started the symposium, it was the time of the boom of the Internet. But then we learned later that it was actually the bubble that in the next year would burst—and this year is when I consider that the real boom of the Internet is starting. I think, you know, contrary to 1999, although you do not have those extreme valuations and things like that, you don't have to explain to anybody, anybody what the Internet is like we had to still in 1999.

It's a very special time and one of the consequences of this is that, throughout this year as I've been organizing this symposium, and I have to make the announcement, and to beg people to come, and to say, "you know it's important—see the line-up of people, etc." This year we posted the form, just as an experiment we posted the registration form on the Web site of the symposium, and in just a couple of days we had 100 people registered without announcing—so that was not a big deal in terms of announcing. I became more concerned about announcing the Web cast and have people remotely. And, of course, my dear director Lorraine Branham had been telling me that I should move the symposium to a bigger venue, which I had been resisting because one of the beauties of this event is that it's small so people can really talk to each other and have a good interaction, and if I go to a huge auditorium this is going to lose.

But I was seriously defeated and next year we are going to go to a bigger venue and we're going to organize this more in a big way—in a Texas way (laughter). To talk about "Texas way," you know the slogan of this University now is, "What starts here changes the world." And please believe that. I think the world of media is under a tremendous, radical change; new paradigms are being created, lots of companies are facing the risk of suffering even bigger impact on this. And so the subjects and the line-up of people that we have here—we're so delighted. I want to thank everybody who came here to help me. I had lots of help from many people. I'm not going to

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extend this because we are late, but you can read my message in the program and see. And I would invite my colleague and director Lorraine Branham to give you a welcome and then I will invite Mark Tremayne, who is the chair of the research component of the symposium, to also give a special welcome to you guys. And so, Lorraine.

LORRAINE BRANHAM: I'm Lorraine Branham and I am the director of the School of Journalism here at the University of Texas and I'm in my fourth year as director and this in my fourth year attending the International Symposium on Online Journalism and it is amazing how this thing has grown in such a short time. And I think it's a testament to what's happening in the online world and how much has changed. I think about what has changed in my career-I'm old enough to admit that I remember when we first brought computers into the newsroom for the first time and how upset people were about that and how worried people were about how that was going to change journalism. If only we knew then how much just having those little boxes that we could only write on was actually going to change this business. We have indeed come a very long way to bloggers and citizen journalism and more and more newsrooms combining their main news operations with their online operations. The transformations taking place in journalism today because of technology and because of the Internet is absolutely amazing. I think the great thing about this symposium is that it's an opportunity to explore the latest research, the trends, the emerging technology, and, at this particular conference, also the emerging business models because that remains the biggest challenge to news organizations-trying to figure out how you capitalize on this thing, how do you make money on it, how do you get it to the point that it actually improves the bottom line rather than be a drain on the bottom line. So thank you all again for making this trip to Austin. I know many of you have come a long way-I hope that you leave here a little more informed with some new ideas and, hopefully, that we can get out from you some ideas so that we can continue to do a good job of preparing our students for this brave new world. Thank you all and thank you Professor Rosental for organizing this.

ROSENTAL ALVES: Thank you.

MARK TREMAYNE: I'd like to welcome you, too. I'm the research chair-I'm sort of involved more with tomorrow's program than today's but there's theme there which really crosses both days and that's citizen journalism. You'll notice this afternoon we have two panels on citizen journalism and tomorrow we have a research panel on citizen journalism. If I can throw out just an anecdote that some of you may be aware of already: a year ago the columnist Michael Kinsley had an idea regarding Social Security privatization. He had thought that he had sort of proved that it's invalid, can't work. And so, he wasn't an expert-he recognized that-so he ran his idea past a number of his usual sources. He sent some emails, made some phone calls, left some messages. And while he was at it, he sent the same message to a couple of the more well-known bloggers, who then put it on their blog. And he was amazed that, what he got back from his usual sources was fairly minimal-some people didn't respond, others responded in a short way-and he got this deluge of stuff back from the blogosphere. What he was impressed by was the depth of debate

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and discussion over the idea that he had proposed. And I would say that that really is an example of what you might call problem-based journalism, which is an approach that those who are involved or interested in being involved with getting their audience more active on their Web sites might take. In education there's something called problem-based learning, which is actually very similar. The transformations that that field, education, and communications are undergoing are somewhat similar. In the education field, the old model was lecture based-you give a lecture and people listen to it-that was the 20th century model. The 21st century model in education is more involving the students-giving them some sort of task and having them go about solving that task and that's how the learning takes place. I think, in communications, we're sort of moving a little bit in that direction as well, where instead of just, I give you the story and you read it, this is an example where you can actually involve the audience-give them a problem and have them discuss it and try to reach some sort of consensus on it. And more so than just letting it happen out there on the blogosphere, you can sort of be an active participant in it. That's just an idea I'll throw out there while I have the microphone-we can talk more about that tomorrow. I welcome you to the symposium.