

Journalism professor earns education award

The AEJMC named John Russial, a University associate professor, the 2002-03 Distinguished Educator.

Aimee Rudin
City/State Politics Reporter

One of the first things many new students in University Professor John Russial's class notice is his smile. It's an easy smile — comfortable, not forced.

Russial, an associate professor in the School of Journalism and Communication, has been teaching University students the ins and outs of newspaper editing, reporting, media writing and media management for the last 11 years. Before joining the staff at the University, Russial worked in professional newsrooms for 17 years.

This year, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication named Russial the 2002-03 Distinguished Educator for its Newspaper Division. The AEJMC is a non-profit educational association of journalism and mass communication faculty, administrators, students and media professionals, with about 3,500 members worldwide.

"Professor Russial's class was laid-back and comfortable," University junior Zach Mull said of Russial's Writing for the Media class. "He would show up smiling, not giddy or anything, but like he was genuinely

happy to be there. He was one of those teachers who you could definitely tell had all the professional knowledge to back up what he was saying in the classroom."

Journalism School Associate Dean Alan Stavitsky said Russial represented the ideal faculty member for a professional school.

"He has great higher experience in the newspaper business, and he has a strong academic background," Stavitsky said. "He's a wonderful bridge between the professional and the academic world."

Stavitsky added that Russial being named Distinguished Educator of the year was great recognition for the journalism school, and it underscored the school's reputation for outstanding teaching.

Russial received his doctorate in journalism in 1989 while working at the Philadelphia Inquirer as the Sunday copy chief. He said he had always been drawn to teaching, and the transition from newsroom to classroom was smooth.

"What you are when you're a copy chief is, you're a teacher," Russial said. "I like the teaching because

that's what enables me to help students help professional papers."

Russial said he tries to emphasize more than just the mechanics of journalism in his classes.

"Reporters and editors must be able to work with words. Everybody knows that," he said. "But journalists have to be able to work with ideas and people as well. I learned this lesson in the newsroom, and I try to use it as a guiding principle in the classroom."

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Russial

Speech codes

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what they call "oppressive" student conduct policies that infringe on students' free speech rights.

Greg Luckianoff, director of legal and public advocacy for FIRE, said student-conduct policies illegally limit freedom of speech and persecute students who hold unpopular opinions that stray from the path of political correctness.

"Students have a tiny fraction of the free speech rights enjoyed by the larger society," Luckianoff said.

He added that FIRE has been flooded with student complaints about abuses of their First Amendment rights, and rather than addressing the issue on a case by case basis, FIRE decided to go after the problem systemically. Luckianoff said FIRE's goal in filing lawsuits against universities in every federal appellate circuit is to rid the country of college student conduct policies, e-mail policies, sexual harassment policies, diversity statements and all other policies that the organization believes amount to no more than speech codes.

"It doesn't have to be called a speech code to be a speech code," Luckianoff said.

University Director of Student Judicial Affairs Chris Loschiavo said he doesn't think this University is in danger of a lawsuit. Loschiavo said while some universities have policies that are antiquated and contain questionable restrictions on students' speech, the University Student Conduct Code isn't a violation of the First Amendment in any way. He said the code is necessary to maintain an environment where everyone feels welcome and able to succeed.

"Our code is pretty narrowly drawn," Loschiavo said. "We don't really have a speech code per se."

He added that the University's conduct code was fashioned after

the U.S. Supreme Court's "fighting words" doctrine, which the court established as one of the forms of speech the First Amendment does not protect.

Luckianoff said the University's code is closer than most to the fighting words doctrine, but he countered that the viability of the fighting words doctrine is questionable to begin with.

Oregon Commentator Publisher Bret Jacobson questions the need for a student conduct code. Jacobson pointed out that federal laws already exist to protect people against harassment, and thus the University's conduct code is uncalled for. Furthermore, Jacobson argues the code isn't just unnecessary — it's a crime.

"Essentially, the code is a way for the University to get around due process concerns," Jacobson said. "It's an ad hoc method of punishing unpopular behavior."

Jacobson added he opposes the University's use of a student conduct code because it restricts legitimate academic debate. He specifically pointed to the portion of the code that says students can get in trouble for "insulting another person in his or her immediate presence with abusive words or gestures when a reasonable person would expect that such act would cause emotional distress or provoke a violent response."

Jacobson countered that a lot of people become emotionally distressed when they engage in heated political discussions, which are a perfectly legitimate way for them to exercise their rights to free speech. He added that he thinks the code is specifically intended to keep students who hold different opinions than the majority from being able to speak their minds.

"The code absolutely punches students who hold unpopular views," Jacobson said.

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