



K A P P A T A U A L P H A NEWSLETTER

National Society Honoring Scholarship in Journalism and Mass Communication

Volume 40, No. 1, Summer 2023
AEJMC Convention Issue

Columbia historian wins KTA research prize

Given the sudden ubiquity of the phrase “fake news” over the last decade, a reader might be forgiven for assuming that Andie Tucher’s new book, *Not Exactly Lying: Fake News and Fake Journalism in American History*, is simply her response to current events.

But as Tucher, the H. Gordon Garbedian professor of journalism at the Columbia Journalism School, tells it, “I think I’ve been writing this book all my professional life.”

Tucher’s long-running consideration of the place of truth in journalism has now resulted in an award-winning book. *Not Exactly Lying* is the winner of the Frank Luther Mott/Kappa Tau Alpha Research Award. She will receive the award at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication’s convention in Washington, D.C.

“This timely and well-written book serves to remind us that debates over what constitutes the truth—journalistically speaking—have long been contentious, even though the ferocity of such debates has arguably increased in recent years,” said Bill Cassidy, the national president of the Kappa Tau Alpha honor society.



TUCHER

Named in honor of Frank Luther Mott, Pulitzer Prize winner, educator and longtime leader of the Kappa Tau Alpha national honor society, the Mott award honors the best research-based book about journalism or mass communication published during the past year.

“Tucher’s riveting work offers valuable insights into furthering the discourse surrounding and concerning the press’s ideal role in serving the public in our democracy, as well as the role of the public in choosing what to believe,” said Cassidy, a professor at Northern Illinois University.

Tucher observes that “fake news”—which might include exaggerated or fantastical stories—has always been a part of American journalism. While researching her book, she concluded that fake news was “too squishy a term to be useful.”

“Fake journalism,” however, was and still is a much more troubling and dangerous phenomenon. From the moment that journalism became a self-defined, truth-proclaiming profession in the

Progressive Era, various “fake” journalists engaged in a “purposeful manipulation and abuse of the conventions of journalism,” insisting that the misinformation and partisan polemic they were spreading represented objective, verified facts, Tucher said.

Tucher points to the First World War and its journalistic-sounding propaganda as a high tide for “fake journalism.” But, she argues, “it recurs with every time of crisis.”

Tucher said the rise of Bill Clinton and the turn toward hyper partisanship in the 1990s marked the start of a major acceleration in a new and especially vicious brand of fake journalism. Various early 21st century reporting scandals, from the fabulism of Jayson Blair and Stephen Glass to the error-prone early coverage of the Iraq War, caused more problems. When “real” journalists owned their mistakes and self-corrected, it provided further grist to the purveyors of fake journalism, she said.

Still, Tucher, the director of the Communications Ph.D. program at the Columbia Journalism School, insists she is not “catastrophizing journalism.” For all

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Nevado, Reno professor named KTA adviser of the year

Media law professor Patrick File wants Kappa Tau Alpha initiates at the University of Nevada, Reno to feel special.

Since becoming adviser of the Reynolds School of Journalism’s KTA chapter, File says he has focused on “keeping KTA membership meaningful” and helping the students build professional connections.

Not only are they recognized at an annual awards banquet with the Reynolds School of Journalism’s other honorees, but they also receive exclusive invitations to meet notable guest speakers in informal settings. Since 2016, for example, File has organized an annual First Amendment Forum, bringing in scholars and speakers from such organizations as the Freedom of the Press Foundation and the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

“The students get to pick their brains, talk about their careers, and learn more from those great guest speakers,” said File, who has been the KTA adviser at the Reynolds School since 2016.

File will be honored as the 39th winner of the William H. Taft Outstanding Adviser Award at the

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LILA REEVES-HAMPTON

Media law professor Patrick File makes remarks at the Kappa Tau Alpha initiation ceremony at the University of Nevada, Reno on May 3, 2023. Eight students (not all pictured) were inducted. File has served as the Reynolds School’s KTA adviser since 2016 and received a research grant in 2019.

File named 39th adviser of year

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Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication conference in Washington, D.C.

File sees KTA as good for both students and faculty. As a KTA adviser, File regularly volunteers to help judge entries for the Frank Luther Mott/Kappa Tau Alpha Research Award for the best book in journalism and mass communication. He says serving as a preliminary screener affords him an excellent way to remain engaged in wide-ranging scholarship.

“Patrick’s insightful comments on the books he’s reviewed always prove extremely helpful as the national officers pick the final winner,” said Beverly Horvit, executive director of Kappa Tau Alpha. “I also greatly appreciate his willingness to serve the society whenever and however asked.”

File teaches both undergraduate and graduate students at the Reynolds School, with a focus on

technology and media law.

“Professor File is a wonderful choice for KTA’s adviser of the year,” said Reynolds School Dean Alan G. Stavitsky. “His dedication to students and commitment to scholarship exemplify KTA’s values.”

File, an associate professor of media law, published *Bad News Travels Fast: The Telegraph, Libel, and Press Freedom in the Progressive Era* (University of Massachusetts Press) in 2019. That same year, File received a \$1,000 research grant from KTA to help cover travel to examine the Ted Curtis Smythe papers at the University of Utah. His focus was analyzing how journalism practitioners and experts at the turn of the 20th century discussed the legal and ethical issues arising from the introduction of photography to journalism.

File earned his doctoral degree at the University of Minnesota and is the director of graduate studies for the Reynolds School of Journalism.

IN BRIEF

Ole Miss professor uses research grant to study role of Black newspapers

The University of Mississippi’s KTA adviser, Kathleen Woodruff Wickham, is making the most of her time in Washington while at AEJMC.

She will be using a \$1,000 Kappa Tau Alpha research grant to continue her work on how the Black press covered major civil rights events by spending time exploring the archives at Howard University and consulting with other scholars.



WICKHAM

Wickham helped plan Ole Miss’s 60th anniversary celebration of James Meredith’s courageous decision to become the first Black student at the university, edited a commemorative book about the episode and remains close to the Meredith family.

Wickham’s latest project evolved out of a fall 2022 undergraduate class she taught at the University of Mississippi on “the press and the South.” Wickham expects that her research will result in a book documenting the diverse perspectives of the Black press during the civil rights era.

Kappa Tau Alpha, the national college honor society for journalism and mass communication, conducts the grant program to provide research assistance to chapter advisers and to recognize their efforts to promote excellence in scholarship. Since beginning the grant program in 2003, KTA has awarded more than \$36,000 in grants.

The society has chapters at 100 universities, and Wickham has served as the adviser of the University of Mississippi chapter for two years.

Temple initiates star students



GEORGE W. MILLER

Journalism students at Temple University celebrate their May 2 induction into Kappa Tau Alpha. Associate Professor Karen Turner, center, has served as the chapter’s adviser since 2015.

Not Exactly Lying wins multiple honors

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the profession’s challenges, she remains heartened by the commitment of her students and other young reporters.

Not Exactly Lying was published by Columbia University Press. The book also earned the Journalism Studies Division Book Award from the International Communication Association and the History Division Book Award from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

Other Mott finalists were Danielle Keats Citron for *The Fight for Privacy: Protecting Dignity, Identity, and Love in the Digital Age* (W. W. Norton);

Deborah Cohen for *Last Call at the Hotel Imperial: The Reporters Who Took on a World at War* (Random House); Aynne Kokas for *Trafficking Data: How China is Winning the Battle for Digital Sovereignty* (Oxford University Press); and Sylvain Parasić for *Computing the News: Data Journalism and the Search for Objectivity* (Columbia University Press).

Kappa Tau Alpha has recognized research contributions to the field since the inauguration of the award in 1944. The winning author receives a \$1,000 prize.

Editor’s note: Matthew Pehl, assistant professor of history at Texas Tech University, interviewed Tucher for this article.



The Kappa Tau Alpha Newsletter is published by:

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