

AEJMC Student Magazine Contest 2010

Judges' Comments

Articles—Places

Judge: Scott Stuckey, managing editor of *National Geographic Traveler*

First Place

“Tibet,” for *The New Yorker*

Why it won: In this article, the writer and his companions travel to Tibet during a long stay in China. The piece excels in its abundance of what I call “cinematic scenes,” rarely seen in these contest entries. A cinematic scene has dialog and moment-by-moment narration, like a scene in a movie—showing us instead of telling us. This alone imparts a sense of place better than any other device in the writer's toolkit. We're there when the van stops along the road, and street urchins climb in and sing “Weeee will, weeee will, ROCK YOU!” We're there when the writer and his companions do the “unthinkable”—wading, with their pant legs rolled up, into a sacred lake, causing their guide to come running, screaming for them to get out. The piece is a series of such scenes, with historical background and insightful observations carefully—and judiciously—placed among them, never overwhelming the narrative arc. Contrast this with most contest entries, which serve up exposition, summary, and place description, with actual narrative rare or nonexistent. They bring to mind those instances when you start to watch a movie expecting a drama, only to find dry voice-over, “The tree-lined streets of the quaint village were rife with charming cafes,” and realize, “Oh my god, it's a documentary! I'm outta here!”

Second Place

“North Captiva: A Tropical Island within the United States,” for *Delta Sky*

Why it won: What this article does better than any other entered is to connect the subject matter to the reader's own interests, right in the first paragraph. “You spend your life coping with the stresses of work... only to realize that your travel destination is every bit as stressful—with horrible traffic, cramped hotels, and a beach so crowded that you can't spread out your beach towel.” The second paragraph introduces a destination without these flaws, a true escape from modern cares. The body of the piece goes on to lay out North Captiva's attractions—remoteness, roomy rental houses, uncrowded sand, good eateries—all along building on the premise laid out in the beginning. The coherence and clarity of point make this piece excel. Where it falls short is in using the second person throughout, making the piece uncomfortably close in tone to a chamber of commerce brochure.

Third Place

“On Separate Sides of the Green Line,” for *The Common Review*

Why it won: This piece, recounting the events of a summer internship working at the Jerusalem Post, offered an American's perspective on the conflict in the Middle East. The writer was sympathetic to both sides of the political divide, finding herself somewhat shocked at the callousness toward Palestinians of some Israeli soldiers she met on a bus, while acknowledging that the root of such an attitude is violence against Israeli civilians. The piece was insightful, had conversations with locals working to resolve the conflict through volunteer work, and was filled with cogent observations that imparted a sense of place.

General strengths of entries: The entries covered places near and far, showing that for modern journalists, the entire globe can be on their “beat.”

General weaknesses of entries: Once again, the major shortcoming I saw in the entries—especially those where a destination was the central focus—was the lack of an angle. That was a problem even for the winning entry, the one that stood out for its narrative elements. The problem starts with the title, “Tibet” What about it? The use of a generic title hints that the writer doesn't know where he's going with the subject, that his article has no “through line” pulling the reader through to the end. In travel writing, often a quest makes for a good angle,

even if it's for something as prosaic as a perfect bowl of wonton soup. The readers hang on, wondering, "did he find it?"

Other observations:

- Some entries made the error of starting off with background information, what we tend to call "preamble" here at *Traveler*. Preamble is death. It's boring. Start right in the action. Feather in the background later, after you've set the scene and presented your set-up, or nut, graph.
- In this age of countless blogs, in which publishing your thoughts is as easy as clicking a mouse: Good journalism requires legwork, that is, reporting, interviewing, and research. Navel-gazing will never take the place of the hard work, especially when it comes to writing that people have to pay to read.
- Adjust your aim. If you're just starting out and don't yet have an impressive clip file, consider pitching stories to something other than the top echelon of consumer magazines, such as *The New Yorker*. Shoot for local or regional publications. Your chances of early success are much higher. If you are going to target the big boys, go for a department assignment first, rather than a feature.

Articles—People

Judge: Dick Stolley, senior editorial adviser at Time Inc. and founding editor of *People*

First Place

"The High Life," for *Esquire*

Why it won: Who ever thought window cleaners would make a fascinating story? But they do, especially if the windows they're cleaning are hundreds of feet above the street. The story begins with a stomach-twisting description of what it's like to fall, then goes on to explain how this crew of mostly Hispanic workers manages not to, at least most of the time. You learn about them, their unusual jobs and some fundamentals about keeping Chicago skyscrapers shiny. Does that sound dull? Believe me, it isn't. This is a perfect example of how exhaustive reporting and vivid writing can make the seemingly mundane remarkably compelling.

Second Place

"The Importance of Being Aaron," for a student publication

Why it won: Stories about AIDS are hardly unusual, but this touching description of a high school senior with the disease sheds new light on the heartbreaking plight of its victims, particularly young ones. It is stunningly candid, from the way Aaron got the disease, to the attitude of the less than sympathetic other students in school, to the awful side effects of some of his medications. Aaron seems determined to pursue a career in acting, and the rave reviews he has gotten on the high school stage have encouraged him. He seems to realize how difficult it will be. You wish him well, and you wonder.

Third Place

"The Defender," for *ESPN the Magazine*

Why it won: This is a unique look at the dark side of college sports: a skillful lawyer who represents Florida athletes in serious trouble with the law. Huntley Johnson's philosophy is that everyone deserves a second chance, and he has indeed saved the careers, reputations and possibly even the lives of twenty or more athletes by getting charges dropped, pleading down or deferring trial. When he got one football player off on a DUI charge, an anti-drunk driving activist called him a "morally corrupt blight on humanity," but one of his young clients said, "He makes you feel safe just by talking to him." The story lets you, the reader, decide.

Honorable Mention

"Taxicab Confessions," for *Vox Magazine*

Why it won: The wit and wisdom of cab drivers is vastly exaggerated, we all agree. But wait; here's a driver in a college town with lots of tales of how she deals with her often-impaired

passengers with understanding and sympathy. It's a touching story that will give new life to that old cliché.

Honorable Mention

"Victor Wang: Baseball Statistician Extraordinaire," for *Sports Illustrated*

Why it won: This is a side of baseball few of us know much about: the use of mathematics—statistics, really—to help coaches and managers make intelligent and game-winning decisions on the field. Victor Wang is only 19 and was never much of a player himself, but he sees himself as the boss of a major league team someday.

General strengths of entries: I was particularly struck by the ability of the writers to take a familiar or conventional subject and through intensive reporting and imaginative writing make it new and compelling. There's a danger in that approach, to be sure. A conventional subject can simply turn out to be conventional if the writer can't bring something really new and exciting to it. The winners and honorable mentions help explain what I mean, but other subjects like homelessness and unemployment were dealt with surprisingly too.

General weaknesses of entries: Weak reporting is probably the cardinal sin. Too many pieces seemed thin; we didn't really learn much about the subject. The writer never seemed to get under the subject's skin. That takes time and access and patience, and both pre-interview research and carefully prepared questions. Cute writing will never replace reporting, although some writers tried.

Articles—Investigation and Analysis

Judge: Andrew Putz, editor of *Boston Magazine*

First Place:

"Crossing Lines," *Mother Jones*

Why it won: This wonderfully written, impressively reported piece seeks to answer a relatively straightforward question, albeit one that's often ignored in the political debate over illegal immigration: why immigrants from Mexico come to the United States in the first place. In doing so, it reminds us that sometimes the best stories are the ones staring us in the face.

Second Place

"Jail Instead of Treatment," *Boston Globe Magazine*

Why it won: Because it deftly humanizes what could have been a dry story about public policy—and exposes a significant flaw in the way Massachusetts treats women with serious substance abuse problems.

Third Place

"Anatomy of a Tragedy," for *Ryerson Review of Journalism*

Why it won: In deconstructing an attention-grabbing, if seemingly straightforward, news story, this piece reveals much about how the news business works these days.

Articles—Service and Information

Judge: John Rockhold, managing editor of *Mother Earth News*

First Place

"How to Embrace Your Inner Geek," for *Bust*

Why it won: This is an engaging and original piece. The article is downright fun to read — for geeks and non-geeks alike. Great use of subheads and multiple formats (bulleted text, lists, sidebars) within a long article (overall, the piece might be a bit too long, but the positives outweigh this negative by far). Chock-full of information, but intermixed with colorful language

and engaging examples so as to not overload the reader. Probably a piece that would be shared among friends.

Second Place

“Where Mind and Body Meet,” for *Elle*

Why it won: This article has a superb combination of literal definitions, firsthand information and engaging examples. It strikes a balance between these three writing styles that is rare and is a challenge to achieve. The article also conveys to its reader the value of these exercise techniques without preaching. It eases the reader through the information like a good yoga instructor would ease a new student into the exercise routine. Obviously well researched, the article includes quotes from a variety of sources. Subheads would’ve helped break up the flow and offered more entry points.

Third Place

“Therapy Is for Everybody,” for *Jayplay*

Why it won: This piece is a comfortable read that holds the reader through a touchy if not controversial topic. Offers a high degree of value to the target audience, without pushing the issue. Great balance of informative and engaging sources. Good variety of formats for multiple entry points. Excellent use of subheads, great photo caption that works like a second deck. Good headline that’s informative and engaging without being esoteric. Probably a piece that would be shared among friends.

Honorable Mention

“Sleeping Through School,” for *Jayplay*

Why it won: This article is an informative piece that really hits home with its audience. Packed with practical examples and easy-to-understand information. Great entry points in the photo caption and sidebar lists. The subheads were not as engaging in that regard. The conclusion felt abrupt. Probably a piece that would be shared among friends.

Honorable Mention

“The Big O,” for *Boston Magazine*

Why it won: A bountiful amount of information in an engaging package. Education and compelling to its audience, for both those aware of and clueless about the topic. Slightly repetitive at times. The headline could be much more straightforward and engaging; it could even be misread by the target audience were it seen online without the art. But the deck is effective. Probably a piece that would be shared among friends.

General strengths of entries:

- Great variety of sources—personal examples, expert examples, sources within and outside of the audiences’ communities.
- Introductions of the better pieces are effective, balancing practical information with firsthand examples.
- The cream of the crop in this batch of submissions really stood out from the pack.
- Solid use of multiple styles of entry points.
- Original and informative topics with engaging and fun-to-read tones.

General weaknesses of entries:

- Several writers slipped into too much telling and not enough showing.
- A handful of submissions were photocopied so poorly that I could not read all of the writing.
- Several writers assumed too much knowledge within the audience about the topic and/or assumed too much agreement from the audience with the writer’s angle

Articles—Features

Judge: Mike Sager, writer for *Esquire* and author of *Scary Monsters and Super Freaks* and *Revenge of the Donut Boys*.

First Place

“Blood Sport-Vampires,”

Why it won: Deft, understated, creative, well researched, a little bit out of the normal comfort zone, humorous but lightly so, tongue in cheek instead of hammer over head, which was a great temptation I am sure. I like the spare writing and economy of style. This shows a writer who has control of his/her prose while not taking his/her self too seriously. This writer has a good future.

Second Place

“I’m Dyin’ Up Here,” for *Ryerson Review of Journalism*

Why it won: Probably the most professional story in the bunch. Extremely well written. Great daft tale. And so true in spirit in every way when it comes to our biz. Frickin readers, you know? They ruin everything. But in a general interest contest, journos writing about journos comes in second. Sorry whoever you are. You have an extremely bright future. Keep up the good work. And get out of the office.

Third Place

“Biggest and best busts,” for *Vox*

Why it won: It’s not really a story so much as a roundup of historical events, brightly written. But that is a big part of what mag writers do. I can tell it took a good deal of research, and since it’s third place anyway, what the hey. It is good reading for the peeps. (And something I hope the design department would/did have fun with)

Honorable Mention

Jayplay

It may be a little bit irregular but I’d like to commend the editors of *Jayplay*. There were a number of entries that ran in *Jayplay* and all of them were brightly written little features. That they tended to have a similar voice gives rise to the idea that some good editors are at work behind the scenes. Well done.

General strengths of entries: There’s a lot of passion and a lot of care in these entries; clearly they are the work of people who are putting their utmost effort into the work they’re doing. This is what it takes to succeed in the big leagues.

General weaknesses of entries: Some stories sound a little term-papery, which I remember in my own work at this age. The stories in general are a little thin, which reflect in a sense the youth of the correspondents. Again, something that will change in time. If you want to be a mag writer you should be reading every article in every big magazine that comes out and you should be reading local and regional mags too. And before you go to bed every night you should make sure to drink a long warm glass of really good fiction to help you sleep.

Articles—First Person

Judge: Alison Gwinn, executive editor, *O the Oprah Magazine*

First Place

“My Family I (Don’t) Have to Know,” for a student publication

Why it won: This poignant and beautifully written personal essay, by a young woman who was adopted as a baby from Korea and then raised in Akron, Ohio, conveys both the ache she feels over never knowing her biological family and the love she has for her adoptive parents. This is well-trodden territory, but the author manages to describe this dichotomy of emotions without ever resorting to cliché or mawkishness. She’s not having a pity party and yet as a reader you

can really feel her pain; it's totally authentic when she describes her embarrassment at being asked as a grade-schooler to describe what it feels like to be adopted and to be "different." And when she decides to initiate a search for her biological parents in Korea, it seems almost inevitable, as if she has no choice. "To me, they still exist as a fiction, an intangible idea that's far removed from reality," she writes. By the end of the piece, she hasn't found her biological parents yet, but she also realizes that to some extent it doesn't really matter. If her life is a large photo album, she says, "my birth parents are a missing photo, and my family is the book."

Second Place

"Heart of Darkness," for *College Girl*

Why it won: "There's drinking and then there's *drinking*," writes the author of "Heart of Darkness," an examination of the personal pain and self-destruction wrought by an all-too-common college pastime—drinking so heavily that you pass out. The writer, who had once vowed never to drink at all, breaks that promise to herself—"the alcohol became an excuse to be myself and stop pretending to have it all together"—and, once she starts imbibing, she finds that she is unusually vulnerable to blackouts. That, she says, is when "bad things happen." The writer does a wonderful job of describing how they feel—the weird sensation of being physically at an event (a party or a night out with friends) but mentally missing it. Blackouts, she says, are like "being kidnapped by your own impulses, paralyzed and unable to stop yourself from whatever is the whim of the moment." Ultimately, she identifies the root of her problem: the death of her mother when she was a child and her subsequent feelings of guilt, plus the sense that she is always being watched and "there are no secrets and no excuses." This is a wrenching, powerful, and excruciatingly honest essay.

Third Place

"The Best-Kept Secret," for a student publication

Why it won: A lot has been written about Asperger's syndrome—it's become the "disease du jour," tossed around to describe anyone who's even remotely a social misfit. But this piece takes a fresh approach to the subject: It's told from the point of view of a young woman whose boyfriend has Asperger's. That boyfriend, named Tony, frequently does things that draw unwanted, embarrassing attention: interrupting others, getting so excited during a game of Taboo that he starts shaking his leg uncontrollably and repeatedly hitting himself, furiously waving and yelling "Hi!" at passersby. But the author knows another side of Tony, one that is sweet and considerate. He doesn't try to hide his condition; rather, he opens up to her about it in the hopes that she will understand. The writer realizes she has a choice: Break up with him (the easy choice) or stand by his side and see what she can do to help. She chooses the latter, and her story of the ups and downs they go through—her reluctance to introduce him to her friends, her humiliation when he shouts at her in front of others—is rich and poignant, and ultimately a tribute to the power of love and sympathy.

Honorable Mention

"Quiet House," for *Harper's*

Why it won: This essay about growing up in a family where there is a significant amount of mental illness—and the kinds of fears that evokes in the writer—is raw and thought-provoking.

Honorable Mention

"Me, Myself and I Don't Know" for *GQ*

Why it won: This tale, about an apathetic (half) Jew who undergoes a crash course in Judaism during Passover week, is quirky, charming and original.

General strengths of entries: This was the strongest group of entries I've seen in this category; it was really hard to winnow them down to the three (or five) best. What was most impressive was that the writers choose unusual, unpredictable topics and they were original and insightful in talking about them.

Specialized Business Press Article

Judge: Sally Roberts, senior editor at *Crain's Business Insurance*

First Place

"Judy McEwen: Chicken SensatHEN," for *The Horn Book Magazine*

Why it won: I thoroughly enjoyed reading about Judy McEwen and her "Chicken SensatHEN" books. The writer does an excellent job of weaving Ms. McEwen's playful personality with her personal story of fulfilling a dream to teach kids about diversity through chickens. It also gives a great first-hand account of one author's journey to self-publishing. Kudos to the writer who sought outside comments; it gives more credence to Ms. McEwen's profile. I would think *The Horn Book Magazine* would be very interested in publishing this article.

Second Place

"Dueling Policies," for *Border Business Magazine*

Why it won: If there is one topic that has been written about more than any other in my years of judging this contest it would be immigration. "Dueling Policies," which covers two state senators' different views on immigration and the use of the federal E-Verify program, happens to be one of, if not the best of the bunch. This article is not only properly researched with appropriate dates and statistics, but it also does a great job of weaving in the senators' personal histories, which have influenced their political beliefs and actions.

I love articles that lay out the facts of two different opinions and allow readers to draw their own conclusions.

Third Place

"Meat is Murder?" for *Time*

Why it won: While not a traditional news or feature article, this commentary on finding reconciliation between vegetarians and meat-eaters is nonetheless a very compelling read. It is incredibly well written with a dry sense of humor that had me smiling most of the way through it. Nicely done.

General strengths of entries:

I thought the entries this year were really excellent and fit nicely with their target publications. Unlike past years where grammar was a huge issue, all the articles submitted this year were really tightly written and properly edited.

General weaknesses of entries:

The only weakness that comes to mind is just the compelling nature of the articles, or lack thereof in most cases. It was pretty easy to pick the three winners, as they were a pure joy to read rather than more of a chore.

Online Magazine

Judge: Nick Fauchald, editor-in-chief of *tastingtable.com*, an online food magazine, and a former editor at *Food & Wine*.

First Place

Access (<http://www.accessmagazine.sjsu.edu/>)

Why it won: The homepage immediately grabs the reader's attention with its dramatic, colorful slideshow and dynamic text (though the images scroll quite quickly). The organization of the homepage is also very smart: The simple grid offers several ways into the magazine's content without overwhelming the eye with too many options. The top navigation is also simple to navigate; it's clear what each section will offer and it avoids the too-often-used dropdown menus (thank you).

The feature stories are also engaging: I enjoyed the page-by-page layout of the text, which kept me reading on. I also appreciated the well-edited social-networking options (Facebook and Twitter only); too often readers are assaulted with a dozen options for sharing content.

Photography and illustrations throughout the site are excellent—stunningly good, actually—and really keep the reader engaged. Though this is a supplement to a print publication, the overall design of the website could easily translate into the tablet format that will soon be upon us. Other magazines—both amateur and professional—should take note.

Second Place

***Drake Magazine* (<http://drakemagazine.com/>)**

Why it won: The overall design of the site suits its audience well, from the original photography and smart illustrations to the link-rich stories. The layout is simple and uncluttered; I can access the entire site from the main homepage with ease.

I only wish the large box that takes up the top half of the features landing page was dynamic—this is a great spot for a carousel or some other kind of story slideshow (though the scrolling banner at the top of every page is a genius use of that tiny bit of real estate). I also appreciate the restraint shown by teasing stories with only a snappy sentence: This will keep readers clicking through the site.

Third Place

***State Press Magazine* (<http://statepressmagazine.com/>)**

Why it won: This is a cleanly designed, easy-to-navigate site. The feature slideshow on the homepage is engaging; I appreciate the nut graf that accompanies every photo.

I especially like the icons used to navigate the various departments (and the clever blog illustrations as well). The site is highly service-oriented publication, and serves its purpose well.

Features and blog entries are simply laid out, though the site might benefit from making a design differentiation between the two: larger photos and less teaser text would make the layout feel more magazine-like.

General strengths of entries:

- Photography and iconography are very strong in many entries—at or near professional level.
- Many of the so-called “blogs” aren’t really blogs. I’d embrace them for what they are—opinion pieces or feature stories—and treat them as such.
- It’s all too easy to clutter a homepage with entry points, polls, feeds, navigational tools, etc. The best entries showed great restraint and created simple, gorgeous pages that won’t scare off their readers with too many options at once.

General weaknesses of entries:

- Some sites still take the term “magazine” too literally, and organize themselves too much like a print publication. Site with photography this good should take advantage of this imagery and offer more slideshows.
- I was surprised to see so few videos embedded in stories. This is an easy way to build a “sticky” readership!
- Many sites embrace social-networking tools. When done correctly, these enrich the user experience. But when over-used—when there are a dozen icons to choose from at the bottom of a story—the choices become overwhelming and create a busy page.

Single Issue of an Ongoing Magazine—Design

Judge: Charli Ornett, creative director of *Yoga Journal*

First Place

Burr

Why it won: It's a beautiful and sophisticated magazine. Both the clean design and the sparing use of fonts create a seamless publication. Limiting themselves to the use of only (3?) typefaces does not limit their imagination—each page layout is interesting in and of itself, as well as fitting into the whole package perfectly.

Story packaging is well done—that's a combination of art and edit working together. And the photography is very high caliber. The production value is also great. The matte paper is hip and feels good.

This magazine is a delight to look at (and to read!)

Second Place

Burnt Orange

Why it won: Clean and easy-to-read, but it also has a lot of fun elements, which means that it's talking to it's readership.

The illustration info graphics on the first edit page is playful and the mixing of illustration, graphics and photos throughout shows good art direction.

It's a little less consistent design-wise than my first place honorable mention (*Think*), but it has so much character & whimsy that it's a strong 2nd place.

Third Place

Jayplay

Why it won: Very professional looking. It's well organized, the grid is strong, but it doesn't look boring thanks to the attention to typographic details and the consistent use of white space. The fonts are great—they are strong and work well together. The pacing is nice—the pages that are all or mostly type are made inviting with fun, colorful graphic details. Photography is also high quality and illustrates the stories in an approachable, witty way.

Honorable Mention

Think

Why it won: Super clean and easy-to-read. Adheres to a strong grid, while playing with it. Only drawback is that it looks more like an annual report than a student magazine.

Honorable Mention

515 Magazine

Why it won: Another Drake “clean machine” publication. Good grid, clean design (mostly) and nice graphic typographic elements that add to the design. There's certain exuberance in some of the design that is charming and would appeal to *Think*'s readers. The design is uneven, but it tries harder than *Think* and falls on its face a few times. I've got to give it to the magazine for trying.

General strengths of entries: Overall the production qualities of the magazines are very good. The story ideas are interesting (I ended up reading many of the articles.)

The photography is often the best part of the publications, which was surprising to me.

Many publications had a great attention to typographic detail and non-gratuitous extras.

General weaknesses of entries: There is no general design weakness. I'd say that there were three main areas for improvement:

- I. Some publications are chaotic and crammed full of too many fonts, styles of design, with no organizing principles. The main magazine that fits this category is UM's *Distractions*.

- But that magazine is FUN! And the craziness of how it looks matches the tone of the writing as well as going very well with the title.
2. Too clean. Who knew that was possible? But some of the publications are a tad on the yawn-producing side.
 3. Lack of typographic finesse and/or attention to detail. This weakness is something that also exists far too often in the professional publication world: Designers who don't actually read the articles don't add anything to the readability of the publication.

Single Issue of an Ongoing Magazine—Editorial

Judge: Ashley Deahl, acting editor-in-chief and managing editor of *Phoenix Magazine*

First place

The Burr

Why it won: *The Burr* did what college magazine should be doing—making their content as relative to their students as possible. So not only was the cover story about the anniversary of the Kent State shootings appropriate, it was creative, informative and poignant. This may not have been the best-designed entry of the bunch (though it didn't detract from it either), but every story was unique to the university and no doubt enlightened its students about some very important history.

Second place

Think

Why it won: This magazine covered some pretty weighty topics—immigration, mental illness, the economy—but it did so with sophistication, creativity and professionalism expected of a nationally produced magazine. The best part? It took all of these big topics and boiled them down to one very important question: How does it affect *our* people? So many college magazines (many of which were included here) make the mistake of writing about very generic topics like STDs, drugs, drinking, etc., thinking that that's what college students want to read about, but they end up making them so generalized that the stories could run anywhere, any time, any place. This magazine was beautifully designed as well, with cool but clean fonts, interesting typography and good use of sidebars. My only criticism would be that every story felt like a mini-feature that carried the same significance. I was hoping the smaller stories would lead into a more defined feature well. Overall though, wonderfully done.

Third place

Ryerson Review of Journalism

Why it won: Smart, sophisticated and creative. This one was a no-brainer. This was top-notch quality everything—photography, design, writing—and as a journalist, I was highly interested by the subject matter itself. Some of the spreads got a bit text-heavy or looked too similar to other features, but overall it was clean and inviting. Good use of symmetry with the illustrations and stories of the three editors.

Honorable mention

O&B

Why it won: I have to give credit to this issue for being bold, a bit scary (in a good way) and really carrying through with a theme (“the Black Issue”). It was really interesting to see how they weaved the theme into completely different topics without it seeming like a complete stretch.

Single Issue of an Ongoing Magazine—General Excellence

Judge: Ken Collier, editor-in-chief of Reader's Digest's *The Family Handyman*

Some of the things I looked for:

- A clear sense of the intended audience, in both writing and design.
- Structure to the issue, giving it variety, a beginning and end, pacing and flow.
- A consistent but flexible overall graphic design.
- High level of execution in individual articles, both in writing and design
- A unique proposition to the publication, clear to the reader throughout.

First Place

think

Why it won:

- Very strong design. Simple, organized, energetic, with particularly strong use of illustrations. Well thought-out typography: simple and straightforward in departments, bold and distinctive in features. Simple but interesting and engaging cover, on a difficult, conceptual topic.
- Effective use of sidebars, pull quotes, fact boxes, and other entry points. E.g. “How the center pivot changed farming” and “things to know about trucks”
- Interesting structure, with departments in ever-widening circles away from local area.
- Clearly a modern magazine with awareness that target readers get information from the web, too.
- Topics are thoughtfully chosen, and the articles are generally concise, focused and engagingly written.
- Extra points for high “degree of difficulty.”

This title could be strengthened by clarifying its unique proposition or point of view. What makes a *think* article unique? Is that obvious to the casual reader? Is that unique proposition clear throughout the issue? The editorial team seems to be heading towards articles that might shake established viewpoints, but many are simply descriptive, and a couple are service articles. There is also some ambiguity about the target reader. The department structure suggests a regional audience. But the relevance of many articles to the regional audience isn't clear.

Second Place

Burnt Orange

Why it won:

- A clear sense of the target audience without being too narrow. While clearly for the UT community and about local affairs, it covers them in larger context. E.g. The Steinbeck and rare books articles.
- Strong graphic design. Interesting typography without being weird, varied and energetic layouts, all kept well organized and straightforward.
- Strong research and writing. Articles are generally well paced and informative, and edited for focus and conciseness.

This title could be strengthened in two ways. A more consistent overall design, especially in feature stories, would make the issue more reader friendly and give the title a more distinctive look and feel. Secondly, it would benefit from more variety and structure: more departments, more very short pieces, more sidebars and more entry points (subheds, pull quotes, etc.) all in an organized arrangement.

Third Place

Burr

Why it won:

- A clear sense of the target audience without being too narrow. Made a local publication interesting and relevant to a much broader readership. (Great material for this issue helped!) Some student-oriented content, but kept light and appropriate.
- Strong writing, research and editing. Thought-provoking and insightful treatments of serious topics. Noteworthy are the profile of Vietnam Tom, the history of the song “Ohio” and story on the Jackson State shootings.

This title could be strengthened in two ways. First, by giving it an overall design: departments consistent in typography and layout, more freedom in features, but everything fitting into an overall design. Second, give the articles more variety of treatment. Not just text and images. Quotes, sidebars, mini-profiles, subheds, tips, factoids, etc. These are what attract readers and keep them going.

General strengths of entries: It's hard to generalize across such a widely varied group, but generally the writing is graceful and engaging. Copyediting is excellent. There's a high level of enthusiasm and excitement with writing that comes across in even the most humdrum topics. Research seems strong as well. Inventiveness in design and topic selection is sometimes striking. There's clearly a lot of talent in these teams.

General weakness of entries: Many articles are written in a very basic format: Just a hed and running text. Most would have benefited from subheds, to organize the content and provide entry points, sidebars, pull quotes, tip boxes, factoids, web pointers, and other ways to capture the attention of a reader and hold it.

Many of the magazines would be strengthened if they had more structure and variety. Departments are generally neglected, though they are crucial to giving a magazine uniqueness, ongoing reader appeal, and an organic reading experience. Departments are especially useful in delivering nuggets of content, which would balance off the longer features. Lastly, though there was interesting and effective graphic design in many individual stories, often the overall design of the title was inconsistent and conventional.

Start-Up Magazine Project—Team

Judge: Roger Tremblay, executive search consultant specializing in marketing communications for Allen Austin Global Executive Search / Advanced Leadership Communication in Dallas.

First Place

Rewind

Why it won: As that noted philosopher Yogi Berra once said, "Nostalgia ain't what it used to be." A magazine like *Rewind* could prove that it's actually much better. Full disclosure: At my age, 62, this is obviously targeted at me and my fellow aging Boomers. So I have an inherent bias. But I actually showed this around to several of my friends and they thought it was terrific. In fact, some of my friends in the magazine publishing business wanted to meet the creators and have a conversation about getting this up and running. So for all of us old folks who still like to hold on to something made from dead trees, this is right on target.

The business plan could have been more fully developed. For such a great concept, the nuts and bolts of this project kind of lagged behind other entries that were bad ideas but well executed.

I was also surprised by no integration of digital media. Some of us are computer literate. I think this concept begs for a blog or a Facebook page.

Second Place

Boost

Why it won: This is a terrific concept and something that would fulfill a definite need in the marketplace. I believe that this is the first time I have seen special interest publications that are less than bimonthly frequency in this contest and it's a refreshing change.

Even if there was no mention of working with Meredith, any one who has worked in magazine publishing would be able to see the influence from a mile away. They do shelter books about as well as anyone who ever did them and I hope the folks who worked on this project appreciate what a wonderful opportunity for learning how to do it the right way they got to experience.

Everything about this was executed very well: Sound business plan, good design, good writing, and well thought-out sales and marketing strategy. I thought the digital strategy was on

target but I was surprised that after correctly identifying TV shows as the competition, there was no mention of considering “Boost Show.” Maybe the right tactic would be an online video execution. Overall, a lot of really good work here.

Third Place

Cozy Home

Why it won: Most of the comments above regarding *Boost* are also applicable here. Once upon a time, the folks at Meredith came up with an idea for a magazine called *Metropolitan Home*. It was an instant success in both reader acceptance and advertising investment. Unfortunately, it lost its way over the years and was sold to another publishing company. A lot of the best editorial concepts from *Met Home* are in this project. I think lightning could strike twice.

Graphically, this is an exceptional execution—a truly gorgeous magazine. On some level, all shelter magazines are aspirational, above and beyond the service element and this really delivers both.

The business plan is solid and I wouldn’t be surprised to see this magazine actually introduced as a special interest publication in the future. Great job!

Honorable Mention

Day One

Why it won: Maybe I’m about to start a full-blown mid-life crisis, but this just really hit me as cool. It’s a creative, out-of-the-box, unique idea and I think it would resonate among a lot of people.

I do think, as an old ad salesman, this would be a difficult magazine to sell since it doesn’t fit into any pre-established niche and most agency media buyers would look at it and say, “That’s very interesting. Come back in a year and we’ll see how you’re doing”. But that’s what they said about *People* in its first year.

I liked the promotion and events strategy; the digital strategy could have been expanded and the income expectations are unrealistic.

Overall, a lot of work here that shows that the group learned a lot and still had the guts to take a chance.

Honorable Mention

Lemonade

Why it won: My son-in-law who is the campus shrink at a major university would love this. And my wife who thinks up stuff to worry about would read this cover to cover. I think this is a really neat, creative idea and I think the name is inspired. From a sales and marketing point of view, this is an easy concept to explain.

I’m not sure it would get immediate advertiser acceptance. There is no endemic advertising category except maybe prescription drugs and education, but it could find its niche.

Good design, good editorial executions and an obvious grasp of publishing fundamentals. I’d like to meet the folks that came up with this one.

General strengths of entries: This was probably the best group of “dummy” publications I’ve seen in this contest. Wonderful layout and design, very good editorial plans and good writing examples. No ad salesperson would be reluctant to show these to potential customers.

Most of the business plans were well thought out and solid but overly optimistic for the current economy. This was the first year that showed evidence of multi-media platforms and the necessity of executing an accompanying digital strategy.

Maybe we’ll get to the day where the emphasis is on an idea or concept that is platform agnostic rather than simply an extension of a magazine execution.

There was a lot of really creative and original thinking in a lot of these projects and yet I got the feeling that there was plenty of evidence that the fundamentals of the business had been learned and understood. You can’t break the rules if you don’t know what they are.

General weaknesses of entries: My usual annual criticism is too many magazine ideas based on a research sample of one or two. There are always magazine projects that are aimed at people who are just getting out of college. Unfortunately the numbers show that your peers do not exactly read magazines in droves. Not too many of those this year.

But a surprising number of magazines that are very similar to publications already on the market or trying to fulfill a need that some other magazine is already doing. The projects were well done, just not very innovative.

I realize this was a journalism project but there was a real lack of understanding of the realities of the advertising marketplace. Magazines that can be considered “General Interest” have a really hard time getting acceptance by advertisers in the short run. Special interest magazines with an endemic advertiser base can very often be profitable more quickly. Maybe the groups who worked with Meredith had an unfair advantage in this area.

As stated above, it was nice to see some integration of new media. But if this project is going to be as close to a “real world” experience as possible, this part is going to have to get a lot better.

Start-Up Magazine Project—Individual

Judge: Gina Hamadey, travel editor, *Every Day With Rachel Ray*

First Place

Grease Monkey

Why it won: You’re filling a niche that has many fans (indulgent Southern cooks). Though, I wouldn’t discount potential female subscribers. You could make it brawny without calling it a “men’s magazine.” (*Bon Appétit* has a lot of masculine qualities, but the subscribers are mostly women.)

The photos you chose are modern, with a definite point of view. There’s a good mix of FOB stories, travel tidbits and longer features. You’ve clearly put thought into the food coverage. A lot of interesting-sounding recipes, and I love the step-by-step manly panini idea.

My complaints:

- Some layouts look messy, with unappealing fonts (“Summer’s Here”).
- You’re missing a proper back-page column.
- I’d rethink the title. It’s clever, but not appetizing.

Second Place

PR Pro

Why it won: It’s an interesting idea that feels modern and timely. PR is an expanding, always-changing business, and so many employees are right out of college. I love the cover story idea/coverline about Tiger Woods, and the magazine maintains a nice voice throughout.

My only complaint is that some stories don’t quite seem to fit into the magazine as a whole (“Eat Lunch, Save Dough”).

Third Place

Pappo

Why it won: I have to admit that I was initially horrified by the idea of a magazine for paparazzi, and the main feature, blueprints of celebrity houses, in particular. But the tongue-in-cheek humor of the issue, and the brilliantly original and meta idea itself won me over. I find myself simultaneously impressed and horrified, but not bored! This girl’s got guts!

General strengths of entries: Enthusiasm and creativity

General weaknesses of entries: Overall, I’d put a little more thought into all of the story ideas. A lot of the column ideas in particular felt a little shoddy, like an afterthought. When I pitch a column for my magazine, I have to give 5 examples for future months, the thought being, if I can’t do that easily, it’s an idea without legs. It might be a good exercise for students to do the same when they’re brainstorming columns to include.

