

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE **Current**

May 12, 2005

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UCSB Rupe Conference Examines Effects of Media Conglomeration on Creativity, Competition, and Democracy

Most advocates of government by the people believe that a strong, diverse, independent press is vital to democracy.

So what happens to a democratic society when political and economic forces allow the media to fall under the control of a fortunate few? That will be the subject of "Media Ownership: Research and Regulation," a UCSB Rupe Spring Conference to be held Saturday May 21 in Santa Barbara.

"Central to the U.S. Constitution is that we have access to information to make us informed citizens," said conference co-organizer Ronald E. Rice, the Arthur N. Rupe Chair in the Social Effects of Mass Communication at UCSB. "If we don't have that diverse and free access, we can't be informed citizens and, therefore, we can't really be the democracy that we say we are."

"Media Ownership" will bring together media scholars and government and industry experts to discuss current conditions and trends in media ownership; legal, ethical, and historical foundations; research, regulation, and politics; and media access.

The conference is free and open to the public and will be held from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. in Victoria Hall, 33 W. Victoria St. in Santa Barbara.

The conference will begin with a scholarly look at "Media Concentration Trends in America: Data, Facts & Fiction" by Eli Noam, a professor of business and economics at Columbia University and an internationally respected scholar.

Rice said Noam will present material from an exhaustive 20-year study of the effects of media ownership that will soon be published as a book.

"For people interested in this topic, this book is going to be the Bible," Rice said. "No one has ever collected this kind of data. From my point of view, this book will radically change the environment of media-policy debate."

Other panelists and topics will include:

- Diane Watson, congresswoman representing California's 33rd District. "Media Ownership, Politics, and Legislation."
- Michael Epstein, professor of law, Southwestern University School of Law. "Legal Foundations of Media Ownership."
- Denise Bielby, professor of sociology, UCSB; and Molly Moloney, Ph.D. candidate in sociology, UCSB. "Global Media Ownership."
- Leah Lievrouw, professor of information studies, UCLA. "Online Oppositional Media."
- Ann Louise Bardach, journalist. "Implications of Media Ownership for Editors and Journalists."
- Ken Harwood, emeritus professor of communication, UCSB. "Model Media Firms."
- Philip Napoli, director of the Donald McGannon Communication Research Center, associate professor of communications and media management, Fordham University. He is the author of more than 20 articles and book chapters on media policy and institutions and has testified before the Federal Communications Commission many times regarding media policy issues. "Bridging Communication Research and Media Regulation."

Constance Penley, co-director of the Center for Film, Television, and New Media and co-organizer of the conference, said "Media Ownership" is a step toward keeping citizens aware of critical media issues they might not otherwise be aware of.

"We need scholars and citizens to be able to understand the debates on media ownership and to be able to participate in them in an informed way," she said.

The conference is sponsored by the Arthur N. Rupe Chair in the Social Effects of Mass Communication, Department of Communication; the Center for Film, Television, and New Media; and the Critical Issues in America Endowment, College of Letters and Science.

Further information, including a complete program, is available on the conference Web site, www.cftnm.ucsb.edu/Events/2006/rupe/index.html.

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