

Report on [International Communication Association \(ICA\) Conference, Montreal, Quebec, Canada](#), 23-26 May 2008

Report by [Jennifer Bartlett](#), Queensland University of Technology, Queensland

The ICA conference was held in Montreal, Canada this year, again featuring communication scholarship from 23 Divisions ? certainly a wealth of fantastic and interesting work on display. With so much diversity, it is impossible to attend every session with many concurrent sessions, but it also means one can pick and choose from a great array of interesting work. I tend to concentrate on the public relations sessions. However, it was interesting to note that public relations work was also featured in several other divisions. Organisational communication and philosophy of communication sessions featured public relations papers, and the Communication history division had a panel titled ?A century of struggle: The tug of war between social activism and corporate public relations. In addition, the public relations and political communication divisions co-hosted a panel session on ?Public relations campaigns and frames within business, politics and the media.

Overall, there were 61 public relations papers on show during the conference. Perennial favourites of crisis management and media relations were high on the agenda. But 2008 was the year of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) papers with 13 papers in sessions on the topic in the public relations division. A highlight of the program was the Public Relations Unplugged session which focused on crisis, reputation and CSR. The ?roundtable format allowed the audience to get interactive with the presenters in 10 minute ?individual sessions around the room. The topics covered in this session ranged from the relationships between reputation and trust across multiple stakeholders; crisis communication models; through to a range of studies on framing, contributions and decision-making systems around corporate social responsibility. On the local front, Kevin Jones and Jennifer Bartlett from QUT presented a paper on the strategic value of CSR and its implications for relationship management.

In the ?Public Relations Practice: Individual, organisation and population-level perspectives session, Joy Chia from U of South Australia presented an interesting paper on whether public relations practitioners are embracing communication complexity as relational opportunity. This session, like most others in the ICA public relations division, featured scholars from the USA, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region bringing a truly international range of perspectives and views to issues in our discipline.

There were a number of awards presented in the public relations division this year. The Bob Heath Top Paper Award went to Magda Pieczka from Queen Margaret University in Scotland. Magda has built a strong body of work on, among other things, public relations as a profession. The Plank Center Award for Top Student Paper was presented to Bryan Smith, University of Maryland.

This was also the year in which the bi-annual Grunig Outstanding dissertation and thesis awards were presented. The dissertation award winner was Dr. Jangyul Robert Kim, Assistant Professor at Colorado State University. His dissertation title was An Experimental Test of Effects of Message Sidedness, Organizational Trustworthiness, and Goodwill in the Public Discussion in Weblogs directed by Dr. Mary Ann Ferguson, University of Florida. The Masters thesis award winners (tie) were Ms. Hye Kyung Kim, Intern at Makovsky + Co, NYC for her thesis titled Stakeholders' Evaluation Processes of A Racial Crisis: The Effects of CSR and Crisis Response on Crisis Responsibility, Emotional Response, Organizational Reputation and Supportive Intentions directed by Dr. Dennis Kinsey, Syracuse University; and Ms. Andrea Schuch, Public Relations Manager, Tampa Lowry Park Zoo (Florida), for her thesis titled An Experimental Analysis of Activist Message Strategy Effect on Receiver Variables directed by Dr. Kelly Page Werder, University of South Florida. Unfortunately, there were no public relations prizes awarded at the Association level.

Public relations is the most internationalised division of ICA with almost half of the members coming from outside the USA. Most associations have a strong regional focus but ICA is seeking to live up to its name as an international association of communication scholars that can provide a global perspective to the work done at the local and regional level. With that in mind, an ICA regional conference will be held in Melbourne in 2009, in the week following ANZCA09 which will be hosted at QUT. The main ICA conference for 2009 will be held in Chicago, with Singapore being the location for the 2010 conference.

About the reviewer:

Dr Jennifer L Bartlett is Senior Lecturer in the School of Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations at the Queensland University of Technology, Australia. Jennifers research, teaching and practice are in public relations and corporate communication with particular emphasis on public relations, corporate social responsibility and legitimacy. Her work is published internationally and has received a number of best paper awards. She chairs the Membership Committee of the International Communication Association and is past Council member for the Public Relations Institute of Australia (QLD).