



Conference report: Communications Research Forum

4–5 October, Canberra

The Communications Research Forum, held annually in Canberra, provides an opportunity for researchers to share their research findings with policy makers and industry practitioners.

The Forum is hosted by the Communications Research Unit of the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts and is jointly sponsored by the University of Canber-

ra, the paper presented by the runner-up, Maureen Burns, follow this article.

Speakers at the conference included:

- Mr Eddy Chan, Commissioner, Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority, Hong Kong SAR, China.

Mr Chan described the new regulatory regime for broadcasting services in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China, which aims to encourage innovation and widen viewers' choice and to enhance Hong Kong's position as a broadcasting hub. The new regime is designed to be pro-competition, technology-neutral and business friendly.

- Ms Abigail Thomas, Project Manager, Digital and New Media Strategy, Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Ms Thomas described and compared the state of free-to-air and pay digital television in the United Kingdom with the digital television services we are likely to see in Australia. Free-to-air television appears to have a future — but perhaps not as the service we have known for the past twenty years or so.



Communications Research Forum prize winners (l-r) Maureen Burns, Harvey May and Rosemary Curtis with representatives of award sponsors, Professor Reg Coutts, Andree Wright (ABA) and Senator Richard Alston.

ra's Communication and Media Policy Unit, the University of South Australia's Centre for Telecommunications Information Networking, RMIT's Network Insight Group and the ABA.

This year, the ABA again sponsored the Forum's Student Research Competition, and Senator Richard Alston, Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, presented the awards. The ABA believes that nurturing student research in communications is an important part of developing our understanding of both how we can better use new communications technologies, and how communications affects us as a society. Student finalists are given the opportunity to present their papers to the conference, and expose their work to a wider audience.

The work of this year's Student Research Competition winner, Harvey May, has already come to the attention of the ABA: an article based on his winning paper, *Cultural diversity and Australian commercial television drama: Policy, industry and recent research contexts*, was published in the May 2000 issue of *ABA Update*. The abstracts of both the winning paper and of

For more information about the Communications Research Forum, go to www.dcita.gov.au/crf.



The ABA's Andree Wright, Director, Policy and Content Regulation, and Richard Fraser, Online Content Regulation section, presenting a 'report card' on the first six months of Australian co-regulatory scheme for Internet content.



Harvey May Queensland University of Technology

ABSTRACT

Cultural diversity and Australian commercial television drama: Policy, industry and recent research contexts

Media studies research of the 1990s illustrated an incongruity between cultural diversity in the Australian community with the representation of that diversity on commercial television screens. Australian drama in particular received much

criticism, based on the 1992 Broadcasting Services Act. In order to determine the status of cultural diversity and commercial television drama at the end of the 1990s, a casting survey of all Australian commercial drama programs broadcast in 1999 was carried out. This was complemented by interviews with industry personnel and a two week content analysis of programming. The research establishes the degree of casting for actors from culturally diverse backgrounds and offers explanations for both improvements made in the previous years and the continuing obstacles faced by some groups in gaining a place on our popular drama programs.

Senator Alston presenting Harvey May with his award



criticism for its seemingly 'Anglo' portrayal of Australian society. Most of this former research was based on program content analysis and critical approaches to studying the media. From the mid-1990s, anecdotal evidence suggested an improvement in the casting of actors from culturally diverse backgrounds. This paper contextualises policy and industry developments of the 1990s related to cultural diversity and presents new research undertaken within the commercial drama television industry. Drawing on policy documents, institutional correspondence and previous research, the paper first tracks the development of policy formation with regard to cultural diversity as influenced by the commercial television industry's representative body, advocacy groups and official authorities. The majority of this activity took place in the first half of the 1990s in a newly established broadcasting

Maureen Burns Griffith University

ABSTRACT

To speak for ourselves — something of a mystery, something of a problem: Radio Australia online

Radio Australia has always operated in a tension of organisational, national and international interests. Its value to the ABC has often been underestimated, and its role questioned, because of its perceived links to government, its international audience and its Melbourne (rather than Sydney) head office.

In a period of intense political and financial pressure, Radio Australia went Online, with some surprising results. Radio Australia Online created a domestic audience for what was previously an international short wave service; it fostered more co-operative relationships between Radio Australia and other parts of the ABC; and it created reference and archival pages for its users. The expertise of Radio Australia staff in international news presentation has proved to be a valuable asset to the ABC as a whole in the Internet era.

This paper is concerned with the questions: 'How did Radio Australia come to have a web presence?', 'How does Radio Australia use that presence?' and 'What effects does web use have on Radio Australia?' This paper is related to a larger research project which analyses ABC Online and its relation to the concept of 'nation'.

