FROM: Bram Abramson, Jeremy Shtern, Greg Taylor
TO: Kim Sawchuk—Editor, Canadian Journal of Communication
SUBJECT: Adding a “Policy” Section to the CJC: A Proposal

This memo follows up on our discussions with you to propose that the Canadian Journal of Communication add a policy section alongside its existing sections. The policy section would function as a separate section of the journal, alongside the book reviews, and tentatively be titled “Policy”, “Policy and Regulation”, “Policy Update”, or a similar title. The section would appear in both the print and electronic editions, similar to the existing sections. It would not be electronic-only.

A. Rationale

State communication policy in Canada (abbreviated here as “communication policy”) refers to the state’s ongoing intervention, or failure to intervene, in the communications sector. Communication policy therefore matters not only to communication policy research—that work which takes state policy as its explicit object—but to a wider swathe of Canadian communications research: communications policy is premised on a broader apprehension as to how communications and media interact with people, and intervenes in that interaction. Yet this process takes places within a professionalised arena from which Canadian communications research is often absent.

Adding a Policy section to the Canadian Journal of Communication (“CJC”) would address this absence and, in so doing, develop a closer link between communications policy and academic communications research in Canada. On one hand, the Policy section as envisioned in this document would bring policy stakeholders into the CJC’s fold of authors and readers, broadening the Canadian communications research dialogue, and providing part of an infrastructure by which researchers whose work is relevant to the policy process can be part of it. On the other hand, a policy section would also strengthen the CJC’s relevance within policy stakeholder communities themselves—making the journal a source of relevant information and thoughtful insight to an increased range of Canadian communications thinkers, and exposing them to research on questions on which they are active from a policy standpoint.

This proposal is directed towards the print edition of the journal. If accepted, the section would presumably be mirrored online in electronic format, similar to the other portions of the journal. Electronic publication is an important and even essential component of the proposal, particularly given its value in reaching much wider audiences outside the academic fold. But inclusion in the print edition is basic to the proposal’s goal of treating communication policy as a domain that, although time-sensitive, is both worthy of serious academic attention—and capable of careful sustained commentary of the type associated with the print medium.

B. Format

The policy section envisioned here would consist of two subsections, tentatively formatted as follows:

1. Releases

This list of policy documents released since the last CJC issue would show, for each important release:
- Title (boldface):
  - unit and agency responsible;
  - title of the release;
  - date released

- Short description:
  - type and role of release within the agency hierarchy;
  - any deadlines set out, such as in the case of CRTC Public Notices calling for comments;
  - brief description to provide context, particularly pointers to other relevant documents, where feasible;
  - contact details, if appropriate.

This list would be ordered:

- by sector (telecom, content generally, broadcasting, press, film, etc.); then
- by agency; then
- by document type (e.g. calls for comments, reports, decisions); then
- by date.

The list would be compiled by the policy editors through submissions from the policy advisory group. Once compiled, the list would be recirculated to ensure all important releases had been captured.

“Important” is, of course, an editorial decision, based on the released policy document’s impact in itself, or capacity to exemplify larger policy trends that impact, the Canadian communications sector at large. These may include decisions by government agencies, arm’s-length bodies, and coregulatory bodies at the federal or national levels and, where appropriate, at the provincial levels, including policies that affect multiple municipalities. These may also include policy releases by non-government organisations whose significant market power gives them the ability to enforce such releases, too.

2. Reviews

Certain policy documents, listed either in the same issue or in a previous issue, would be reviewed at greater length, in the style of a book review, but with special emphasis on contextual description. Where possible, a response would be included from someone involved in drafting the policy, from a stakeholder, or by some other party. The editors would have to play a special role here to ensure that the combined effect of the review and, where included, response, addressed the range of positions and valid arguments raised by the policy under review, rather than exposing only a narrow position that the authors or their organisations might advocate.

C. Roles

The description above has identified several roles whose filling would be required in order to make the proposed section work.

1. Policy Editors—Core Group

Like book review editors, 1-3 policy editors would be needed to select, oversee, solicit, and generally ensure the successful release of the policy section, from issue to issue. It is important that policy editors have a good familiarity with Canadian communication policy processes and their stakeholders.
This includes familiarity with the significant differences in the positions of the various service providers, funders, user groups, and other involved groups. The policy editors would maintain friendly communications with, and mediate among, the Policy Advisory Group members, whose individual positions and approaches would tend to differ from one another and from those of one or more Editors. Doing so would require, for instance, ensuring that the Policy & Regulation section’s quality and demeanour remained at a level sufficient that it enjoy continued credibility among Policy Advisory Group members and their communities.

2. Policy Advisory Group—Broader Group

The Policy Advisory Group would consist of ten to twenty individuals active in Canadian communication policy. This group would both ensure representation of a broad cross-section of policy stakeholder communities and position, and provide for the involvement of outstanding communications policy thinkers in crafting both the policy section and its readership. Cultivating, maintaining, and working with this Group would be among the Editors’ key tasks.

D. Getting the Ball Rolling

Should the CJC wish to move forward with this proposal, its proponents propose to act as an Initial Coordination Committee. Our task would consist of advertising for and determining a selection process for Policy Editors—particularly if any of the proponents wish to stand for Policy Editor nomination, a small outside selection committee of eminent Canadian communication policy scholars and stakeholders would likely be invited—based on the criteria indicated above.