

## What's Inside. . . and Why It Matters

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How does one rate the quality of a journal? University committees often rely on statistical "impact" ratings or manuscript acceptance rates as the major indicators of a journal's worth. But the process is much simpler for many of us, for whom the question is simply whether a journal provides information of interest or information that helps us do our jobs more efficiently. We value and look forward to receiving publications and media that are helpful or interesting, and we discount or discard everything else.

While no single issue of any publication is likely to contain information of interest to everyone, successful publications provide content that readers need and can't easily get from somewhere else. These are standing goals of the *Journal of Applied Communications*. You can help us get the content right by telling us how we're doing as this year unfolds.

For now, let me tell you about content in the current issue.

In the following editorial, I make a case for maintaining and strengthening the *Journal of Applied Communications*. While many of us are committed to this task, we need your help.

In our opening research article, longtime ACE member and academic leader Jim Evans shares his thoughts about the importance of theory in agricultural communication theories. He discusses theories he's used, theories he has found valuable, and theories he believes might help us in the future. His assertion that theories can be practical and useful to applied communications is based on a half-century of professional work and experience in the field.

Theory also plays a major role in the article written by Steve Hill and his colleagues. These researchers rely on multiple behavioral theories to help understand barriers to the adoption of environmentally sustainable water management practices. The work is important because consumers consistently rate water quality as one of the most serious health risks to their families. We need more research like this to encourage environmentally and socially responsible behaviors in our audiences.

Finally, Lisa Lundy and her associates examine one of the classic issues in science communication: the sometimes-tenuous relationship between scientists and the public. Enhancing the public's knowledge and appreciation of science is more important than ever when one considers the range of complex issues on the agenda today, such as nanotechnology and

## Introduction

biotechnology. Both of these broad areas—and many others in the news today—have direct links to and applications in agriculture, as Lundy points out.

Closing out this issue are two book reviews. The first examines Timothy Samara's *Publication Design Workbook: A Real-World Design Guide*, and the second examines Douglas Brinkley's *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*. Thanks go to Macey A. Panach, University of Arkansas, and Linda Benedict, Louisiana State University, for these contributions.

If you have ideas for future content, please call or send me a note. What we publish says a lot about us. Please help us get it right.