

S. Holly Stocking

Associate Professor of Journalism

As a young reporter at the *Los Angeles Times*, S. Holly Stocking covered campus riots and the feminist movement, contributed to the magazine *Human Behavior*, and taught journalism classes at the University of California at Los Angeles. Already, in her mid-twenties, she was discovering the rewards of a multitrack life. She learned from teaching that she liked it and embarked on Ph.D. work at Indiana University. Still ABD, she took a break to direct science writing projects at the Boys Town Center for the Study of Youth Development in Omaha, Nebraska, and emerged with a conviction that was to motivate much of her research and teaching at Indiana University: that journalists could do a better job of bringing science news to the public.

Professor Stocking wrote a dissertation on the public communication of medical science news, joined the School of Journalism faculty in 1986 after three years as a visiting assistant professor, created a two-course science news sequence, and co-wrote a monograph, *How Do Journalists Think?*, applying the findings of cognitive science to the study of newswork. Then, in 1993, she launched a pathbreaking approach to journalists' communication of science at a session of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. As one of five presenters in the session she had organized on Science and Ignorance, she developed the idea that scientific ignorance, like knowledge, is socially constructed and that media play a role in that construction. On cue, a Harvard academic rose to sing the "ignorance anthem": "Yes, we have no pat answers." When the laughter and applause had died down, the editor of the journal *Knowledge* offered to devote an entire issue to "ignorance."

Professor Stocking's contribution to that issue—written with Lisa Holstein, a School of Journalism Ph.D. student who had also worked on the panel presentation—brought the media into this new field of "ignorance studies." In their article, "Constructing and Reconstructing Scientific Ignorance," Stocking and Holstein proposed motivations for ignorance claims made by scientists and explored journalists' motivations for amplifying, downplaying, or even ignoring these ignorance claims when they report on scientific research. In subsequent articles, book chapters, and conference papers over the next 15 years, Professor Stocking further developed a theoretical framework for understanding the social construction of scientific ignorance in media accounts.

The significance of this work became ever clearer as companies used ignorance claims to discredit scientific findings and theories that would undermine their profits. In 2008, Stocking and Holstein reported their study on how the hog industry in North Carolina attempted to discredit a scientist's work by using ignorance claims like those pioneered by tobacco companies and global warming opponents. The article's conclusion highlighted the social importance of this approach to media studies:

As the strategic use of ignorance claims to manufacture doubt in scientific controversies grows, public misunderstanding of important scientific issues may be expected to accelerate. Given this likelihood, it is imperative that we come to understand the conditions under which journalists use those claims intended to construct scientific ignorance and confuse the public.

Professor Stocking has put her theoretical insights to work in graduate courses in science journalism that have drawn students from across the university. Some students became scientists better prepared to talk about their work with journalists; others became journalists who took internships and positions in some of the nation's best science publications, earning the School of Journalism's science program a spot among the top science writing programs listed by the National Association of Science Writers' 1997 *Field Guide to Science Writing*.

A demanding but caring teacher, Professor Stocking has devoted hours to conversations with individual students and has taken them to conferences where they could meet science writers and report on research presentations. She has found delight in introducing both graduate and undergraduate students to literary journalism, nurturing her own artistic side as well as theirs. Her imagination, intelligence, and dedication as a teacher have been acknowledged by university-wide and School of Journalism teaching awards. She has been active in campus efforts to improve teaching, including the university's Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching, editing one FACET collection on teaching strategies and contributing to others. She has drawn on her understanding of ignorance, risk, and cognitive bias for articles published in *Journalism Educator*.

Professor Stocking spent a year as a visiting scholar in the history and philosophy of science program at the University of Cambridge and has served as a senior editor for *Science Communication* and on the editorial boards of other journals. Encyclopedias have tapped her expertise, and she is currently preparing a collection of *New York Times* science articles for the Congressional Quarterly Press. Honoring her teaching in science writing and journalism ethics, her contributions to research, and her service to the public understanding of science, in 2007 the American Association for the Advancement of Science elected her a fellow; she was only the second nonscientist at IU to earn that honor.

There is, however, another side to Holly Stocking. Emergency liver surgery in 1989 recalled her to a recognition that some things matter more than a single-minded pursuit of career. Caring for her elderly mother some years later just reinforced that recognition. In personal essays, articles, and workshops, she has explored ways to honor nonacademic values and interests in a university environment that often appears dominated by the head at the cost of the heart. With students in the senior journalism ethics course, she has explored the concept of "good work" as something richer and broader than narrow competence. Her studies with Buddhist monks in Bloomington have led to work in progress exploring the concept of mindful journalism and to a chapter in the 2009 *Handbook*

of *Media Ethics* where, again breaking new ground, she applied Buddhist ethics to media practice.

Throughout her career, Holly Stocking has challenged journalists, students, and colleagues to bring their work lives in line with their highest values as human beings, returning again and again to a question that writer Annie Dillard posed in *The Writing Life*: “What would you begin writing if you knew you would die soon?” It is a question Professor Stocking expects will continue to guide her in the years ahead.

~Carol Polsgrove