>> INSIDE: CAN CONNECTIVITY EXPLAIN THE CONTINUED SUCCESS OF THE COLLEGIATE PRESS?

college media REVIEW

THE FLAGSHIP PUBLICATION OF COLLEGE MEDIA ADVISERS, INC.

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Convergence

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Convergence at Campus Newspapers

>> Collegiate Newspapers a Natural Fit for Community Journalism

Editor's corner

Those advisers of us who cut our teeth when newspapers were king came of professional age when taking risks centered largely on how boldly we would gather the news or play it on the page. Even though newspapers, in the macro view of the 20th century, were already on a decline, they were healthy vibrant beasts with few competitive threats when it came to providing in-depth information to their potential audiences.

Those days are long, gone and at times still sought for. But it was a bit jarring recently to hear that journalists who need to be both resilient and resolute in their quest to meet the demands of their audiences should openly accept the prospect of failing in their quest to succeed. Failure in the traditional newsroom used to mean leaving the editor's office with a little less skin that you had going in (and still can). But now it can also mean marking another option off the checklist of strategies that might or might not bring success to publications in uncertain times.

At least, that's what I drew from a conversation with long-time adviser Mark Witherspoon of Iowa State University, who had earlier reminded forward-thinking advisers on the listserv not to leave out the 3 R's of Journalism 101 when it came to listing the skillsets up and coming journalists need. It doesn't get much older-school than Witherspoon when it comes to the bedrock values of journalism, so it came out of left field to hear him say we ought to be prepared for failure. And the reason for that, he said, is because nobody yet knows the forms success is going to take.

"We're all geared for success," he said. "We need to be geared to at least the possibility that we're going to fail. So the question is, 'how do you get over that fear?' I'm still seeing a print mentality…in our newsroom."

And you know it don't come easy, he points out. "We don't stop teaching the basics, but we have to get to the point where we're teaching new tools, " he said. "It's a cultural change. We need to be teaching everything we've taught before, and the technology."

Witherspoon likens this sea change in the scope of journalism to the revival in interest among the college generation of the 1970s in the aftermath of Watergate. "This is the most stupendous teaching moment since I've been advising and at least since Woodward and Bernstein," he said. "We need to find that passion (that's) in our students on how to do things."

Understatement of the 21st Century? "Our job is harder to do now," Witherspoon says.

And it's harder on both the academic and advising sides of the aisle. This issue of CMR offers a broad look at how academic programs and student publications are attempting to cope with the changing tides: Kay Colley, a faculty member and adviser at Texas Wesleyan University, reports on how academic programs are tackling the massive task of revising curriculums that will embrace the expected and the unexpected evolutions in the media industry. Stephen Wolgast, an instructor and newspaper adviser at Kansas State University, relates how a sampling of advisers across the U.S. are coping with the same issues that Witherspoon points out.

While the major publications continue to grapple with their enormity, there's hope predicted on the community newspapers landscape, based on a couple of articles inside. SUNY Plattsburgh's Shawn W. Murphy, an associate professor and adviser to the weekly newspaper, points out that community newspapers, healthier on the whole than their larger counterparts, are a great starting ground for young journalists who like local engagement and who bring the technological savvy many of the smaller papers lack. And Flagler College adviser Brian Thompson, the recipient of the 2009 Ken Nordin Research Award sponsored by CMA, explores how the interrelationship between college journalists and their peers contributes to the success of college newspapers—community newspapers, after all—in the first place.

And as always, our staff wants to know what you think about these issues.

— Robert Bohler, Editor

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On Deck THIS FALL

It's one thing to provide readers and viewers with converged information on a multi-platform Web site, another matter entirely to develop backpack student journalists who can do it all on assignment. But the industry's demanding it, and two advisers from college and pro backgrounds explore how to can develop a strong MoJo for your staffs. And we also take a look at integrated marketing campaigns can help make your news product stronger in the long run.

CONVERGENCE

Education in the Curriculum

by Kay Colley

When deregulation hit the media industry with the Telecommunications Act of 1996, convergence became the buzzword of the day. Pundits predicted the demise of newspaper empires. Suddenly these newly "converged" newsrooms would rise up and overtake the industry, leaving readers, viewers and listeners with one voice and no competition in the media landscape.

As the job descriptions for newspapers and television stations began to change in heralding this new era of convergence, journalism programs throughout the nation responded with objectives to produce the new "converged" journalist by altering curriculum. But just where in that process are programs today? Do they produce "converged" journalists? And, just what *is* the definition of convergence?

The answer depends on the source. According to Kenneth C. Killebrew, author of *Managing Media Convergence: Pathways to Journalistic Cooperation*, convergence implies information sharing and enhancement to create a message that is available in multiple media platforms to deliver through a Web-based operating system.

Andrew Nachison of The American Press Institute focuses on the strategy and tools behind the idea of convergence, leaving the reader/viewer with an informational product that is a conglomeration of print, audio, video and interactive digital information.

And there's a difference, says Paul Grabowicz, senior lecturer, associate dean and director of the New Media Program at the University of California- Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, between the industry term convergence and what UC-Berkeley teaches—new media and multimedia.

"Convergence is more of an industry term, and multimedia is more of a 'what are journalists doing?' term," Grabowicz said. "Convergence is sort of following industry patterns. Multimedia is trying to figure out how to stay ahead of what's going on."

That is what Berkeley did when it undertook curriculum revision at the graduate level. Berkeley began the process of teaching online publishing in 1995 and then in 2000, reacting to student demand, revised the curriculum to have a more multimedia flavor. Instead of making the newly created multimedia reporting course a requirement, the course was first instituted as an elective.

"We went through various different permutations trying to figure out how do we teach the skills part but also how do we teach the storytelling part," Grabowicz said. "By about three years ago, about 80 percent of the students were taking it as an elective, so we decided to make it a requirement for all incoming students in the fall of 2007, and that pretty much didn't work."

Faculty found the course difficult to integrate into the same semester as the basics of reporting class. Another problem was that the course didn't offer a real-world experience.

To solve the problem, the school sought grant funding from the Ford Foundation and began hyper-local websites that covered smaller communities in the California Bay Area as part of the multimedia reporting course. Faculty members took

another shot at the curriculum to iron out the problems of integrating with the basic reporting skills class. The solution: intensive training boot camps running approximately 13 hours a day.

"The presumption is that when the students are done, they can go into their reporting class and start applying this polished multimedia journalism from the start," Grabowicz. "That seems to have worked."

As a graduate school program, Grabowicz admits the curricular revision at Berkeley was probably easier, but he thinks a similar program would work at the undergraduate level as well.

"The question is whether you can steer it through the bureaucratic requirements that are there," he said. "It would be more problematic because we basically said to the students coming in, this is the only thing you're going to be doing this semester.' That allowed us to occupy their time—13 hours a day for five days a week the first three weeks of the semester."

Grabowicz suggested that for undergraduates a more likely solution would be having students do a multimedia boot camp in the summer, or restructuring the program to introduce multimedia training following the first year of courses.

"I think the approach seems to work, much better than any other we've looked into or tried," he said.

At the University of Missouri at Columbia, a new program emphasis was launched in Fall 2005, the school's first new major in more than 50 years. The new emphasis, Convergence Journalism, offers specialized courses that focus on integration across media along with the more traditional journalism curriculum. The convergence concentration courses are offered after a journalism student completes his or her core journalism courses.

While the department includes six faculty members, the course syllabi list faculty members throughout the School of Journalism as guest lecturers. The Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute began housing the Convergence Department in its new building in September 2008. The institute was launched in 2004 "to develop and test ways to improve journalism through new technology and improved processes," according to the Institute's web site.

A 2002 study indicates that academic programs are moving in varying degrees to address the demand for convergent-related curricula. Camille Kraeplin of Southern Methodist University and Carrie Anna Criado, formerly of SMU, attempted to survey 105 undergraduate journalism programs from across the United States, to discover the state of convergence journalism curricula. This study included journalism programs of all sizes:, 19 percent had fewer than 100 majors, 37 percent had at least least 100 majors but fewer than 500; 28 percent had at least 500 majors but fewer than 1,000, and 16 percent had 1,000 or more.

Of the 46 deans or department chairs who responded to Kraeplin and Criado, 85 percent of their programs had adapted curricula in response to industry trends toward convergence. Within that group, 77 percent said that the change was only minor while 23 percent said their changes had been major with complete revisions of the curriculum. Twenty-nine percent of the programs that had made changes said that the changes had been in place for more than three years, while 37 percent of the respondents said the changes had been in place for one or two years.

At the 2009 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Jeremy Sarachan presented his findings on current technological and pedagogical practices in convergence education. He surveyed 401 department chairs of accredited and non-accredited departments affiliated with AEJMC. He received 110 responses to his survey and found that new media or convergence media topics tend to be included in specific, upper-level classes in journalism departments. Many convergence and new media courses were also offered throughout the university, which allows students to take courses in web design from the computer science department, for example, or web writing from the English department.

> "We're in an era of relentless change. That means we're going to have to change what we do every semester from now on. If we can learn that lesson, then we can model something for the industry."

Sarachan also discovered that a little more than half of the departments surveyed intend to include convergent journalism as a new topic of study within the next two years. But while some undergraduate journalism departments have finally begun to respond to the rise of convergence media by instituting coursework, other departments have a 13-year lead in the race.

One is at Abilene Christian University in Texas.

"We made our initial changes toward a convergence model in 1996," said Dr. Cheryl Bacon, professor and department chair of the journalism and mass communication at Abilene Christian. "Now we made some additional modification since then. At that point is when we said everybody needs to leave here with the same baseline skills because of all the issues that we saw coming in terms of convergence."

ACU designed what it calls the JMC core. Faculty members in the department determined that every graduate from ACU should leave with good writing skills, good visual skills, good digital skills and a foundation in law and ethics.

"So we designed the JMC core to accomplish that," Bacon said. "That was our first step in the convergence process. We have modified a couple of requirements in courses since then, but the core, in large part, still stands."

A trip to Apple headquarters inspired the department to conclude that media were becoming more alike. Then they asked the question: "So what is everyone going to have to know to be success? And that's kind of where we started," Bacon said.

Throughout the introduction of the JMC core, the faculty saw other changes occurring, including less differentiation between video and photography.

"I would like to think that because of our size (approximately 250 majors) we were able to make some changes ahead of the really large universities," Bacon said, "but it was very intentional. It was an attempt to look 10, 20 years down the road and say, people aren't just going to be preparing for one kind of career anymore. What do we need to do so that they're prepared for whatever is out there."

ACU's student media has always operated as laboratory media under the auspices of the department, which has allowed for closer integration between coursework and the student media and content flowing from courses to student media.

"We have been able to look at curriculum and student media at the same time," Bacon said. "It has been very, very helpful for us to have curriculum and student media integrated—the continuity that exists, as well as additional staffing. Students are required for their course to assist with production of a TV show. They're required for their course to write whatever the managing editor tells them to write."

The result has been improvements in both areas, more hands-on experiences for students, and ultimately increased job opportunities across media platforms.

Faculty at the University of Nevada, Reno, have begun using a new model of convergence journalism education where students experiment with cameras and video equipment from day one. This is the first semester the university has introduced technology into the classroom in these lower-level courses.

"I think we've found that a lot of the students coming in really don't know what they want to specialize in, so this kind of helps them figure that out, and hopefully gives them some literacy across the different storytelling media," said Larry Dailey, professor and Reynolds Chair of Media Technology at the university's journalism school. "One of the big challenges on this model is when you have specialized courses. Matching up an instructor for the general course is pretty easy because it's easy to find an instructor who's good at one thing or so. It's difficult to find faculty that can speak knowledgably about what communicates in a still picture setting, what makes good audio, and what makes good written stories."

It is because of this dilemma that many researchers have recommended a team-teaching approach to convergence skills, allowing faculty to teach to their strengths. Another approach that has been advocated by Dr. Ann Auman, professor in the School of Communications at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, and Dr. Jonathan Lillie, assistant professor of online journalism and digital media in the Department of Communication at Loyola University, is a learning-community approach where overarching projects are tackled in multiple courses, allowing for the integrated approach of today's converged newsrooms.

Despite the multiple models, it seems that adding elements of convergence media into college and university curriculums is what the majority of educators will be doing in the next two years, if they haven't already.

In terms of a model of education, Dailey is more interested in solving larger problems that continue to plague journalism rather than focusing on this next big thing of convergence.

"I'm not so interested in the technologies as I am in how do you build a culture where you never again say, 'well we got it right so we can quit changing our curriculum.'" he says. "I think the lesson for colleges and universities is we're in an era of relentless change, especially the communications industry. For colleges and universities to train students that work in the realm of communications, that means we're going to have to change what we do every semester from now on. If we can learn that lesson, then we can model something for the industry."

"We're in an era of relentless change. That means we're going to have to change what we do every semester from now on. If we can learn that lesson, then we can model something for the industry."

Dr. Kay Colley

is currently faculty liaison and student media director at Texas Wesleyan University, where she is also an assistant professor in the Department of Communication and teaches journalism and public relations courses. Her more than 14 years in communication education also includes full-time faculty appointments at the University of Texas at Arlington in public relations, the University of North Texas in journalism and Blinn College in journalism. Colley has advised student newspapers at UNT and Blinn, and her professional background includes stints in public relations, magazines, daily newspapers and weekly newspapers. She has a master's degree in international journalism and a doctorate in higher education.

Convergence at Campus Newspapers

by Stephen Wolgast

Most American professional newsrooms, their newspapers already threatened with extinction by Web competition, are doing everything they can to establish digital connections with their readers.

And college newsrooms are not much different. But although the web is pervasive in college students' lives, the notion of using it to share their journalism isn't always at the forefront of their minds, many advisers say. When it's emphasized in their classes, they seem more likely to practice it in their newsrooms, according to student media advisers. But when it isn't, the college paper's Web efforts tend to be left to the whim of student journalists' interest. And even as advisers push the web, they themselves sometimes have other challenges that keep them from making that shift a priority.

The biggest challenge is revenues. Newspapers that rely on advertising income mirror professional publications in that dollars remain connected to the print version. Making online ad sales at college publications even more difficult is the low interest among the student body in their campus papers' web sites, according to many advisers, based on the tracking of sources' hits to their sites.

For example, the Web site of the *Northern Star,* the student newspaper at Northern Illinois University, gets about 4,000 hits a day, only a quarter of the number of copies it prints. At *The Red & Black,* the University of Georgia's student paper, around 80 percent of Web hits come from outside the Athens area.

And as long as there's a print version, student editors have dozens of galleys to fill every day before they can think of other obligations. At the University of Kansas, Malcolm Gibson, news adviser of the *University Daily Kansan,* understands the pressure student editors face. "They walk in in the morning and they have a 28-page paper to fill," he said. "It really grabs their attention." Add their college activities – classes, dating, socializing – and the time left over to dedicate to their part-time journalism jobs is small.

Because many student papers survive on ad sales, either partly or totally, some advisers feel they need to keep students focused where the revenue is. Peter Waack, the general manager of the *Daily Orange* at Syracuse University, keeps an eye on how much time students spend preparing content that appears only online. "If I feel they're getting too into the video stuff," he said, "I kind of mention to the student editors that 90 percent of our income comes from readers" of the version in print, not online.

Gibson, whose *Daily Kansan* is partially funded by the student government, is looking for new revenue streams for the publication. "We're trying to move revenue online – starting other web sites and starting a sports weekly," he said. "(The) student senate keeps cutting, so we have to generate the revenue and sustain ourselves."

Other papers haven't let financial pressures keep them from shifting priorities. Take the University of Missouri, where professionals manage and edit the the *Missourian,* and nine journalism classes provide the staff.

> *"They'll get a sandwich and put it on Facebook, but the idea of posting an accident is just foreign to them."*

"We are Web-first, period," says executive editor Tom Warhover. "Everything is directed toward the web. While it's not an afterthought, print *(Daily Missourian)* comes after."

Another Midwestern university embraces the web because the students expect it. At Northwestern University, students who walk into *The Daily Northwestern* newsroom are familiar not only with the basics of journalism, but the basics of convergence.

"I credit the undergraduate curriculum at Medill," the journalism school, said Stacia Campbell, general manager of Students Publishing Co. "They're focusing on the on-line product as well." That means her student staffers have seen the future and are ready to test themselves. "We're getting upperclassmen who already have that experience," she said. "They come to us and really want to ramp it up," knowing that when they publish online, their work is accessible far beyond the reach of delivery trucks.

But convergence efforts in the classroom don't always translate into converts, and the intensity of student interest in the web varies by newsroom, at least among the nine student newspapers contacted for this article.

At the University of Georgia, where *The Red & Black* also relies on students in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communications to staff its newsroom and to teach the importance of the web, each semester begins with adviser Ed Morales and his student editors training new staff to record and upload audio, to use video cameras and to employ other web skills. . "Grady College is slowly trying to adapt to that," Morales says. "It's a good college. Obviously, they crank out just fabulous news writers. But they've been really slow to address this Web convergence, but they're working on it, to their credit."

What's more, learning how the web works takes student journalists only so far at an online news publication. When Morales first started his job at *The Red & Black* in January 2006, the sports staff didn't post results of weekend games until Monday, because that's when the next issue of the paper was published.

"The one thing they don't get is doing the update now," he said. "There's no sense of competition – they're not getting beat on a story."

Now, scores are posted shortly after games end, and reporters know that they need to file copy for the web before filing for print. But the students' lack of urgency with news still puzzles him; he knows they're familiar with the immediacy the web provides. "They'll get a sandwich and put it on Facebook, but the idea of posting an accident is just foreign to them," he said.

Take a walk through the library or the newsroom and a random look at an undergraduate's computer screen, and the odds are even that the page being vieed is on Facebook. Social media are essential to these students' lives, and they're not just sharing their luncheon menus, though there's plenty of that. Facebook and, to a lesser extent, Twitter are used in newsrooms for editors to post story assignments and for reporters to keep in touch on deadline. E-mail is still required reading, but it's not always primary reading.

Why, then, don't student journalists use online tools to share news – journalism—with their audiences, and not just sandwiches? It's hard to say with any certainty, particularly when considering the number of publications on campus that don't offer online journalism curriculum..

At Northern Illinois, there's no class that specifically covers online journalism, which leaves the student paper to take the lead teaching web skills, adviser Jim Killam said. "They're learning it by doing it rather than in the classroom," Killam observed. "There's probably more going on here at the Star than students would get in the classes."

The Northern Star relies on alumni to teach new students how to produce web content, and student editors who learned while on internships keep the ball rolling during the semester. "It's a slow process of integrating it into our newsroom," said Killam. "You teach all the stuff you used to have to teach, then you have to pile this on top of it."

One of the biggest convergent shifts for newspaper staffs is to learn video skills, a particular challenge at the University of Washington, where the broadcast program closed in the 1990s. "Any multi-media skills the students have came with them," said Kristin Mills, director of Student Publications and adviser to *The Daily.* If students are unfamiliar with web skills, student editors train the newcomers. "For the first few segments, they're coached very closely," she said, and then they're on their own. Students at *The Daily* occasionally find the learning curve too steep. "Some people just leave," she said.

Other journalism curricula have embraced the web revolution. The University of Southern California's journalism school has

its own student-run web site for news, neontommy.org. Mona Cravens, director of Student Publications at USC, points out that with the online news published by *The Daily Trojan,* students can pick up their convergence skills in the *Trojan* newsroom or at the journalism school. "If they're not learning over here, learning online editing, they can learn it over there," she said.

The University of Kansas starts teaching multimedia in its introductory courses and keeps going. The journalism school offers specific classes on convergence that are mandatory for journalism majors. "They're knowing how to do [video] cameras, do story-telling," adviser Gibson said. "We don't have to teach them in the newsroom."

And on many campuses, it's a combination of classroom instruction and newsroom training.

At Northwestern, reporters new to the newsroom spend time in a special training program in addition to the classroom. "That's a major part of Medill's undergraduate program," Campbell said. "There's a requirement that they go through our development desk – you produce 'x' number of stories" before they advance, she said.

And likewise at the state flagship universities of Kansas, Texas at Austin, Georgia and Syracuse University, where Waack says the students' combination of increasing simplicity in technology and the students' increasing aptitudes make for increasingly shorter training times.

Daily Texan adviser Richard Finnell says he doesn't believe the instruction time compromises the teaching of traditional journalism skills to any significant degree. "Most of them learn this stuff really fast," said Finnell. "They pick it up from each other really fast, or they learn it in class and come in here and just fly."

Or, as Morales of *The Red & Black* phrases it, "They see the web as a necessary evil instead of something they focus on."

Basic skills remain the emphasis at Missouri, though Warhover acknowledges that the question of teaching journalism versus technical skills is a challenge. "The long answer is, that is a topic we wrestle with almost every semester," he said. "Philosophically, the answer tends to be, our job is to teach them stories. Our job is to teach them critical thinking." He said the objective in teaching software skills is "to load them up with a baseline of technology." As an example, he said that students are introduced to specialized software like Flash over just a few days. "If they really want to learn it they have to do it on their own," he said.

Warhover takes a long view of those facets of journalism that occasionally outshine the others. "You'll find a small number that just really get into it – into video, just anything," he said. "Just as in the past there were students who were all about investigative reporting or whatever. The question for us is, how do you feed that passion? And the answer, and I know I'm sounding like a broken record, is to channel it into story telling. "

Focusing on journalism plays out in unusual ways on some campuses when it's time to fill newsroom convergence jobs. At Southern California, "We'll have either a strong tech student out of computer science or engineering, but they don't have journalistic judgment," Cravens said. "Or we'll have a journalism student who doesn't know beans about technology."

The same thing happens at *The Red & Black,* Morales said. "We find a lot of our top web people aren't in the journalism school," he said. "My best web person last semester was a biology student who loved playing with toys," Morales said.

The motivation to build and maintain an online presence comes and goes as the students do. "It really depends on our editor in chief and how interested they are in promoting it," said Waack. Over the last two years, student editors at Syracuse added video blogs because they were interested in the web. It's not always like that, though. "I've learned that if they're not interested in it then there's no use in my trying to force the thing if it's not their passion," he said.

> *"You teach all the stuff you used to teach, then you have to pile this on top of it."*

Other students have figured out that having web skills will make them more desirable when they're looking for work. So even if they don't want to take a lead role as a paper's online editor, they want at least a little experience, according to USC's Cravens. "Our students seem most concerned about equipping themselves with whatever skills they need to succeed," she said. "I think they'll grab at any type of skill to round out their resume to be competitive in the job market."

Finding a job remains the ultimate payoff for a journalism graduate. Advisers know the competition is not only tough, but fierce. Convergence skills, they agree, are one way to make stronger candidates of graduates. "All my students in the video program have gotten a job," Mills said, pointing out that not all her former students at Washington apply everything they learned once they're working professionally. But she doesn't see that as a liability. "Whether they actually use the skills in the next job or not, they help you be a better story-teller."

At Georgia, Morales knows who will succeed. "The students I've had who really wanted jobs have gotten them, because they really wanted to be journalists," said Morales, who, with 20 years' experience in professional newsrooms, helps students find jobs and keeps in touch with them after they've found work. Once they do, many realize only after leaving campus how important the Internet is to their employers. "Some of the students who've left and write back say they have no idea this is so much of what we do."

The flip side is that students who now skip convergence education, whether in the classroom or the newsroom, do so at their peril. "Some don't want to do it and they don't have to," Finnell said. "They can pretend they're going to be print journalists for the next 30 years."

Stephen Wolgast

is the news adviser to the *Kansas State Collegian* at Kansas State University, where he is also the associate director of student publications and an instructor in the A. Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications. He was a design editor at *The New York Times* for nine years, and previously worked at newspapers including the *Akron Beacon Journal, The (New Orleans) Times-Picayune* and *The Baltic Independent* in Tallinn, Estonia. He holds an M.S. in journalism from Columbia University.

BACK TO THE FUTURE:

College newspaper experience a natural fit at the community level

by Shawn W. Murphy

When Benjamin Harris' pamphlet-size *Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick* was published in Boston on Sept. 25, 1690, it was this country's first community newspaper. The intended-monthly never produced a second issue, though, after the Crown suppressed it for what was deemed to be content unbefitting to a king. Fourteen years later, John Campbell "published by authority" the *Boston News-Letter*, the first community newspaper to see a second issue. Business considerations were an after-thought; Harris' newspaper was a true public service, with the back page left blank rather than filled with advertisements.

Fast-forward 200 years to a time fueled by the Industrial Revolution when there is a continuously published community newspaper in nearly every town, with most towns having more than one, sometimes many more. By the turn of the 20th century, newspaper revenue had shifted from primarily political party interests to ads from these industries and businesses. Reveling about the significance of small-town community newspapers, William Allen White, the famed editor of the *Emporia (Kan.) Gazette*, wrote in a 1916 *Harper's Monthly* article titled "The Country Newspaper" that they were "the incarnation of the town spirit."

"It is the country newspaper bringing together daily the threads of the town's life . . . that reveals us to ourselves," he wrote, adding, "Our papers, our little country papers, seem drab and miserably provincial to strangers; (sic) yet we who read them read in their lines the sweet, intimate story of life."

Fast-forward another 100 years through the TV age to a time powered by the Internet Revolution when there appears to be an imploding newspaper industry as a result of a changing media landscape, evolving technology, an antiquated business model, and a deep economic recession. A number of towns and small cities now have one, or no, newspaper, and some predict the demise of newspapers easily within our lifetime. That would seem to be a no-brainer prediction when you consider that "in the first half of 2009, 123 TV news shows were canceled, 106 newspapers folded, 110 bureaus closed, 556 magazines died, and 12,000 journalists lost their jobs," according to an article in the September/October 2009 issue of *Mother Jones*.

What went wrong? What lessons are learned from this? And what does the future have in store for community newspapers and for a student journalist who plans a professional career?

Brian Steffens, the executive director of the National Newspaper Association, says "what went wrong" was, in part, the urban-suburban growth. "I think what's happened with big city papers, not necessarily by design as they grew to encompass suburbs, is that they lost sight and lost community ties," said Steffen, who contends that the success of local newspapers tends to start first with the connection of the paper to

IMAGE COURTESY OF FLICKR USER FACEMEPLS

the community, a connection he feels has always worked to the benefit of the paper and the community. This connection, he says, was lost over time as newspapers expanded with various zoned editions and tried to be everything to everyone in a wider circulation and distribution area with additional opportunities for advertising revenue. And for publicly-owned chain papers, this growth was necessary in order to satisfy the corporate demands for ever-increasing profits. In some instances this ownership model worked well, but other times it did not, especially when loan agreements seemed suddenly inflated when the recession took hold and advertising revenues tanked.

For a *Publishers Auxiliary* cover story in March 2008, Steffens was quoted as saying: "There are plenty of community newspapers that are maintaining or growing double-digit profit margins and many that are growing circulation and readership. I get more calls about new papers starting up than I get from publishers who are considering shutting down. The pace of community papers being bought and sold the past two years indicates a healthy and vibrant community newspaper market."

So, does this still hold true less than two years later?

"A little less so today" Steffens answered. "As a whole, they are weathering the recession better than dailies. A year ago we weren't in recession. We are seeing declines in ad dollars, not readership. We are *not* losing ad revenue to digital media. Instead, to a cyclical cycle in the economy. It's about the recession."

Steffens adds that community newspapers are still vital and the outlook is strong, that smaller community papers aren't experiencing the financial troubles to the extent that bigger city papers are. Data about the financial health of newspapers typically accounts for just the largest 100 to 250 newspapers of the thousands of newspapers nationwide. The NNA's survey of community newspaper readership is conducted during the summer and released in late September. At *CMR's* press time, the results of this year's survey were not available, but the NNA anticipates that the data will show that the state of community newspapers was generally solid in 2009.

While Steffens points out that there are pros and cons with newspapers being publicly versus privately owned, he acknowledges that chains have to show almost daily results to stockholders. By contrast, a privately owned community newspaper can tighten its belt and take less profit for awhile. Moreover, he adds, "There's not a lot of media competition locally. That's a difference." Therefore, community newspapers might be better-suited to weather the economic storm.

So, with many big city and national newspapers folding or hemorrhaging, are we returning to the days when the focus was simply on producing local news for local folks? Are we re-embracing the independently owned community newspaper? Are we going back to the future? And should we, as journalism educators, be steering our students toward these jobs?

Yes, say several industry insiders. Professional community newspapers are becoming even more viable alternatives for emerging journalism graduates as opportunities where they can do good journalism and employ their multimedia skills for small, old-school newsrooms in need of them.

"Don't ignore smaller papers," Steffens advises. "There's value in working for community newspapers to pay your dues, "I find that a good, young journalist can go to a community paper and be editor within two years, but you need to know how to run a business, a community newspaper."

Steffens notes that despite the soured economy, he gets calls from publishers at smaller papers looking for graduates who unfortunately tend to shy away from these community publications due, in part, to low pay. "But, man, you can do a lot and be real valuable right out of the gate, where at a bigger paper you're a cog in the wheel for awhile," Steffens said. "At community papers reporters get better clips – clips that make a difference to people in your community, people you see every day. At big city papers you are isolated by writing too large of a scope for your audience. I think there's a future in small journalism."

The NNA defines a community newspaper as "any newspaper…committed to serving a particular community," which could be "geograph-

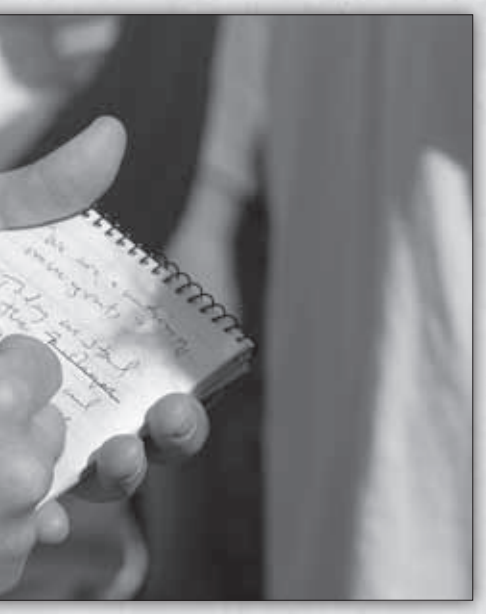

IMAGE COURTESY OF FLICKR USER ALEX-S

IMAGE COURTESY OF FLICKR USER ENGAGE-TO!

ic, political, social or religious." This old-school, paper-and-ink trade association, established in 1885, whose mission is "to protect, promote and enhance America's community newspapers"

And the NNA acknowledges on its Web, some of those "exist only in cyberspace."

And the community newspapers offer opportunity for tech-savvy journalism grads, notes Steffens, because the current staff at many of them "doesn't know how or what to do" with Web technology. That makes college graduates trained in basic multimedia journalism "invaluable" at these papers run by traditionalists. "If you have any multimedia or technology skills, you can really be the instigator, not the follower," he said. "A young journalist could really make a difference. "

One such young journalist is Josh Williams, a 2002 graduate from SUNY Plattsburgh who majored in journalism and minored in photography. His college newspaper and internship experiences landed him a job as a photographer with the *New York Post* in 2003, where he learned about multimedia journalism and in the fall of 2007 took a hiatus from the *Post* and began a community newspaper, the *Genesee Sun,* in a rural community in New York state. By the next year, the paper had folded, primarily, Williams says, because of printing and distribution expenses necessary to reach homes in this rural area that lacked Internet or access with more than a dial-up modem.

But for Williams it was a sacrifice that was rewarding in non-financial ways. "I am proud of what I did," he said. "People in this agricultural small-town community really did respect the work I put in. It's a sacrifice, but it (community news) is the future. "It's a clear necessity. On a community level, people work long hours and they don't have time to attend the meetings and stay up to date on happenings."

He predicts that community newspapers that are struggling will thrive once they embrace multimedia journalism and take full advantage of the opportunity afforded by their Web site with journalistic content and advertising possibilities.

"The profit margin is 10 times better online than in print," he said. "And you can do so much more (with content) online.

"Publishers of community papers are terrified of technology, of advances in the Web, and in losing profit from the print end. It's an old-school mentality: If it's broken, don't fix it. But if you don't, you're going to be on the unemployment line."

Williams echoes Steffens' assessment of the opportunities that await Web-groomed journalists: "It's going to make them more viable employees," he says. "It's not rocket science. Take Final Cut Pro, do voice-overs, cut and paste, write, put it online."

In August Williams left the *Post* to start working as a senior producer DNAinfo.com, which he sees as the "community newspaper" of the future – an online-only, hyper-local news Web site that is initially scheduled to launch operations in Manhattan late in 2009, with plans to expand nationwide.

DNAinfo.com's beta Web site included a mission statement that read much like any other community newspaper but with a multimedia twist that reflects the journalistic era in which we now live and looks to the future of our trade. It read, in part: "We produce local news, better. We offer more than your block, but are rooted in your community. We'll give you concise, accurate information about your city when you want it – on your phone, your computer, and anywhere else we can. We'll offer original, aggressive reporting on critical topics that shape Manhattan, as well as bring you the best news, commentary, blogs and listings about New York."

So, what *will* the future hold for journalism and community newspapers? Since none of us have that crystal ball, everything is speculation. But it is undoubtedly true that there will always be the need for newspaper-minded journalists – not untrained citizen bloggers – to cover local news for a captive local audience. Community newspapers are, after all, typically the sole source of news in depth for its citizenry.

Case in point, the daily *Press-Republican* in Plattsburg, N.Y.

"The newspaper not only is the primary reporter of all local events and one of the primary leaders of local action via its editorials, it is actually practically the sole generator of community news," explains editor Bob Grady of the CNHI newspaper that covers a vast three-county region in rural swath of northern New York. "We break stories that are picked up by other media. We alone regularly cover county, city, town, village and school boards. If you think of the local TV station [NBC affiliate WPTZ] as our primary competition as a news gatherer, consider that the station has perhaps two or three reporters for our three-county region and beyond; we have 15 or more, counting sports and not counting our many freelance writers. If a local newspaper were not covering this region, there would be comparatively no news coverage at all. We generate almost all coverage."

And if the *Press-Republican* were to go under, what impact would that have on that community? Says Grady: "Governments on all levels would be invited to operate for all practical purposes without anyone reporting, questioning or criticizing them. Government virtually without independent monitoring is a danger to the people who created it and whom it is there to serve. Secondarily, I can't imagine any community feeling complete without its (local) newspaper"

Grady believes that the future of community newspapers is still secure, despite grim predictions of losing all readers to the Web. He uses his paper, with a daily circulation of about 19,000 daily, 21,000 on Sundays, as an example. While the paper has lost small amounts of print readers in the past few years, most likely to the Internet, its overall readership, including its Web site and the newspaper, is much higher than ever, he said, and despite the soured economy still earns a sizable profit for parent company CNHI.

"The online readership is measured in about 2.2 million page

> *If you have any multimedia or technology skills, you can really be the instigator, not the follower ... a young journalist could really make a difference.*

views a month and rising. That is the average at this moment," he says. "If you consider that we sell about 20,000 papers a day, with about 50,000 readers, and average 28 pages a day, the per-page readership of the paper still far exceeds our online traffic. As more readers gravitate to the Internet, it will become the primary information vehicle for the region. (As) the Internet audience swells, the printed newspaper will evolve into a source for more in-depth features, giving readers more analysis and better understanding of complex issues. No community would stand for termination of its newspaper habit, I believe. As younger citizens, who don't have that habit, become fixtures in their community, with children and jobs, they will learn the value of knowing what's going on."

The electronic shift has resulted in a need for the *Press-Republican* to have in its newsroom journalists who know this multimedia technology. Grady says the paper has had to change its hiring criteria. "If our new journalists don't have facility in multimedia journalism, they are of less use to us than we will require," he said. "We want them to not only know about recent and future developments but to help us take advantage of them."

IMAGE COURTESY OF FLICKR USER UNCLEWEED

And, says Grady, student newspapers are the excellent training ground, by their very nature, for future community journalists. "I don't think we would say that if you haven't worked for your college newspaper, you couldn't possibly succeed in our newsroom," he said. "I would say, though, that if two people apply for the same job and one has college-newspaper experience and can demonstrate talent through it while the other has none, Student A gets the job. We know that employee will adapt to our needs more quickly than the other would because of having already worked under similar circumstances with similar goals."

Bill Ketter, vice president of news for CNHI, or Community Newspaper Holdings Inc., the group owner of Grady's *Press-Republican*, which owns 137 community papers with an average circulation of 15,000, argues that small community papers may be the best place for jobs right out of J-school because they help develop skills. "In this economy in which it's harder to get big-city newspaper jobs, small papers are now an even better opportunity" for employment for "journalists with versatility," Ketter said. "It's more exciting now than ever to tell stories in all these different mediums, but it's also more difficult today. You must be multi-dimensional."

Understanding how to tell stories in print and on Web and on electronic platforms is essential, according to Ketter, who notes that there are "different expectations for the audience today."

"They want staccato journalism – quick bursts of information," he said. "It has to be quick, concise and precise. They don't want a lot, just headlines. And they want to *see* it also, so you minimize the text. Therefore, you have to understand different forms of presentation. The newspaper business is changing so dramatically. It's not really a newspaper business, it's an information business."

So, what should college journalism programs be doing to train journalism majors to work at a community newspaper?

"They must stick with blocking and tackling, teach the basics – ethics, credibility, gaining trust, knowing how to access and use public records, how to get information, that sort of thing – the bread and butter," he says. "But they also need to know how to use video to tell stories, how to use slideshows and pictures to tell stories, because the Web is more visual than textual."

Ketter, a former journalism chair at Boston University, says jour the past," which he says is "a real weakness in J-schools where they focus too much on journalism and not the 'public factor'," which he sees as the crux of community journalism.

"Journalism schools have to be so much more versatile than in the past, he said. "They need to see these trends and go about reinventing programs to address these new forms of information. And students need to be instilled with a passion to inform. There are so many different ways to inform today."

And will there be jobs at community newspapers for our graduates? Ketter thinks so: "I think community papers are in good shape – those that are closest to their readers, that know their guide dog and watchdog role, that celebrate the lives of their readers, that know the object of a paper, in the words of William Allen White, is to cover 'the sweet, intimate story of life.'"

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Refereed Article

Exploring 'connectivity' at the college newspaper: Can it help explain the success of the collegiate press?

Brian Thompson
Flagler College

INTRODUCTION

Bad news continues for the newspaper industry. Circulations are dropping and advertising has fled the scene. Revenues are down. Papers are cutting everything from newsroom staffs to the size of their issues, not to mention a handful who have shut down print operations altogether. It is no surprise that the industry is in trouble, and with the advent of the Internet, a fractured media environment, waning interest by the public, a devastating economic recession, and countless new media devices all competing for eyeballs, the future of newspapers is uncertain.

Yet, through all this doom and gloom there is at least one segment of the industry that has continued to serve as a bright spot, and may be able to weather this bleak economic environment — the college newspaper. In fact, it is not the Web edition that has seen success, but the actual ink-and-newsprint version that today's youth and young adult market is supposed to loathe.

There is growing evidence that circulations and national advertising in college newspapers has been increasing the past several years. Alloy Media + Marketing's College Newspaper Audience study found that 76 percent of students say they've read a copy of their college newspaper in the past month, and 55 percent have read an issue in the last week. Other marketing and college-media companies have reported similar findings in studies (Student Monitor, 2005; College Publisher, 2006). Bressers and Bergen studied college student media habits and reported 93 percent of respondents read their campus newspaper (2002).

It is important not to overstate this "phenomenon." Not all college newspapers are thriving, and even those that are growing still get dwarfed in size by traditional newspapers, both in revenue and circulation. The current economic recession might also be a game-changer for collegiate media, and there is some evidence this is already happening (Murley, 2009; Walters, 2009). Yet, many report that revenue has not dropped, and some like Alloy Media don't expect to see collegiate media hurt as badly as the rest of the industry because student readership remains strong (Murley, 2009; Walters, 2009).

So if the rest of the industry is in decline, why isn't the same happening to college papers? More importantly, are collegiate journalists doing something different than professional journalists? One possible explanation, which this research study begins to explore, is that collegiate journalists' strong connections to the community around them, and the relationships they build with fellow students, might help them produce content that better appeals to students.

There is some evidence to back this idea up, and Reader (2006) called these community relationships "connectivity" — the concept that "the level of intimacy journalists have with their communities can influence how journalists do their jobs" (p. 852). He advanced the idea in a study that found professional journalists' connections to their communities impacted how they dealt with ethical dilemmas. On this issue he determined that journalists in smaller markets were more likely to be in touch with, and more concerned with, community values than journalists in larger markets.

If connectivity can play a role in ethical decision-making at newspapers, close connections might also help student journalists when it comes to news judgment, editorial decision-making, and the crafting of stories. And if so, this might play a role in why college students stay connected (and keep read-

ing) their college papers. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to better understand the collegiate journalist's relationship with the community around them, and whether being active members of the college community gives them an advantage as journalists. As part of the student "tribe," can they more easily tap into and further build on these bonds and relationships to gain a greater awareness of the community's interests and needs? How close do they feel to the community around them, and does it help in gathering story ideas? What role does "connectivity" — the level of intimacy journalists have with their communities — play in how they do their jobs? As importantly, how do collegiate journalists view objectivity and journalistic independence, and how do they avoid bias and unfairness?

CONSIDERING CONNECTIVITY

Reader's concept of "journalistic connectivity" built upon the work of Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, who looked at how community influenced the press. They found that because small-town journalists were more likely to have myriad interactions with the public as both sources and in social settings, it is almost impossible for them to separate the professional relationship from the personal (Reader, 2006, p. 855).

Reader's own research uncovered several themes, including the idea that direct accountability to the community was one of the biggest differences between large and small papers when it came to ethical decision-making. Small paper editors boiled the reason for this down to "community connections," and an editor in the study summed it up this way: "It's a lot easier to make hard calls in a big city where you aren't likely to know the people affected" (2006, p. 860).

Reader found fundamental differences between how small and large city journalists operate, and he wrote that, "At larger newspapers, the emphasis seems to be to preserve the reputation of the institution of the newspaper, whereas at smaller newspapers the starting point seems to be to manage journalists' individual connections with their communities" (2006, p. 861).

This is similar to what Massey (1998) called "community connectedness" — "tuning in and acting on a community's collective concerns to deliver the kind of news that engages people in public life" (p. 395). Other researchers like Stamm (1988) have explored the interdependence between individual and community when it comes to local media, arguing that while media benefit when this relationship is strong, it cannot be taken for granted. More importantly, media must contribute something to this relationship, as well.

Some have argued that the connection between community and communication is natural (Carey, 1989). In the ritual view of communication, the transmission of a message is not the focus, and instead takes a secondary role to communication as a form of participation, association, as well as shared beliefs within a society or community. Here there are similarities to a concept known as "social capital."

Popularized by Putnam (2000), "social capitalism" was characterized as the "connections among individuals — social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 19). Putnam said that at its core, social capital helps foster social networks that have value for a community — "Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a college education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups" (2000, p. 18). He further pointed out that creating networks that "serve as conduits for the flow of helpful information" (p. 289) can be beneficial both to communities and individuals.

Some researchers have related this idea to journalism, and even younger generations' shunning of traditional media like newspapers. Mindich (2005), for instance, believes that journalism's ability to support and build community is a powerful capability that cannot be overlooked. "News can unite people in powerful ways and create powerful imaginary communities," he wrote (2005, p. 10). He looked at the abandonment of traditional media by younger demographics and questioned whether a major flaw in journalism is that young people do not feel attached, engaged, or included in the news — that it's not directed toward them, and therefore makes them feel isolated and excluded. He wrote: "When younger generations no longer imagine themselves as part of a community, they seem themselves as alone, unaffected by others" (2005, p. 103).

This is a strong case to be made for the importance of community, its value to the news process as it concerns a younger demographic, and how news media might need to embrace community even more, especially as it concerns college-age students. Mindich called for journalists to not only engage this young demographic, but to also give them good reasons why as citizens they should tune back into the news. He suggested a number of steps, one of which being that journalists need to make young people feel part of the discussion — like the news is also for them, and not just an older generation (2005, p. 126). He wrote: "... if young people are included, and not just b-roll, they will begin to make their way back into the process" (2005, p. 126). Perhaps this is already happening with college media.

St. John (2007) noted that the problems newspapers are facing today often get attributed to bad business models and the rise of electronic media. But he believes that the press' manufactured and self-imposed disconnect from the community at-large is just as responsible for the industry's current state. He said newspapers continue to resist any kind of re-connect to avoid the appearance of peddling propaganda or serving as activists/advocates for a cause. Many journalists believe that too much

involvement or connection with their readers threatens their objectivity and independence, and even compromises their oath to unbiased reporting (Heider and Poindexter, 2005). But McQuail (2005) has argued that this quest for journalistic freedom has caused too much detachment from the surrounding public.

What We Know About Collegiate Media Consumers

While research on collegiate journalists is limited, there is plenty on college students and their media habits, which provides us with an interesting snapshot of what readers of college newspapers like, and are looking for, in their news. Interestingly, it is not just entertainment or soft, fluffy pieces. College students are looking for stories relevant to their lives and often will turn to media that are focused on their interests (Shalagheck, 1998; Sherr, 2005; Diddi and LaRose, 2006; Barnhurst and Wartella, 1991).

It is widely known that college-age students don't read traditional newspapers. In fact, a study for The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy found that only 16 percent of those aged 18-30 said they read the news daily in a newspaper, and most startlingly, half of young adults said they "rarely if ever" read a paper (Patterson, 2007).

Yet, research mentioned above shows that this does not necessarily hold for college newspapers, which are seeing readership increases, or at least steady interest. Could it be that traditional newspapers just aren't connecting with college students? Or are college students looking for something different in their media than traditional papers are offering? Research on this demographic seems to say so, and that college students are looking for a sense of inclusion.

Patterson (2007) found that young adults are less attuned to hard news stories, and seem to gravitate to soft news stories because they are "memorable and shareable" (p. 16). He wrote:

> The subjects of many hard news stories have a numbing sameness — another act of Congress or another presidential speech — that can block them from memory even when they get heavy coverage. A lack of knowledge, too, can be a barrier to comprehending many hard news stories. Individuals who poorly understand politics or are confused by it can fail to note a hard news story, much less a key fact about it. (p. 16)

Barnhurst and Wartella (1991) found that one reason young adults don't embrace newspapers is they often feel "excluded" from the facts and like outsiders to a "closed system of knowledge" that was primarily geared toward adults (p. 202). Shalagheck (1998) found that to make newspaper content more desirable, newspapers need to go further than just providing information to students, and actually help them make decisions. Students were looking for advice from media on health issues, money, politics, and consumer issues, and other issues that impact their lives. Sherr (2005) found that this demographic was looking for news to be relevant to their lives and tailored to their interests. Otherwise, they tune out.

While research is limited, there is also some evidence that a sense of community does play a role in college reading habits, as Collins (2003) showed when he found that a strong relationship between a student and the campus community actually positively impacted readership of college newspapers.
This is similar to research done on traditional media (Davidson and Cotter, 1997; Viswanath and Finnegan, 1990) that also found an association between a strong sense of community and newspaper readership.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

To explore whether connectivity is at work with collegiate journalists, a qualitative research study was conducted using in-depth interviews of 11 college newspaper editors in Florida. Unlike quantitative studies, which are more concerned with statistics and cause-effect relationships, qualitative studies are exploratory. As Creswell (2003) wrote, qualitative studies are most effective when little has been written or studied on a topic or population. Researchers use these methods to "listen to participants and build an understanding based on their ideas" (p. 30).

Interviews took place from November of 2008 to February of 2009. Interviews were conducted primarily by phone, except for one in-person interview and one interviewee who asked to respond to questions by e-mail. The state of Florida provided a virtual microcosm of collegiate newspapers, and a wide cross-section of collegiate journalism was represented. To that end, this study included: Three editors from state universities, one of which is a traditionally African-American school; an editor from an independent newspaper at a fourth state university; five editors from private colleges/universities in the state (while four of these colleges/universities have enrollments that range from 1,750 to 5,800 students, one is a major research university with more than 15,300 students and a nationally-known, award-winning newspaper); and two editors from state community colleges. Of those interviewed, two of the editors have graduated within the past year and are now working as professional journalists. This allowed them to give perspective not just on the collegiate newspaper world, but also on differences with the professional side.

Interviewees were upperclassmen (juniors or seniors), as they have more experience in journalism, better knowledge of the college community, and a better understanding of how newspapers work and function. In addition, all were lead editors, managing editors or news editors for their papers.

A similar format to Reader's (2006) study of connectivity was followed. Participants were asked to describe their communities, what their communities generally thought about their newspaper, and who they thought their paper's strongest supporters and critics were. A second set of questions focused on getting at how close the participant felt to the community; whether this connection was viewed as an asset and how it was used in the news process; if it helped in gathering story ideas, knowing what readers were interested in, and if it helped to define what is "newsworthy." A third set of questions focused on getting the participant's ideas on objectivity and journalistic independence as a way to understand how they viewed journalistic norms highly valued by professional journalists. Further questioning touched on how they avoid bias, and whether they felt a need to side with fellow students over, say, administrators.

FINDINGS

As 'Students,' An Affinity with Community

One of the most intriguing findings from this research was how much collegiate journalists referred to themselves as students. In fact, they seemed to describe themselves as much as students as they did journalists. Often they would combine the two as "student journalists," but the reality is that those interviewed for this study thought of themselves as students first and hold that status in high regard. This is part of their identity — who they are — and they see no reason to either deny it or make it subordinate to, say, being a journalist.

Why would this be interesting or even important? Simply because it might cause some to argue that being a journalist should trump all else. Certainly some would make a case that this affinity with "studenthood" diverges too much from what journalist Walter Lippmann outlined in the 1920s: that the press should go about its business in a purely detached manner telling stories in a "'perspective free' style, not writing from the view of a citizen, but instead from that of a disinterested observer" (St. John, 2007, p.9).

How, they might argue, could students be observers if they felt such a strong attachment to their "citizenry" as students? But this would be missing a very important point: Collegiate journalists see themselves as students simply because that is what they are, first and foremost. They cannot separate themselves from this fact any more than they can separate themselves from being human, American, male/female, black/white, etc. Some referred to themselves as students of journalism, as if they are studying to become journalists and are merely "apprentices" now. In speaking of themselves as students, it's simply a reality, and not something they would comprehend as a hindrance or hurdle to practicing journalism — not to mention unethical.

This extended to their thoughts on feeling a part of the community of students on campus, as all said they felt very connected to this community. More importantly, they value these connections both personally and as journalists. One editor remarked: "I think one of the things is that you're by default part of the community you're covering. You have a connection to the community."

He went on to say that there is a feeling among collegiate journalists that "this is where I go to school and I have a stake in it." Another said she saw herself as part of the college community and not just a journalist who was looking at the scene as an outsider.

Those interviewed said they not only felt strong connections to the college community and their fellow students, but also that these personal connections and relationships benefit them as they go about their jobs as journalists. Over and over again they said these relationships gave them something of an "insider advantage."

Some chalked these connections up to student journalists being able to relate more to the college community. "(College papers) are about as local as you can possibly be," said an editor who had worked on a paper at a small private college of only 2,400 students. Now working for a small community newspaper in Central Florida, he said he sees similarities between his experiences as a journalist on a small college campus and a journalist in a small, tight-knit town. But he added it's almost impossible to have the same kind of connections now that he did in college where "you know everyone. You know when something happens who to call."

Another former editor who is today working with a community daily in Northeast Florida said even at a large university with 50,000 students, the campus was still a very tight-knit community despite the numerous student groups, races, age groups, etc. Students, he said, are a very similar demographic and collegiate journalists have the advantage of being part of that demographic.

This was echoed by others. One female editor at a private college said as a student she naturally gets to know everybody. As a collegiate journalist she said it is vital to cultivate these relationships in order to keep the flow of tips, ideas, and information coming into the newspaper. "We have our hands wrapped around the community and we know what's going on with it because it's so small," she said. The smaller size allows them to "hear what's going on and to sense it … I can sort of see the college breathing … as far as what people are talking about and what they're not talking about."

A community college editor added that by being involved in organizations on campus, going to classes or frequenting student hangouts keeps them tapped into what might be called the "information network."

Tapping Into the 'Information Network'

This information network idea came up repeatedly through interviews with students. Editors interviewed spoke of college campuses as if they were rich networks full of sources and stories that they could readily tap thanks to their own membership within these communities. One likened it to being "embedded" in the school, and more importantly the fabric of the student body — a "ready-made demographic that you're part of and already know really well." This gives journalists a lay of the land, not to mention the ability to find sources, build relationships, develop stories and maybe most importantly, establish trust.

"It's all about connections," he continued.

It also helps in allowing them to better understand what is and isn't newsworthy from a student's point of view. "You're on the pulse of what's happening on campus because you're living it," said another editor. "It's hard to NOT know what's going on (on campus). I never really had people come up to me and say, 'you need to cover this.' It's always just a conversation and then you would look into it." He called these relationships very natural, and the flow of information easy and casual.

It is also helpful for these editors to be so similar to their readers: "What is important to you is probably going to be important to your readers," he said.

That differs from the professional world that he is in now where he finds the audience more diversified — tougher to get to know and understand. "You have to kind of think about who the audience is and try to figure out what they would want to read," he said about the professional paper. On the other hand, in the student world he said he could count on his own interests modeling pretty closely what his readership would find newsworthy.

On where most stories originate, editors said it was a fairly balanced mix between talking to students and hearing something on campus vs. more official sources like press releases or administrators. "I tell people one of the best sources of stories is just talking to your friends. What are problems or issues they are facing and being affected by?" explained one editor. He said he got a story idea last year about elevator safety issues in buildings on campus from overhearing a conversation outside his political science class.

"A lot of times if I'm sitting there in the student center eating by myself, you can just start listening to people around you," said another editor, adding that to be an effective journalist on a college campus you need to know and understand the community "intimately."

Trust can also be an added benefit. Several said that students are more willing to feel a connection to student journalists and share information and ideas. "They say, 'Hey, you're one of me. We connect. I can trust you,'" remarked one editor.

Diversity on their staffs — not just racially, but with students who are involved in different organizations, majors, sports, fraternities, religious groups, etc. — also brings added benefits, editors said.

Advocacy, Objectivity and the Quest for Fairness

Another recurring theme that continued to come up in interviews was how newspapers served as a "voice for the students" or the "voice of the campus." Several editors mentioned these were either official or unofficial mottos for their papers. Said one community college editor: "We're trying to write stories that affect us because we are students and we are our own readers."

This topic about "voice of the students" generally allowed for a segue way into issues about advocacy, journalistic independence, and objectivity. Editors were asked whether this represented some kind of advocacy for students that might go against the foundations of journalism or one of the pillars of the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics: "Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting" (1996). This line of questioning started some of the most intriguing conversations of the sessions. All denied that their approaches meant they were advocating for students. The distinction, several said, was that they didn't take up causes for students, but rather were acting to illuminate or illustrate issues that were of importance to or affecting students.

They openly admitted that issues they cover might also affect them personally — there's no getting around that. Everything from tuition increases to campus crime to bad food in the cafeteria does touch their lives. But they dismissed the notion that this might mean they couldn't be unbiased or were therefore advocating for student causes — or even their own.

One editor likened being an advocate to taking sides, which he said is not what college newspapers do. By voice of the students, he said it means that they are serving as the primary source of news for students, a role that they take very seriously. Several said their roles were to be watchdogs for students and to hold people accountable, but not to be advocates by taking sides or pushing causes.

In this way, they believe they can maintain close connections to the community without compromising a sense of fairness or balance that is key to journalism. In fact, all spoke of the need to stay fair and balanced in their stories, most importantly by allowing all sides of an issue to have their say. "While we know what students are most interested in (on any given story), we're not necessarily going to tell them what they want to hear," said an editor. "We tell them what's happening."

Targeting Readers and Becoming 'Student-centric'

One topic that came up in interviews of collegiate journalists was the significance of reader feedback, and making sure that what they produced was targeted toward readers. Most editors agreed that readers' interests should take precedence over what they thought was most interesting or newsworthy. One editor had an intriguing point when she said, "In my opinion, if you're putting out a great paper and no one is reading it then you're not very successful."

Echoing what many others expressed, she said:

> We write for our audience. We are students first and cover everything going on at our university with that in mind. Overall, I am a strong believer that knowing who you are writing for and having a connection to the things you are covering and the people you are writing for does make you a better journalist because you earn credibility and have a better understanding of how people will react to your writing.

Two editors described the ultimate goal for collegiate newspapers in almost identical terms: to be "studentcentric" or "student-centered." One of these editors was critical of past staffs for forgetting that students were the primary audience, and for producing a paper that seemed to better connect with administrators and faculty than with students. That hurt them in readership numbers, he said, and after assuming the lead editor's role, he said he has made it a priority to turn the focus back on students. That has meant listening to students more, adding more student sources and comments to stories, limiting the more official news that comes straight from college administrators, and adding features that look at student interests and needs. "I think a lot of people don't put themselves in the reader's shoes," he said. "I think we do a good job of stopping and thinking about what the reader is interested in."

One editor said she isn't able to relate to most professional newspapers, echoing what studies have often found about college students' opinions about news media (Barnhurst and Wartella, 1991; Diddi and LaRose, 2006; Patterson, 2007; Shalagheck, 1998; Sherr, 2005). The broad and general focus of newspapers misses her altogether. "I'm 20, how does that pertain to me?" she asked about front-page stories that have no bearing on her life. College newspapers, she said, know what their readers want and give it to them.

CONCLUSION

What Has Been Learned

This study found that collegiate journalists develop strong personal relationships with their readers (the community around them), which often helps them find and develop stories that are relevant to their readership. This seems to confirm that connectivity does play a role in how collegiate journalists practice journalism. Reader (2006) defined connectivity as a concept of how the level of intimacy journalists have with their communities actually influences their jobs. This "level of intimacy" — the relationships and community connections — does appear to play a major role in the work of collegiate journalists interviewed for this study. More importantly, it seems to be more than just an incidental or accidental part of newsgathering. While they may not use the term "connectivity" to describe it, editors interviewed for this study said the building of these connections is important and something that they actively try to use to their advantage. The idea of connectivity is embraced as an asset — a leg up in trying to produce highly relevant and engaging journalism. It's seen as a way to develop stories, to gather feedback, to better understand readers, and to stay on top of what's happening. From the research it is also apparent that collegiate journalists do rank high the importance of their audience's needs and interests when it comes to choosing which stories to cover.

In many ways, this finding isn't revolutionary. Professional journalists use similar connections when managing, and even massaging, regular sources. But those sources are usually of a more official nature and the pool is much smaller. With collegiate journalists, this pool of potential sources is made up of the entire college community — friends, classmates, dormmates, acquaintances, friends of friends, strangers, drinking buddies, faculty members, etc. — all of whom may also be current or potential readers. And there appears to be greater importance placed on getting story ideas and feedback from these community members than from more official sources like college administrators. This seems to be the opposite of what studies of professional journalists have found. For instance, Weaver et al. looked at what or who influenced journalists' notions of newsworthiness and found that journalists pointed to their journalistic training (79 percent) and their supervisors (56 percent) before more community-oriented influencers like sources (43 percent) or audience research (30 percent) (2007, p. 154). In this way, the collegiate journalist's relationship with the reader is not as one-way as the professional world, and takes on much more of a two-way relationship between the community and journalists.

On questions of objectivity and independence, it does not appear that collegiate journalists rank these ideals as highly as some professional journalists, and many questioned whether these were even possible or made sense considering their situation. However, the research found that they do place special significance on fairness in news stories and coverage, remaining unbiased and preserving their credibility through high ethical standards.

The journalists interviewed for this study do indeed see themselves as part of and closely tied to the college communities

they cover. In this way, there seems to be almost a symbiotic relationship at play between journalists and students. This suggests elements of social capital at play. Putnam (2000) explained how the creation of networks in communities helped to create conduits for the flow of information that benefitted both the community as well as individual members of the community. From the findings, it is clear that this is the case.

One interesting point that developed from the research was that those interviewed referred to themselves expressly as students. This is important to note and understand in that it helps to explain how and why they feel so connected to the community. They are not merely journalists who are trying to make inroads into the community, but instead have started out as insiders who are already a part of the community. As such, they are naturally able to tap into the information network and take advantage of it as journalists.

From this research, it is clear collegiate journalists try to engage and involve readers in the newsgathering process, rather than just relying on official sources or their own training. All of this might help to explain some of their success. As St. John (2007) wrote:

> (N)ewspapers can better demonstrate their relevancy to readers when reporters move past customary official and institutional sources and explore third-places where they can receive citizen input on the shaping and framing of stories. The visible result will be stories that relate to most Americans daily lives, rather than stories about celebrity mishaps, spats between local officials or trials about bizarre criminal actions. Stories that transparently reveal citizens' voices and concerns clearly demonstrate that the newspaper's cause is not for a client, funding organization or institutional agenda, but rather to support helping American democracy go well. (p. 29)

Others have made similar points including Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) who said, "Citizens have become an abstraction, something the press talks about but not to" (p. 27). They argued that in an age where anyone can be their own reporter or commentator by using the Web and blogs, it is more pressing than ever for journalists to move to "two-way journalism" where they act as mediators or forum leaders rather than just lecturers. From the findings in this study, it seems apparent that collegiate journalists are following this advice in a fundamental way. The connections they build with the college community may therefore play an important role in why readership numbers have stayed strong. As importantly, this might also suggest new avenues forward for researchers and professional journalists who are looking for ways to rethink the profession and make it more relevant to readers.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study is not without its limitations. First, interviews were conducted only on a small sample of editors in Florida. While there was diversity in the kinds of newspapers chosen, as well as the actual editors, this study may not accurately represent the rest of the country. Second, while this research uncovers some very enlightening and intriguing findings, it would be a mistake to assume that this represents conclusive evidence of how all collegiate journalists function, or of major differences between collegiate and professional journalists. Finally, if connectivity does play a role in collegiate journalism, it would be overreaching to assume that it is the main, or sole, reason behind the success of collegiate newspapers. It's possible their success has more to do with free papers distributed on tight-nit campuses where students would rather read of all things a newspaper than study or listen to a class lecture. Further research, especially of why college students read their newspapers, would be needed to make such a connection.

That said, this topic is ripe for more study. While much is known about professional journalists, most research done on collegiate newspapers concerns censorship issues, First Amendment rights, or journalistic teaching methods on a more basic level. But as this study shows, there is something noteworthy happening in collegiate journalism and the idea of connectivity at college newspapers should be explored further. Additional research should be done to try and better quantify a larger sample of collegiate journalists throughout the country. This would allow for a better understanding of whether and how this idea of connectivity is employed by collegiate journalists. Also, Weaver et al. have produced a comprehensive study of professional journalists. A similar study of collegiate journalists should be undertaken to allow for a true comparison between collegiate and professional journalists to understand major differences between the two. Finally, it would be advantageous to do more studying of college-age readers to better understand what it is that appeals to them about college newspapers, and whether these connections help to play a role in why they read college papers.

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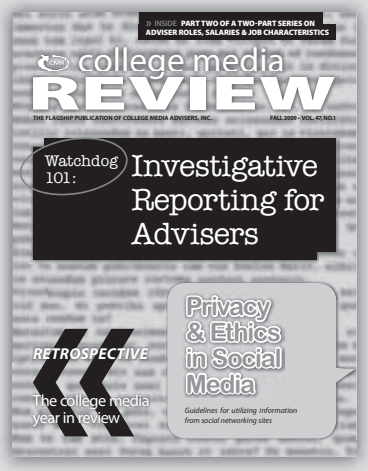

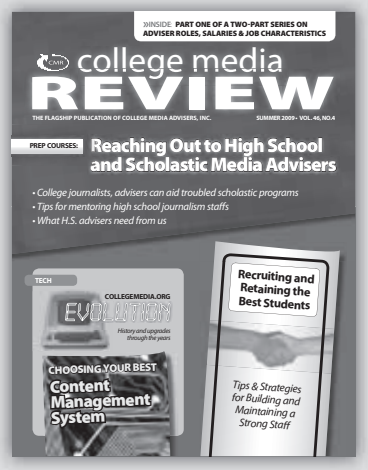

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