COLLEGE MEDIA review

Vol. 49 No. 2 Winter 2012

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This document compiles articles that were previously published online as stand-alone posts on the College Media Review website. During the original release period, content was not produced as bound issues; articles were uploaded individually as they were approved. Volume and issue numbers in this compilation follow the publication cycle used at the time, in which each issue covered a four-month period (for example: Vol. 45, No. 1, Fall).

Research Spotlight: Media advisory board — friend or foe?

cmreview.org/research-spotlight-media-advisory-board-friend-or-foe/

College Media Review January 22, 2012

Student media advisers give high marks for priorities, performance of publication boards

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Abstract – College journalists often have their work evaluated by campus Media Advisory Boards. Student editors complain some boards have used their oversight role to censor or indirectly exert control over the print or broadcast product. This exploratory study seeks to determine how often Media Advisory Boards exist and what factors correlate with a school having such a board. This study, based on a national survey of members of the College Media Advisers organization (N = 157), is designed to provide baseline data on such questions as how boards differ in title and size, what characteristics of a school help explain differences in the composition of a board, and what are the most common functions of a board. The results can be useful to schools considering creation of such a board, to schools examining the operations of their current board, and to various constituencies – student editors, journalism faculty, administrators – involved with the student press.

When publisher Joseph Pulitzer suggested creating the first collegiate school of journalism in the 1890s, he battled with Columbia University officials over a proposed advisory board for the school. The disagreement delayed the project, and while Pulitzer endowed the journalism school with $2 million, he died before the school could open (O'Dell, 1936).

The dispute was the first of many conflicts regarding college administrators, campus journalism, and advisory boards. In the ensuing 100-plus years, problems continued as more journalism programs were created, student newspapers and broadcast operations followed, and schools worked to find a balance between respecting the First Amendment tradition of the press and the desire of colleges to protect their reputation and manage themselves successfully. Many colleges and universities responded by creating Publication Advisory Boards, often composed of administrators, faculty advisers to the media, other faculty members, student editors, students at large, and professional journalists from the local community, to provide a variety of perspectives on such issues. As broadcast operations grew on many campuses, the boards were sometimes reconstituted as Media Advisory Boards.

This study focuses exclusively on Media Advisory Boards, albeit from solely an adviser's perspective. In the 21st century, how often do Media Advisory Boards exist, and what factors correlate with a school having or not having such a board? How do they differ in such characteristics as title and size? What characteristics of a school help explain differences in the composition of a board? What are the most common functions of a board, and do they differ from what the adviser sees as the ideal? Are advisers satisfied with board performance; do they feel administrators exert too much influence on boards? This study, based on interviews with members of the College Media Advisers organization, is designed to provide baseline data on such questions. Such an exploratory study can be of use to schools considering creation of such a board, to schools examining the operations of their current board, and to various constituencies — student editors, journalism faculty, administrators – involved with the student press.

Litany of complaints

Many campus editors have complained publicly about their Media Advisory Board, and some have turned to the Student Press Law Center for help. In the past decade, SPLC issued dozens of reports on issues involving student media and advisory boards (Student Press Law Center, 2009). The issues have ranged from whether a board should be created to whether administrators have used it improperly:

- When officials at Utica College in New York proposed forming an oversight board for the student newspaper, the five top editors and the faculty adviser all resigned (Student Press Law Center, 2003c).
- Boston College tried to place stipulations on its contract for office space with *The Heights* student newspaper in 2003, mandating the establishment of "an 'active advisory board' made up of Boston College faculty and staff, including at least one administrator." Student editors said it was an attack on their independence (Student Press Law Center, 2003a).
- Student journalists brought a First Amendment lawsuit against Ocean County College officials in New Jersey after a woman was fired from her position as faculty adviser to the school newspaper. A settlement mandated creation of a Student Media Advisory Board; the board was to include leaders of the campus student media, local media professionals, faculty advisers, and student body representatives (Ingram, 2010).
- At Fairfield University in Connecticut, where the authors of this study are employed, the school created a newspaper advisory board in 2009 to help deal with such issues as a student protest regarding a newspaper column on "The Walk of Shame" (Keister, 2009).

Disputes involving advisory boards continued into 2011. In Virginia, administrators at Christopher Newport University were criticized for trying to undercut the authority of the seven-year-old Student Media Board that oversees budgeting for the newspaper, radio station, and fine arts magazines. Student editors said the administration wanted to end the

print edition of the newspaper because of investigative stories that put the school in a negative light (Shalash, 2011). At the University of Texas—Tyler, the sudden firing of the longtime adviser to the *Patriot Talon* newspaper prompted the school's Student Media Advisory Board to investigate her claim that she was ordered to "tell the students what to write" (Zweifler, 2011).

These varied cases show how some schools, when faced with a modern-day problem regarding the student press, often turn to their Media Advisory Board – or create one should emergency arise. Once created, the board can serve many different purposes — some to the benefit of the student press, some to its potential detriment (Summarized by Click, 1993; Ingelhart, 1993; for a more recent, brief summary, see Turner, 2008).

Despite their widespread use – and widespread complaints about them – Media Advisory Boards have rarely been the main focal point of academic research. William Click devoted a chapter to the boards in his seminal "Governing College Student Publications" (1993), but the material is descriptive and anecdotal, and there is no evidence of a formal study. More often, we have only the individual accounts of problems on a given campus, scattered references in academic research that focuses primarily on other topics, but no comprehensive look.

Academe and advisory boards

The student Media Advisory Boards under discussion here, which often include off-campus members, can be seen as part of a broader effort by colleges and universities to use professionals in the community to bridge the gap between academicians and practitioners (Teitel, 1995). Teitel said interest in such advisory boards and committees comes as "the scope of demands and expectations for responsiveness and accountability has increased, requiring greater interaction with the world outside the ivory tower" (p. 59). Business schools routinely create departmental advisory councils in an effort to keep their curriculum relevant to the needs of the workforce (Kress and Wendell, 1993). For example, one business program formed a Technical Communication Advisory Board, consisting of faculty, students, and outsider advisers, to give advice on course offerings and recruiting students (Dorazio, 1996).

In journalism and mass communication, a 1994 study of 163 JMC programs found 51.5 percent had a "(m)edia advisory board or board of visitors that includes industry professionals" (Self, 1994). Ten years later, Henderson surveyed 61 JMC programs with current or former departmental advisory boards. She reported interest in academic advisory boards in general had "recently experienced something of a resurgence. … (Y)et, for all their rapid growth, very little has been written about them" (p. 60). She included a list of areas where boards have interacted with students, and one area was "student newspaper procedures" (Henderson, 2004). Pullen (2005), saying that "doing more with less" is expected today in academe (p. 27), argued that creating an advisory board was one way to

help build healthy JMC programs and deal with growing enrollments. More recently, a 2011 national survey of JMC departments found that many do use journalism professionals on advisory boards. These professionals can serve as auditors of academic programs and provide feedback on recruiting students and individual courses. But the researchers also found some programs have been reluctant to take advantage of what they called “renown-gown” resources like using local journalists on an advisory board (Benigni, Ferguson & McGee, 2011, p. 54).

While several national studies have looked at JMC programs that use advisory boards, there is an absence of studies on the narrower category of student Media Advisory Boards designed to help the campus press.

A free press? Or at the pleasure of the president?

Creation of an advisory board for campus newspapers, television stations, and other news outlets often depends, in part, on the administrative and legal structure under which the student news outlet(s) operate on a campus. The three traditional structures have not changed in past decades (Duscha and Fisher, 1973; also see summary by Brandon, 2001).

First, the news operation can be under the direct control of the administration or faculty; for example, at a community college, a student newspaper can be the product of a journalism class workshop in which the professor is the sole adviser. The college president is often the legal publisher. This direct control model was more the norm a half a century ago; a 1952 study found 59.8 percent of the non-accredited journalism programs exercised “close supervision” of a paper’s editorial content; among accredited programs, 24 percent used close supervision (Bert, 1952).

A second structure allows the news outlet to operate in a semi-autonomous state; the student organization often receives free office space and can receive administration or student government funding. Instead of any prior review of published material, student editors often work with an advisory board to obtain feedback after publication. The board, itself, is often the official publisher.

The third structure calls for the student organization to be totally independent of university influence. Several studies have found a very small number of college newspapers meet the criteria for being totally independent of university funding and other ties; the criteria can run up to 26 different indicators (Inglehart, 1993; Yam, 2008; Bodle, 1997). The second and third models are closer to the ideal as outlined in the Code of Ethics of the College Media Advisers, which emphasizes ethical prohibitions against administration or faculty interference in content (College Media Advisers).

Legal distinctions about the student press at public schools versus private schools also help determine the structure that governs a student medium. Public schools are government-run, and the U.S. Constitution places curbs on the government’s ability to censor. The president

of a private college can exert far more direct control over the student press, including the ability to mandate an advisory board, because the 14th amendment offers all private entities the ability to curb free expression (Lisosky, 2010). The Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier decision by the Supreme Court in 1988 gave high school administrators the right to censor school papers, and student editors have worried that it could be interpreted as allowing all college administrators to do the same, whether in a public or private school. Hosty v. Carter followed in 2005, saying Hazelwood had raised so many questions that it was no longer clear what freedoms college media enjoyed (Butzow, 2008). Student electronic media on campus have traditionally enjoyed even less legal protection, despite calls for comparable rights (Kleiman, 1996).

The role of any advisory board also is complicated by a lack of agreement among campus actors on the primary role of the student press. Brandon (2001) summarizes many of the traditional roles. To the student journalist, the function of the student press may be to obtain experience that can lead to a journalism job. Many students also want to experience such journalistic values as advocating for justice and providing a voice for the voiceless. To a faculty member, the campus media are places where students can be taught writing and editing and/or management and sales skills (Brandon, 2001).

> As far back as 1965, Mencher warned that to an administrator, a campus newspaper or television news operation can seem more of a “public relations arm” than a “laboratory of life” (p. 216). His account of college editors being “removed from office by outraged college authorities. ‘They were jeopardizing the good name of the institution’” (p. 216) echoes the more recent controversies detailed at the start of this study.

Advisory boards in the last 20 years

The one comprehensive look at how media boards operate comes from William Click in his Governing College Student Publications (first published in 1980 and revised in 1993). In a chapter entitled “Boards of Student Publications,” Click outlined the most common responsibilities and authority of a board; typical membership; and board size, selection, and composition. Instead of collecting data from a formal survey of colleges, Click wrote in the preface to the 1993 edition:

…[G]overning documents and structures for college student publications were collected from institutions of all types around the country and analyzed for typical and significant points. This resulting monograph illustrates several approaches to governing student publications and reflects the knowledge and thinking of the writer. (p. viii)

Other information on Media Advisory Boards is limited to responses to scattered questions in broader academic studies. For example, a 2009 study of college advisers by Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver and Ronald E. Spielberger asked what university body was technically the “publisher” of the student newspaper. The Publications/Media Board was the publisher at

34.5 percent of four-year public schools and at much lower percentages at private (12.1 percent) and two-year colleges (3.2 percent). They also looked at where student media were positioned in college administrative structures; most media organizations reported to Student Affairs or an academic department, and virtually none of them actually reported to a Media Board (Kopenhaver and Spielberger, 2009). The authors also conducted a broad 1989 study of independent college papers that included several questions on advisory boards, such as whether a board existed, whether it selects the editor-in-chief, and whom the board reports to (Kopenhaver and Spielberger, 1989).

Research Questions

The lack of research that focuses primarily on the Media Advisory Boards has limited our understanding of how often they exist, where they exist, and how they operate. Therefore, this study asks:

- RQ1: At what types of schools are Media Advisory Boards most likely to exist, and what characteristics of a school strongly correlate with their existence?
- RQ2: How do Media Advisory Boards differ in terms of title, size, hierarchical position within a school, and formality of operation?
- RQ3: What does the composition of media boards look like and what characteristics of schools help explain the compositional differences of the boards?
- RQ4: From the perspective of the faculty media adviser, what are the key functions of advisory boards and how are the functions prioritized compared to the advisers' expectations?

The value of Media Advisory Boards seems to lie in the role of the beholder. Many of the bulleted student grievances cited at the start of this study complained about boards being heavy-handed in selecting editors and approving budgets.

Yet a survey of the chairs of six Media Advisory Boards stressed their boards' understanding for and respect of the free press tradition of student journalism (Student Press Law Center, 2003a). Click said having a media board approve a student newspaper's budget can benefit students, and he suggested that student newspapers educate their boards about student journalists' rights (Student Press Law Center, 2003a). Kopenhaver, who has conducted several annual surveys of faculty media advisers, said, "A good student media board will protect the student newspaper. It will be kind of the buffer if the administration tries to do something in regards to the paper" (Yam, 2008).

Given the diverse views, this study also asks:

- RQ5: How satisfied are advisers with the performance of the Media Advisory Board?
- RQ6: What characteristics of the school and of the adviser correlate with higher satisfaction of media board performance?

Method

The term Media Advisory Board is used broadly, throughout, to capture endless variations in board titles, as discussed later in the results. This study uses the term, “student media,” to describe student efforts to provide news coverage of activities on campus through college newspapers, magazines, television stations, and radio stations. The analysis refers to print, broadcast and Internet student news outlets unless stated otherwise.

The unit of analysis in this study is the college Media Advisory Board; researchers sought to focus both on schools with and without such a board in an effort to gauge what factors correlate with the existence of such a board. Researchers believed the media adviser at each campus would be the most reliable source of information about the Media Advisory Board at that campus; therefore, a survey instrument was constructed and sent to all members of the College Media Advisers organization. CMA, formerly known as the National Council of College Publication Advisers, was established in 1956 and is the best known association of U.S. college media advisers.

CMA provided a mailing list for its 641 current members. After eliminating entries with missing or false e-mail addresses, all 621 remaining names were checked individually against duplicates. To raise awareness, we notified CMA members of the upcoming survey via the organization’s listserv, in hopes of raising awareness. A nationwide, online survey invitation was sent out in June 2011 with (1) a letter, explaining the purpose of the study and promising anonymity, (2) a promise to send the survey results to participating advisers, and (3) a unique hyperlink that allowed only the e-mail recipient to fill out the online survey. Three weeks later, reminder e-mails were sent to those who had not yet responded.

We received 168 responses, which were then screened to ensure that no more than one person represented a particular school. During data cleaning, we eliminated 11 data points, as they either missed a majority of the questions or provided multiple numbers that defied face validity. This left us with a final sample of 157 complete responses, yielding a response rate of 25.3 percent. Only six advisers reported their school had a second Media Advisory Board, usually for a different medium. Data on the second board was not included due to the small number of cases. One of the authors of this study completed a survey to include data on that writer’s school.

The sample characteristics paralleled the population parameters of the college media advisers on two key variables. Some 68 percent of the CMA population worked at public colleges and universities, compared to 66.0 percent of the survey’s sample. Eighty-one percent of the CMA population worked at a four-year school, compared to 84 percent of the survey respondents. The results were important since the researchers expected the type of school (public vs. private, four-year vs. two-year) would help explain some of the variance in issues, such as whether a school had a Media Advisory Board.

A strength of the study was that a substantial percentage of respondents (39.5 percent) reported they did not have a Media Advisory Board at their school, allowing the researchers to compare the characteristics of schools with a board and those without.

The survey used multivariate analysis to see what independent variables could help predict the existence of such a board. Information on other organizational issues also was collected such as the board title, its composition, where it was located in the academic organization chart when the board was created, and whether it had any bylaws.

Advisers then were asked about the current functions of their board. In creating the survey instrument, researchers consulted with more than 30 mission statements of Media Advisory Boards to be sure that these functions listed were representative. The functions range from "selecting Editor-in-Chief/Station manager or other top positions" to "integrating journalism curriculum." Respondents rated each function based on a scale of one (not important at all) to five (extremely important). The study also examined possible discrepancies between advisers' perceived importance of board functions and how they, personally, would prioritize the board's functions.

Results

A majority (60.5 percent) of those responding (n = 157) reported their schools had a Media Advisory Board. There was a wide range of time frames as to when boards were established. Seventeen percent of schools with boards reported they have been in existence for five years or less. The average (median) age of a board was 25 years. But there was a large amount of variance; almost half of the schools – 48.3 percent – reported their board has been in existence for 20 years or more.

The researchers also analyzed advisory boards based on the type of college media with which the boards were affiliated. Two primary models emerged. In the first, schools used an advisory board for the school newspaper and, in some cases, various other print activities (which could include the yearbook, a general interest magazine, and/or a literary magazine). A majority of the respondents (48 of the 97 schools, or 52 percent), said they used this approach; 29 of the 48 focused solely on the campus newspaper. The second model focused on a combined board for both broadcast and print activities; 39 schools, or 42 percent, used this approach. Six schools reported using separate boards for individual student media activities. (They are reported separately here, but also could be listed under both print and broadcast.) A final four schools reported a board dealing with just broadcast media.

The heavier focus on print may be due to the respondents being drawn from the membership of CMA, which started out as a publications-only advisers' group.

Table 1. Types of student media with advisory boards

Print media (newspaper alone and/or with yearbook, magazine, literary magazine)	48 (52%)
Both broadcast and print media	39 (42%)
Broadcast media (TV and/or radio)	4 (4%)
Separate board for each medium	6 (2%)
Total	97 (100%)

Note: Print media category includes 29 boards that deal only with newspapers.

In RQ1, we asked about the types of schools at which Media Advisory Boards are most likely to exist, and what characteristics of a school help explain the differences. As Table 2 shows, regional differences were significant ($\chi 2 = 9.56$, df = 3, p = .02; Cramer's V = .25). Nearly three quarters (73.2 percent) of Southern schools had a board, while their Western counterparts were more likely than others not to have one (40 percent).

We also found a significant difference associated with the type of school. Only about one of three two-year schools (34.6 percent) reported having a board. Conversely, almost two out of three four-year institutions (65.6 percent) featured advisory boards. The overall statistical model confirmed the differences ($\chi 2 = 8.74$, df = 1, p = .00; Cramer's V = .24).

Enrollment size and legal status of the school did not correlate strongly with the presence of a media board. Public colleges were no more likely to embrace or reject media boards than their private counterparts, and the presence of the board was similarly distributed across small, medium, and large institutions.

Table 2. Distribution of the presence of media boards across region, public vs. private, two-year vs. four-year, and enrollment size.

		No Board (row %)	Board (row %)	Total (row %)
Region				
	West	12 (60.0%)	8 (40%)	20 (100%)
	Midwest	21 (38.2%)	34 (61.8%)	55 (100%)
	Northeast	14 (53.8%)	12 (46.2%)	26 (100%)
	South	15 (26.8%)	41 (73.2%)	56 (100%)
	$\chi 2$=9.56, df=3, p=.02*; Cramer's V=.25, p=.02			
Legal Status				
	Public	42 (40.4%)	62 (59.6%)	104 (100%)
	Private	20 (37.7%)	33 (62.3%)	53 (100%)
	$\chi 2$=.10, df=1, p=.75; Cramer's V=.03, p=.75			
Year				
	Two-year	17 (65.4%)	9 (34.6%)	26 (100%)
	Four-year	45 (34.4%)	86 (65.6%)	131 (100%)
	$\chi 2$=8.74, df=1, p=.00**; Cramer's V=.24, p=.00			
Size				
	Small	22 (43.1%)	29 (56.9%)	51 (100%)
	Medium	22 (40.7%)	32 (59.3%)	54 (100%)
	Large	18 (34.6%)	34 (65.4%)	52 (100%)
	$\chi 2$=.83, df=2, p=.66; Cramer's V=.07, p=.66			
Total		62 (39.5%)	95 (60.5%)	157 (100%)

Notes:
1. Sizes of schools were determined by three ranges of percentiles of enrollment.
   0 < small <33 percentile (4500 students)
   33 < medium < 66 percentile (19000 students)
   66< large < 100 percentile (30000 students)
2. Regions were divided according to the U.S. Census's "Regions and Divisions of the United States" (http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf)
3. *p < .05; **p < .01

RQ2 asked how Media Advisory Boards differed in terms of size, title, location within the university and formality of operation. Sizes of media boards varied considerably from 3 to 43 members, with an average size of 12 members. Sizes of the boards did not vary significantly across some key school characteristics, such as public vs. private, two-year vs. four-year, size, enrollment, and region.

As shown in Table 3, there was, nonetheless, a great variety in the titles of the media or publication advisory boards. After removing the name of any specific student organization, there were 42 different titles reported. After condensing, most centered on such common terms as “media” (39 mentions), “publication” (35 mentions) and “advisory board” (9 mentions).

Table 3 . Frequency, specific titles of campus media advisory organizations

39 mentions	Student Media Board; Student Media Advisory Board; Media Board; Student Media Advisory Committee; Student Media Committee; Media Advisory Board; Campus Media Committee; College Media Board; Media Board of Directors; Media Corp. Board of Directors; Media Student Council; Student Media Council; Student Media Board of Directors; Journalism and Mass Communication Media Board
35 mentions	Publication Board; Student Publications Board; Student Publications Committee; Daily Publication Board; Board of Publications; Board of Student Publications; Publications Committee; Publications Committee of the Faculty Student Association; Student Publications Advisory Board Committee
9 mentions	Advisory Board; Board of Advisers; News Advisory Board; Mass Communication Advisory Board; Newspaper Advisory Board; Editorial Advisory Board
3 mentions	Board of Directors
2 mentions	Board of Student Communications

Notes: All titles with two or more entries are listed in descending order of frequency. Any specific mention of a news organization in a title (e.g., “Mirror Advisory Board”) has been deleted and the remaining part of the title is listed (Advisory Board).

In terms of an organizational chart, the boards were located in a wide variety of areas. Some 31.6 percent of boards were located in Student Affairs, 16.8 percent in Academic Affairs, and the others were described as “independent,” were located in an academic department, or were in a variety of settings. In terms of their formality of operation, 76 percent reported operating under a set of bylaws. Sixty-eight percent took minutes at meetings.

RQ3 inquired into the composition of Media Advisory Boards and what characteristics of schools helped explain the compositional differences of the board. Figure 1 details the proportions of groups commonly found on advisory boards. Student journalists (20 percent) and faculty (20 percent) were most heavily represented, followed by representatives of the student body (19 percent). In contrast, administrators (11 percent) and student government (6 percent) representatives were much less visible in board composition.

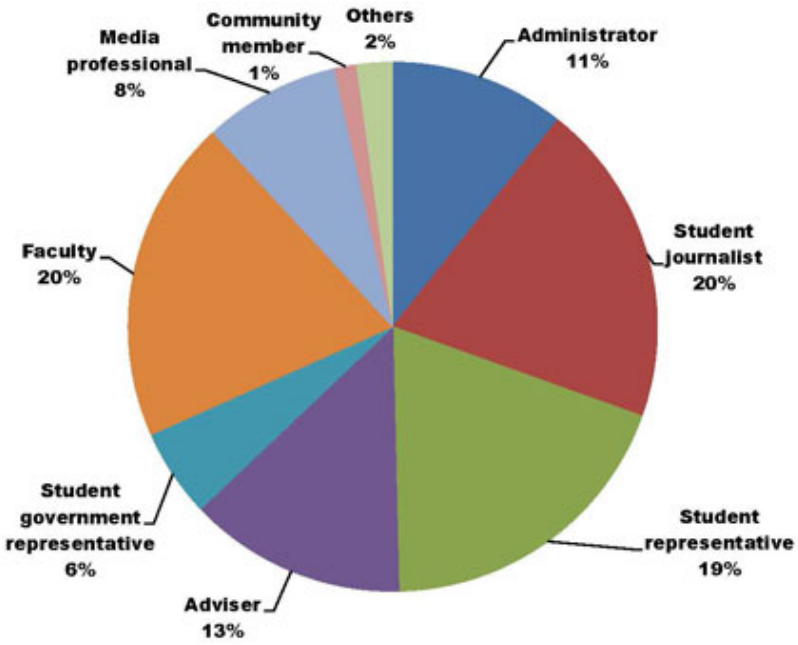

Figure 1. Overall percentages of group members on Media Advisory Board

Given the average board has 12 members, a typical board might have two to three members who are student journalists, two additional students, one to two administrators, one to two formal advisers, two (additional) faculty members, one media professional and another, varied member, such as a student government representative. There was no significant difference in board composition across two- and four-year schools or in composition across regions.

> The researchers also focused on whether two school characteristics – public vs. private status or size – made any differences in terms of board composition. Two factorial ANOVA analyses (Table 4) confirmed effects of both characteristics. First, advisers ($F = 19.69$, $df = 1/92$, $p = .00$) and student journalists ($F = 4.53$, $df = 1/92$, $p = .04$) were more likely to be found on the boards at private schools than they are at public schools, along with representatives of the student body ($F = 9.11$, $df = 1/92$, $p = .00$).

Second, both student reporters ($F = 3.35$, $df = 1/92$, $p = .04$) and advisers ($F = 25.06$, $df = 1/92$, $p = .00$) were much less likely to be included on boards in larger schools than were they in smaller ones. For example, advisers only accounted for 5.9 percent of board membership in large colleges but more than four times more (24.4 percent) in small colleges. Student journalists in small schools took up an average 25.8 percent of seats on boards, compared to medium-sized (20.35 percent) and large (14.12 percent) schools. Larger schools, however, do show a stronger presence of student body representatives (large, 25.63 percent; medium, 22.36 percent; small, 8.14 percent).

Table 4. Factorial ANOVA for average percentages of board across public vs. private schools and school size

	Public vs. Private				School Size				
	Public (Mean%)	Private (Mean%)	F (1/92)	p	Small (Mean%)	Medium (Mean%)	Large (Mean%)	F (1/92)	p
Administration	8.73	14.22	3.36	.070	15.19	8.29	8.85	2.39	.097
Student journalist	16.93	25.25	4.53	.036*	25.76[a]	20.35	14.12[b]	3.35	.039*
Student representative	23.14	11.55	9.11	.003**	8.14[b]	22.36[a]	25.63[a]	8.97	.000**
Adviser	9.39	20.88	19.69	.000**	24.43[a]	11.00[b]	5.90[c]	25.06	.000**
Student govmnt representative	6.28	3.79	3.112	.081	4.76	4.43	6.82	1.16	.317
Faculty	21.24	16.98	1.98	.163	15.38	20.86	22.57	2.26	.110
Media professionals	10.24	4.76	3.19	.078	4.28	9.52	10.74	1.72	.185
Community members	1.56	0.97	.248	.620	.69	.63	2.6	1.41	.249
Others	2.49	1.60	.35	.556	1.38	2.31	2.77	.32	.730

Note:
1. *p < .05; **p <.01
2. Due to unequal group sample sizes, the Games-Howell post-hoc test was chosen to adjust for homogeneity of variances assumption violation.
3. Superscripts "a" and "b" represent grouping of means generated by the Games-Howell post-hoc test. Within rows, means labeled "a" are significantly higher than those labeled "b", which subsequently are significantly higher than those labeled "c".

RQ4 investigates the kinds of key functions commonly served by advisory boards (e.g., select student media leaders, serve as a bridge with administrators, offer post-publication critiques) and how those functions are prioritized in the boards' work against advisers' expectations.

The researchers employed 11 items to measure functions of media boards. They asked advisers the operational importance of each function the board carries out. Then advisers were asked, in an idealized world, how important they would consider each function. Answers ranged from a high of 5 (extremely important) to a low of 1 (not important at all).

Two sets of mean scores were tabulated for both operational and adviser-valued importance (see the second and fifth column in Table 5). After rank ordering the scores separately, it was found that "elect EIC/Station Manager or other top positions," "defend student media if content is challenged," and "serve as a neutral sounding board if content is challenged" were the top three functions in terms of both operational and adviser-valued importance. Consistency was also found in some of the lower-ranked functions. For instance, the boards took an insignificant role in "supervising the adviser," "selecting other staff leaders," and "previewing content before release," as advisers desired.

Next, the researchers subtracted operational importance from adviser-valued importance, hoping to find out how advisers' ideals deviated from the real world. A paired t-test revealed several interesting patterns. Advisers desired for the board to take an even more active role

in “defending student media if content is challenged” (t = -6.96, df = 94, p = .00), and “serving as a neutral sounding board if content is challenged” (t = 5.05, df = 94, p = .00), albeit both functions are already top priorities of the board, as described earlier. Moreover, functions including “serving as a bridge between the student media and administration” (t = -3.66, df = 94, p = .00), “integrating the journalism curriculum” (t = -3.30, df = 94, p = .00), and “providing ideas for media content” (t = -2.67, df = 94, p = .01) need more attention from the board, advisers indicated. Even though “previewing content before release” was the least important function in most boards (Mean = 1.85, SD = 1.01), it could be argued that advisers wanted to see an even lesser role of the board (t = 2.16, df = 94, p = .033) in prepublication. For two additional items — “provide ideas for media content” and “preview content” – the gaps between reality and advisers’ ideals may not be significantly wide in a practical sense due to their small effect sizes (Cohen’s *d* = .23 and .12, respectively) near or below .20, as defined by Cohen (1988).

Table 5. Comparison of operational importance vs. adviser-valued importance of board functions

	Operational Importance			Adviser-Valued Importance			Mean Differences		
	Mean (N=95)	SD	Rank	Mean (N=95)	SD	Rank	t (df=94)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Cohen's *d*
Defend student media if content is challenged	3.09	1.38	3	3.95	1.25	2	-6.962	0.000**	.65
Serve as a neutral sounding board if content is challenged	3.11	1.40	2	3.67	1.37	3	-5.046	0.000**	.41
Serve as a bridge between the student media and administration	2.94	1.40	4	3.41	1.48	4	-3.659	0.000**	.32
Integrate the journalism curriculum	2.00	1.04	9	2.34	1.23	8	-3.297	0.001**	.30
Provide ideas for media content	2.12	1.13	7	2.40	1.27	6	-2.668	0.009**	.23
Preview content before release	1.85	1.01	11	1.73	1.03	11	2.162	0.033*	.12
Give suggestions to improve workflow and production	2.36	1.25	5	2.57	1.30	5	-1.865	0.065	
Select other staff leaders	1.99	1.18	10	1.91	1.17	10	1.238	0.219	
Select EIC/Station Manager or other top positions	4.22	1.38	1	4.16	1.40	1	1.029	0.306	
Critique content after release	2.08	1.16	8	2.17	1.25	9	0.917	0.362	
Supervise the adviser	2.27	1.33	6	2.37	1.43	7	-0.904	0.368	

Notes:
1. *p < .05; **p <.01.
2. Ranks are based on a descending order of means.
3. The 5-point scale ranges from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (extremely important)

RQ5 dealt with how satisfied advisers were with the performance of the Media Advisory Board. Advisers were asked to agree or disagree with specific statements about the operation of advisory boards. Most statements were cast in a positive frame and asked advisers to judge their own boards against an ideal situation, from a journalism point of view. Answers ranged from a high of 5 (strongly agree) to a low of 1 (strongly disagree).

Table 6. Frequency distribution and means of satisfaction toward board performance

	5 (Str. Agree)	4	3	2	1 (Str. Dis.)	Total	Mean	SD
The board understands that some student errors are part of the learning process.	44%	33%	20%	1%	2%	100%	4.16	.93
As an adviser, I am generally satisfied with the advisory board.	32%	31%	27%	6%	4%	100%	3.79	1.09
The board appreciates the watchdog role that a student media organization can assume.	32%	31%	27%	4%	6%	100%	3.77	1.13
On balance, the board has had a positive impact on the student organization.	31%	31%	27%	6%	5%	100%	3.75	1.12
The board is effective in its role of overseeing the student organization.	24%	27%	32%	8%	8%	99%	3.51	1.19
The board can supply some continuity at times when the quality of the student organization dips due to graduation or other reasons.	8%	16%	35%	12%	30%	101%	2.62	1.29
I would recommend changes to the board's operation.	10%	13%	30%	7%	41%	100%	2.42	1.38
The board would prefer the student organization to be more of a positive, public relations tool for the school.	3%	2%	31%	12%	53%	101%	1.92	1.10

Notes:
1. N = 95
2. Responses ranged from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Totals do not all add up to 100% due to rounding.

For the first five indicators, a majority of advisers said they agreed with the positive statements about board performance. For example, they see their board as understanding that some student errors are part of the learning process (77 percent agreed) and that the board is supportive of a watchdog role for the student media (63 percent). A majority said they were satisfied with the advisory board (63 percent) and that it has had a positive impact on the student organization it oversees (62 percent). A narrow majority (51 percent) said the board is effective in its oversight role.

Less than a majority (24 percent) agreed with the statement with the board can supply continuity at down times for the student organization. Only 23 percent agreed that they would recommend changes to the board's operation. Only 5 percent agreed the board would prefer the student organization to be more of a positive public relations tool for the administration.

In a final effort to gauge adviser satisfaction with board performance, advisers were asked how they would "rate the influence of the administration on the board's operation." Only 4 percent said the administration was "very influential," an additional 4 percent said it was "influential" and 31 percent said it was "somewhat influential." The majority, 61 percent,

agreed that the administration was “not influential at all.” Therefore, despite the many conflicts involving board operation, as reported to SPLC and elsewhere, advisers were generally positive when asked about the performance of their own board.

In answering RQ6, we focused on what characteristics of the school and of the adviser correlate with higher satisfaction of media board performance. We used hierarchical regression to test if perceived influence of administration, school characteristics (size, public-vs.-private, two- vs. four-year, and region), and demographics of the adviser (age, education, years of advising at current school, years of student media advising, years of media experience) explained satisfaction. The model was significant in explaining 27 percent of the variability of satisfaction, R2 = .27, adj. R2 = .14. Perceived influence of administration alone accounted for 15 percent of the variability of satisfaction (t = -3.87, p = .00) and was the only variable with significant predictive power (see Table 7), indicating that when advisers perceive lower influence of the administration on the media board, they are more likely to be satisfied with the board’s performance.

Table 7. Hierarchical regression predicting satisfaction toward board performance

Predictor	β	t	p	R^2 Change
Influence of administration	-.387	-3.89	.000**	.150
School Characteristics				.074
Size	-.256	-1.664	.100	
Public vs. private	-.055	-.386	.700	
Two- vs. four-year	.042	.408	.684	
West	.116	1.107	.272	
Midwest	.012	.111	.912	
Northeast	.177	1.594	115	
Demographics of advisers				.046
Age	.059	.419	.677	
Gender	-.105	-.922	.359	
Education	-.044	-.374	.710	
Years of advising current school	-.115	-.789	.433	
Years of student media advising	.237	1.475	.144	
Years of media experience	-.013	-.099	.921	

Notes:
1. *p < .05; **p < .01
2. Two categorical variables, "region" and "gender," were dummy-coded for multiple regression. "South" is not shown in the table because it was the uncoded variable that all the other region variables were compared against.

Discussion

There has been considerable scholarly interest in the issue of campus media censorship (for example, see Butzow, 2008; Lisosky, 2010; LoMonte, 2011a, 2011b; Peltz-Steeler, 2001; Student Press Law Center, 2009; Yam, 2008). But not much inquiry had been done in examining advisory boards – the "mediator" between student media and administration. This study has bridged the gap by offering both a broad view and microscopic view of college Media Advisory Boards across the United States. Several patterns emerged from the data.

First, the researchers observed both similarities and differences in terms of some basic characteristics of advisory boards. Having an established advisory board seems to be a common practice at U.S. colleges and perhaps more common than it was in the past. Looking back at Self's (1994) finding that half of JMC colleges reportedly had advisory boards in the early 1990s, we now have a majority of schools that responded that have a board (60.5 percent). As described by Henderson (2004), there has been a resurgence of interest in advisory boards; 44.8 percent of those in this study's sample were established after Self's study in 1994.

The sizes and titles of the boards showed considerable diversity across the sample. Even though this study found the average board size of 12 members, a number slightly higher than what Click (1993) recommends, the size of each board varied from school to school, covering a spectrum from three members to 43 members (SD = 5.76). The variety of board titles perhaps responds not only to the variety of schools but also to the arrival of online media forms.

Second, advisers had a clear expectation that one of the primary roles of advisory boards should be to serve as a buffer between administration and student media should friction arise, rather than controlling the media in editorial or managerial terms. Advisers in this study reported that most advisory boards did a satisfactory job of serving as a neutral sounding board or even a defender of student media if content is challenged. In fact, the researchers were pleased to see similarity between how advisers rank current board functions and how advisers would rank these board functions in a perfect world.

The finding has largely dismissed the enduring concern, at least for these schools, as raised by Mencher back in 1965, that advisory boards could turn student media into "public relations arm" rather than a "laboratory of life." Only 5 percent of the advisers in this study would describe their advisory boards as public relations arms of the administration. However, the finding does not offer any permanent peace of mind, because the advisers also pointed out room for improvement and suggested that media boards should more aggressively pursue their buffering roles.

Third, board membership was well-balanced overall with some differences across school types. Here we borrow Click's (1993) "lay vs. expert" model to understand a healthy board composition. Click maintained that a balanced board would have a balanced number of both expert members "with training and expertise in journalism, law and business" and lay

members “who represent leaders in general and who may be uninformed” about journalism and publishing businesses (p. 18). We understand the balance as a structure to avoid elitism, a possible product of an expert-dominated board, as well as to avoid predominantly layman decision-making, which might lead to the disregard of journalistic practices and conventions.

This study found almost a tie among the three largest groups: student journalists (20 percent), study body representatives (19 percent), and faculty (20 percent). Student representatives speak for the majority of readers, or laymen; student journalists are the largest group of journalism practitioners, or experts; and faculty can be both laymen and experts, average readers with the perspectives of educators, or experts who give professional advice.

Private and public schools tended to have different preferences in assembling media boards. Private institutions seemed to value expert members more than their public counterparts by including higher numbers of journalists and advisers. Due to less First Amendment protection in private schools (Lisosky, 2010), a heavier presence of experts may help counterbalance a more perceivable influence from the administration. Public schools, where the First Amendment exerts its full power, tend to have a much higher percentage of student representatives. By giving the laymen, namely the students, more voice in the media board, public schools seem to have a distinct way of balancing the power of the press without the administration being directly involved in the editorial business.

Fourth, we were surprised to see a high rate of satisfaction with the Media Advisory Boards’ performances. According to the advisers, media boards were good at “understanding that some student errors are part of the learning process,” “appreciating the watchdog role that a student media organization can assume,” and having “a positive impact” on the student media. As mentioned earlier, the high satisfaction seems to be a result of a low perceived influence of the administration. Again, this finding is inconsistent with potential critics’ apocalyptic concerns about suppressive media boards.

Rather, with low administrative influence accompanying more trust among members and better performance, a virtuous cycle seems to be in place. Media boards, however, still need to be more helpful in dealing with quality dips due to graduation and other logistic reasons.

The literature warns many things might go wrong since the board is handling a variety of delicate issues. Surprisingly, this study suggests that potentially controversial board issues such as defending student media, serving as a bridge between student media and administration, trying to mandate pre-publication review and supervising the adviser, most likely do not go wrong, at least in the eyes of the advisers.

This study has several limitations that can circumscribe the generalizability of the results. Rather than all the college media advisers in the United States, the surveyed population was confined to the members of College Media Advisers. The sample was drawn online on a voluntary basis, a method used for many web-based surveys. The evaluative responses came solely from advisers; their visions of how a media board should work may differ significantly from those of other key players.

We hope that this study has provided foundational, benchmark data. Future researchers will benefit when they revisit such issues and study how the college media adapt to increasingly heterogeneous campuses and fast-evolving technologies. Other research methods could be used, including in-depth interviews and focus groups, to probe into the micro-mechanics of the boards. Additional work could be done on the frequency of board meetings, the determination of voting vs. non-voting board members, and how schools wrestle with the legal definition of "publisher."

Acknowledgement

The study was based in part on a panel discussion led by the authors at the CMA Spring Convention in New York City, 2011. The authors would like to acknowledge the research assistance of Tebben Lopez.

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When controversial coverage lands on advisers

cmreview.org/when-controversial-coverage-lands-on-advisers/

College Media Review January 23, 2012

Embattled advisers should look to alumni networks, training and legislation to protect their jobs.

By Debra Landis
University of Illinois Springfield

This year hardly had started before another college media adviser was fired following a controversy over student-managed content. Paul Isom, the student publications director at East Carolina University, lost his job after editors at the The East Carolinian newspaper published a full-frontal photo of a streaker among a series of photos on the front page.

The East Carolinian

theeastcarolinian.com

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BRIEFS

Arrest made in drive-by

Staff Reports

An arrest has been made in the drive-by shooting of Peddlin' Pirates' driver Damien Lovett.

Marcus Harris, a Greenville resident, has been charged with robbery with a dangerous weapon, assault by pointing a weapon and felony possession of a firearm.

According to Martin Tanski, the owner of Peddlin' Pirates, Lovett was shot through both of his legs by one bullet during the incident at the corner of East Third Street and Rotary Avenue, a little over two weeks ago.

Harris, 18, fired bullets from a truck and shot Lovett after an attempted robbery of Lovett, only a few streets away from the Peddlin' Pirates garage at around 1:40 a.m. on Oct. 15, reported WITN.

Initial reports and Tanski's eyewitness account listed a second suspect as being involved in the shooting and the robbery.

A release stated that additional charges against Harris and a second suspect are possible.

Anyone who can offer any information is asked to call the police at 329-4315 or Pitt-Greenville CrimeStoppers at 758-7777.

Campus Dining and Kellogg's team up

Staff Reports

John Sieglinger ran across the field during halftime at a football game against Southern Mississippi University, where he was tackled by university officials.

Streaker takes field

Cameron Gupton
ASSISTANT NEWS EDITOR

The streaker at Saturday's football game against Southern Mississippi University has been arrested for the incident.

John Sieglinger, 21, was arrested for misdemeanor indecent exposure and first-degree trespass for running naked across Bagwell Field at Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium, stated a Pitt County Detention Center booking.

Sieglinger was a student at Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh where he lives. He pulled the stunt in the middle of the military appreciation ceremony that was taking place on the field during halftime.

He was tackled at the 50-yard line by stadium staff before he could finish his naked run. His bond was set at $1,500 and he was released from jail after paying the fine.

According to Sieglinger, his decision to streak was pre-planned; he had given his friends money to bail him out of jail beforehand.

"It was something that I wanted to do before I died," said Sieglinger.

Kevin Mercer, one of Sieglinger's friends who bailed him out said that he wasn't watching the game when it happened.

"We are a pretty close group of friends," said Mercer. "We all went and bailed him out."

Sieglinger chose to run during the ceremony due to the fact that security was much lower, but he says looking back, it was bad timing.

"As far as the controversy, it was definitely bad timing," he said. "(But) It kind of represents freedom, and what's more free that running down the stadium in the crisp Greenville air?"

Sieglinger's Facebook page contains multiple images of him running across the field, with graphic areas censored.

> STREAKER page A2

Students published unedited "streaker" photos in November; adviser fired in January.

Isom joined at least 14 other college publication advisers who have been fired or reassigned since 2007 for what they contend resulted from content published in their student newspapers, according to the Student Press Law Center.

ECU Public Affairs Director Mary Schulken would not comment to CMR on the firing of Isom but called The East Carolinian an “editorially independent” student newspaper, a position the administration also took in a Nov. 8 media advisory, nearly two months before Isom was fired.

The number of advisers who have been fired following controversial coverage could be much higher, says Mark Witherspoon, adviser to the Iowa State Daily.

“College media advisers are fired or reappointed all the time, and we may just not know about it,” said Witherspoon, a CMA Hall of Fame member and former president who chairs the CMA’s First Amendment Committee, in an interview before the news of Isom’s firing was widely known.

And while there are no magic bullets to protect advisers, there are steps they can take to protect themselves against being fired because of content students have chosen to publish, said Frank LoMonte, executive director of the Student Press Law Center.

Advisers can develop “censorship resistance” through the development of alumni and news media networks whose members can provide training for advisers and students and serve as sounding boards when controversies arise, LoMonte said.

When advisers do sense their supervisors have concerns about their job performances, advisers should take the initiative to meet with the supervisors to address the issues, says T.R. Hanrahan, who writes a blog and maintains the website for the Fired Adviser Comfort Team, an offshoot of the Student Press Law Center. “Trust your instincts,” he said.

The removal or reappointment of a college media advisers because of what the student journalists they advise have decided to publish or broadcast is as much of a form of censorship as the threat to withdraw funding on the same grounds, LoMonte said.

Hanrahan said he knows firsthand what can happen from that kind of backlash.

The Missouri College Press Association adviser of the year in 2010, Hanrahan was dismissed as college newspaper adviser at Missouri Southern State University in April 2011 after The Chart newspaper’s report that the university had hired an accounting professor who had been convicted of embezzlement in Ohio.

“I saw it coming for a year or more,” said Hanrahan. “But looking back, I was naïve. I was advising the college newspaper I edited as a student.”

At the time, university administrators said they “wanted to make a change” but didn’t elaborate, according to Hanrahan, who contends his dismissal was related to content.

The professor later resigned, according to several news articles from the Associated Press, and The Chart won an SPJ Mark of Excellence award for its reporting. In previous years, the Associated Press reported, the newspaper had broken a story on university’s planned closing of a child development center — a decision that later was reversed — and had newspapers with a story on declining campus enrollment removed by the university from a high school recruitment fair.

Hanrahan characterized the investigative story about the accounting professor who had been convicted of embezzling as “the last straw” for the university.

A university spokesman did not respond to several requests seeking comment for this College Media Review story.

Being preemptive doesn’t mean being paranoid but does involve educating supervisors and others about case law, the College Media Association’s Code of Ethical Behavior (which says advisers are professional educators and mentors but not censors), and why it’s important for college media to be editorially independent.

Members of college and state press associations may want to work toward passage of legislation prohibiting advisers from being fired or transferred because of content in the media they advise.

Illinois and California are the only states in the nation with a law prohibiting the dismissal or reappointment of an adviser at a public university or college because of content, according to LoMonte. The College Campus Press Act, which also pertains to community colleges, took effect in June 2008.

The Illinois act was passed without concerted lobbying efforts, recalled media law expert James Tidwell, chair of the journalism department at Eastern Illinois University and a member of the CMA’s Hall of Fame.

“There were not thousands of phone calls or letters (promoting the law’s introduction and passage),” Tidwell said. “We received a call that the law was being introduced. It passed overwhelmingly.”

Among its provisions, the state law states that public universities observe the following:

- “Campus media produced primarily by students at a state-sponsored institution of higher learning is a public forum for expression by the student journalists and editors at the particular institution;”
- Campus media, whether campus-sponsored or non-campus-sponsored “are not subject to prior review by public officials of a State-sponsored institution of higher learning;”
- Collegiate student editors “are responsible for determining the news, opinions, feature content, and advertising content of campus media;” and
- “Collegiate media adviser must not be terminated, transferred, removed, otherwise disciplined, or retaliated against for refusing to suppress protected free expression rights of collegiate student journalists and of collegiate student editors.”

Tidwell says lawmakers wanted the public to know they supported students' First Amendment rights. The bill was approved in the wake of the Illinois court case, Hosty v. Carter, in which journalists sued Governors State University after a university dean told the student newspaper's printer to hold future issues until a school official had approved the student newspaper's content.

The 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in 2005 that the Supreme Court's 1988 Hazelwood decision limiting high school student free expression rights could extend to college and university campuses. In 2006, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to grant an appeal in the case.

"I think Illinois legislators wanted people to know they supported the First Amendment," Tidwell said.

Debra Chandler Landis is in her 17th year as student publications adviser at the University of Illinois Springfield. At UIS, she advises the news and business operations of the weekly student newspaper, The Journal, as well as The Journal's semester news and features magazine, Beyond, and The Journal's summer publication, The Guide. She holds a master's degree in journalism from Southern Illinois University Carbondale and a bachelor's degree in journalism and sociology from Iowa State University.

Memoir: “I wanted to ask you a question about a story I’m reporting on.”

cmreview.org/memoir-i-wanted-to-ask-you-a-question-about-a-story-im-reporting-on/

College Media Review January 23, 2012

One new adviser navigates his uncharted territory into media advising at a private school.

By Robert L. Kaiser
Canisius College

The first sign I was destined for a strange relationship with Canisius College’s athletics program came at 8:48 on a sub-freezing, snow-encrusted Buffalo night in mid-February 2011, when the college’s mascot — a mutant creature straight out of Greek mythology — connected with me through social media.

“Petey Griffin is now following you on Twitter!” an email in my Canisius inbox trumpeted.

“Petey” is a student dressed up as the Canisius Golden Griffin. According to the ancient Greeks, a griffin has a lion’s body and tail, an eagle’s head and wings, and the general disposition of an air traveler navigating security at LaGuardia. As mascots go, it would be an inspired and inspiring choice – if only it didn’t invoke an image of a sinking ship, in this case *Le Griffon*, an ill-fated 17th-century French sailing vessel that sank in the Great Lakes after an Iroquois prophet supposedly placed a curse on it. It’s an ominous portent for teams trying to stay afloat in conference standings.

I can’t say whether Tom Parrotta, the amiable head coach of the Canisius men’s basketball team, was himself affected by the old prophet’s curse, but during the cold early months of 2011 Parrotta might have felt like the captain of a sinking ship. That February, even as Petey Griffin was cheerfully using Twitter to build the Canisius fan base, Parrotta’s program was taking on water. The Golden Griffins were losing more games than they were winning, and behind the scenes a storm was brewing that would test not only Parrotta, the program’s fifth-year coach, but also me, the greenhorn faculty adviser to students putting out the college’s weekly newspaper.

I had a lot to learn that winter, my first semester as a college professor. Only a few months earlier, after 25 years as a journalist, I had traded newsrooms for classrooms, joining the Canisius faculty as a tenure-track assistant professor of multimedia journalism. The landscape of my new world was daunting for its vastness and urgent imperatives as well as for its unfamiliarity. Canisius had started a journalism program effective with my hire; signing my contract, I knew that besides facing the steep learning curve attendant midlife career changes I was assuming a great deal of responsibility. By my second year I would be the director of the college’s journalism program. By my second semester I would be the adviser to the student newspaper, a tabloid called – you guessed it – *The Griffin.*

Now the second semester was upon me, and I was beginning to realize there would be no easing into the adviser’s role. Mine would be a baptism by fire – one that burst into full flame with an email I received from sophomore journalism major Nick Veronica at 10:38 a.m. on March 9.

Fraught though they were, the events Veronica’s email set in motion proved invaluable in my own education at Canisius — as a teacher, as an adviser and as an outlander to academia in general and to private colleges in particular. I was forced not only to evaluate and inform, early on, my approach to faculty advising — a perilous balancing act between doing too much and doing too little — but to examine ethical and legal questions at the very heart of journalism. Also, to navigate a foggy and dangerous intersection: that of universities and open-records laws, which in the real-world journalists wield like swords but which in the halls of academia can be as squishy as an April thaw in Buffalo.

“Hey Professor Kaiser,” Veronica wrote in his email. “I was wondering what time you are on campus today. I wanted to ask you a question about a story I’m reporting on.”

> A few weeks earlier, on Feb. 21— as Parrotta’s charges were reeling from a three-game losing streak that included the horrible indignity of a defeat at the hands of archrival Niagara — Veronica had heard the first rumblings of trouble in the basketball program, though he didn’t immediately recognize them as such.

That day, one of Veronica’s hockey teammates had strolled into the locker room griping that his iPod, a Christmas gift from his mother, had been stolen from his room.

At first Veronica “didn’t think anything of it,” he later told me. Then on March 8, a Tuesday, while walking with a friend in one of the underground tunnels that connect campus buildings south of Main Street, Veronica learned that his teammate had recovered the stolen iPod. The friend who told Veronica this as they walked in the tunnel was the sister of his teammate’s roommate, who also had lost an iPod in the theft and subsequently recovered it.

Before Veronica could ask how the iPods had turned up, his friend – “she was pretty pissed” – huffed something about not being able to believe that the thieves were basketball players.

“My ears perked up,” Veronica recalled later in a written account of his reporting process that I asked him to send me. “I knew that would be a story.”

According to Veronica, that night he interviewed his teammate for an hour and a half, all on the record. Veronica’s teammate told him how events had unfolded. He also told him the names of the three players involved, which they had learned from campus police after reporting the theft. At the time of the theft, police said, the players had been at a party and at least one of them had been drinking.

Only one of the players admitted to the theft, and that player, a freshman, subsequently returned Veronica’s teammate’s iPod with a telltale photo of his daughter set as the screen’s background wallpaper.

The next morning Veronica called the campus public safety department and asked for an interview with the investigating officers, though he didn’t say why. Instead, he was granted an audience with the head of public safety, Gary Everett, who had the report of the incident on his desk when Veronica walked in.

Everett would not confirm for Veronica the names of anyone involved or that they were members of the basketball team. When Veronica asked whether those involved had been drinking, Everett changed the subject.

“In retrospect,” Veronica wrote me later, “I really should have pushed the envelope and grilled him on that, but that’s easy to say now.”

It was only a few hours after Veronica interviewed police that he sent me the email asking to talk.

I had no inkling then that Veronica wanted to discuss Parrotta's basketball program, no idea anyone was accusing any of the players of anything except ineptitude. None of the Golden Griffins seemed all that adept at stealing the ball from an opposing point guard, let alone boosting an iPod from a dorm room. The two players who sat on the front row in my COM203 class were likeable, respectful and, so far as I could tell, honest.

And so, as I responded to Veronica's email with an invitation to drop by my office in Lyons Hall after his 1 p.m. class, I was curious but unexcited. Within minutes, I wasn't giving our email exchange another thought.

By the end of the day, I wouldn't be able to get Veronica's email or the story he was pursuing out of my mind.

Nick Veronica is at once shy and cocky, and, while I saw in his demeanor something of a challenge, I also saw in it a reminder of what I was like when I was young.

As a working journalist I had climbed to the pinnacle, was a star at the *Chicago Tribune*, a go-to guy recruited to that paper so I could write long, important stories for the front page. But a tire-squealing career change at a time of life when many men are buying red Corvettes had tempered my arrogance. As I learned a new career, I felt free once again to ask and emulate, to not only admit to fear and confusion and uncertainty but to occupy them completely and to laugh about it. I had almost as much to learn about being a faculty adviser as about being a teacher.

That early-March afternoon, I welcomed Veronica into my office and sat listening and asking questions as he told me about the story he was working on. My instincts as a journalist came rushing back like riding a bike. When Veronica was finished, I leaned back in my chair and launched into my first meaningful contribution as faculty adviser: a measured monologue on the power and peril of the story that was welling up around us.

What Veronica had on his hands was a big story, that was plain to see, and I felt invigorated merely by my proximity to it. Sports and crime are powerful engines in our media culture, and here Veronica had both in one potentially explosive article.

"This is the kind of story that'll make *The Griffin* a 'must read,' " I told him. "Nail this and you'll have *The Buffalo News* chasing you."

I paused.

"I have to tell you something, though," I said.

It was then I gave voice to my concerns, which had started gnawing at me the moment he told me what he was working on. Veronica, and the paper along with him, was stepping into a legal and ethical mine field, I pointed out, and I felt it my obligation as faculty adviser to point out all the potential pitfalls and the best ways around them – not only for Veronica's sake and that of his editor, Kate Songin, but also for the sake of the college; Canisius could be at risk of a libel suit if the story was not handled carefully.

My greatest concern was this: Veronica, who had the names of the basketball players involved and seemed eager to publish them, didn't have the information from a single privileged source; the police had not verified the names nor confirmed basketball players were involved. In fact, Veronica's only sources on the identities of the perpetrators were the victims of the theft, and because they had decided against pressing charges, all we had were students accusing other students of a crime without any objective official source to corroborate their claims.

I asked Veronica if he had seen the police report. He said he hadn't.

"You need to get a copy of that," I said.

And then it hit me:

I was sitting in a building with a statue of a saint in the hallway.

I felt a headache coming on. This was a private college. How did open-records laws apply, if at all? Even the registrar's office probably wasn't obligated to divulge, confirm or deny the barest of information about students' comings and goings.

"Let me do some research," I said. "Please don't run the story until we've talked again."

With that, Veronica left my office. I gulped down two Excedrin and swiveled left to my MacBook to begin scouring the Internet for information about open-record laws and universities — in particular, private colleges. To my dismay if not my surprise, the preponderance of evidence seemed to show we had no ground on which to stand. The best article I found on the subject was "Accessing Campus Police Records at Private Universities: Transparency and Accountability when Operating under State Executive Authority," a Dec. 20, 2004, dissertation by Robert A. Morris at the Indiana University School of Law at Indianapolis.

Morris began his paper with a story about a 2003 incident at Taylor University, a private, Christian, interdenominational, liberal arts university. In the spring of that year, Morris wrote:

… expensive camera equipment was stolen from the Communication Arts Department of Taylor…. As a student journalist enrolled at the time of the incident, Justin McLaughlin had an interest in the details of the crime. When his in-person request for relevant documentation was denied, he followed it with a written request in September 2003, citing the Indiana

Access to Public Records Act as the basis for his request. This request was also denied. The Indiana Access to Public Records Act preamble asserts the public policy 'that all persons are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those who represent them as public officers and employees.' Moreover, the Act is to be liberally construed, with the burden of proof on the agency to establish a valid rationale for non-disclosure of requested records. McLaughlin believed this language would enable him to access the records. He filed a formal complaint in September 2003 with the Indiana Office of the Public Access Counselor, hoping an advisory opinion asserting the same would persuade Taylor University. The advisory opinion stated that the Act did not apply to the university because it is a private entity. A handful of other states have directly confronted this issue through public access counselor opinions, formal adjudications, or legislative actions, with varying results. In all instances, the conflict is whether to classify police departments of private universities as agencies of the state for purposes of access to information, or, conversely, to classify them as private entities that are outside the purview of such laws.

In the last few years, some states have taken measures to hold private universities accountable to open-records laws, according to the Student Press Law Center, which reported in 2006 that "gaining access to campus crime records has often been an arduous task for journalists at private colleges and universities."

Summarizing what I'd found and providing a link to the Morris paper, I sent Veronica an email at 2:33 p.m. on Wednesday, March 09:

"Nick,

"I found the attached document. … Bottom line: There's no clear consensus on the issue. Consequently, you may ask for the record and they may deny it and by the time you got through fighting it in the courts, if you were so inclined, we could all be of retirement age and The Griffin would have passed through several generations of editors. …

"I think your best bet is to see if the kid whose stuff was stolen will give you a copy of the record. HOWEVER, if the record isn't public, the fact that you have it and can cite it as a source doesn't necessarily afford you legal protection. So you would have a decision to make about whether to go with the name."

The next afternoon, Veronica brought me a draft of the story to read. All the facts were there except for the players' names. I told him I thought it was ready to go and that the paper should not wait to run it until Friday, when the next print edition came out, but post it on the website immediately lest they be scooped.

As I had predicted, *The Buffalo News* soon followed with a story, crediting The Griffin. The News eventually updated the story to include the players' names, as did The Griffin when the players were suspended indefinitely from Canisius.

In the written account I had him to provide me after it was all over, Veronica summed up his experience reporting the story this way:

“You can’t get away with that just because (especially because) you play basketball, despite the fact it probably would have been covered up and thrown under the rug if I didn’t do the dirty work (and I have a sneaking suspicion they knew about it before the season ended).”

That’s probably what I’m most proud of, that I brought justice to a situation that would have otherwise been covered up.

PS- …I can feel myself getting better, and that might be the most exciting part of all.

Rob Kaiser is the director of the journalism program at Canisius College, where he is an assistant professor of journalism. A full-time journalist for more than 25 years before trading newsrooms for classrooms in August 2010, Kaiser has been a reporter, columnist, editorial writer, magazine writer, senior editor and writing coach. His work has appeared in numerous publications including the Chicago Tribune, Chicago Tribune Magazine, the Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, The Baltimore Sun and the Orlando Sentinel. Kaiser has a master of fine arts degree in writing from Spalding University in Louisville, Ky., and a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Kentucky.

Funding issues and independence

cmreview.org/funding-issues-and-independence/

College Media Review January 23, 2012

Dependence on student fees for media operating budget creates instant conflict of interest

By Debra Landis
University of Illinois Springfield

The scene seems surreal: Journalists asking politicians for money to help keep their operations going.

That is exactly what happens in U.S. institutions of higher education when the leaders of college publications that depend on student fees to augment newspaper operations are required to appear before student government groups to ask for money.

It sets up the potential for showdowns in which student government leaders, upset with coverage by the campus press, are able to threaten to reduce or cut funding entirely. The publications, in turn, report their funding is being threatened.

It's uncertain exactly how many student newspapers across the country request student fees each year, but "it's the majority," according to Frank LoMonte, executive director of the Student Press Law Center.

At some colleges, steps have been taken to work around this annual round of requests for funding, which Iowa State Daily adviser Mark Witherspoon compared to "begging for money" from groups that may not see the news media as working in their or the university's best interests.

The Iowa State Daily now negotiates long-term student fee contracts with representatives of student government and the university administration, Witherspoon said. While the Daily relies mostly on advertising revenue, Witherspoon said operations still would be hurt if the paper's budget didn't include student fees.

"It is working out well," Witherspoon said, adding that administrators and student government leaders understand the important roles the student newspaper serves on campus.

At University of Illinois Springfield, The Journal now receives a designated amount of student fees each year rather than being required to appear before a student government funding group. Former UIS Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs L. Christopher Miller, who helped spearhead the move, said of student government leaders approving money for the media covering them, "it's a conflict of interest."

In addition to removing student news organizations from annual student fee requests, there are other steps student media departments can take to be "censorship resistant," according to Frank LoMonte, executive director of the Student Press Law Center.

One step, according to LoMonte, is to publish a product that's viewed a quality publication by professional standards. While student newspapers should never shy away from hard-hitting, investigative stories, it's more difficult for student or administrative leaders to cut or eliminate funding if a newspaper is balanced, fair and accurate and devoid of spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors, LoMonte said.

If they haven't done so already, student newspapers should consider developing strong alumni networks and professional media contacts for potential advice and support should money for operations be threatened.

For more information about becoming "censorship resistant," contact the Student Press Law Center, which fields thousands of calls each year and offers assistance on a variety of media-related questions.

Debra Chandler Landis is in her 17th year as student publications adviser at the University of Illinois Springfield. At UIS, she advises the news and business operations of the weekly student newspaper, The Journal, as well as The Journal's semester news and features magazine, Beyond, and The Journal's summer publication, The Guide. She holds a master's degree in journalism from Southern Illinois University Carbondale and a bachelor's degree in journalism and sociology from Iowa State University.

Editor’s Corner

cmreview.org/editors-corner/

College Media Review January 25, 2012

In with the old in the new year

If you’ve been following the CMA listserv since the first of the year, you’re familiar with the case of the East Carolina University newspaper adviser who was fired after controversy over the publication of a full-frontal photo of a streaker at a Pirates home football game. And, by now, you’ve probably heard about the blunder by a community news blog managed by Penn State students whose premature reporting of the death of coaching icon Joe Paterno was picked up by national media.

These two incidents are vastly dissimilar on some levels – the ECU publication has (or had) a professional adviser, while the Onward State news staff apparently does not. Most advisers who have responded on the CMA listserv believe Paul Isom’s firing at ECU was unethical — that he was held responsible for the publication of content that he had no legal authority to

squash. ECU has stated it backs the editorial independence of the newspaper. If that is indeed the case, the timing of ECU's decision couldn't have been worse in terms of the credibility of their position.

At Penn State, student journalists proceeded with the publication of Paterno's death after two staff members reported to editors that an athletics administrator had sent out an email message to student athletes notifying them the long-time head football coach had died. One staffer was victim to a hoax email and the other's account was, in hindsight, at best weak on substantiation.

But in all the hurly-burly surrounding Paterno's dismissal from the university in the wake of the Sandusky sex scandal, his subsequent announcement that he was being treated for lung cancer, and the reports that he had been hospitalized in serious condition, were the student editors at Onward State so caught up in the events that some professional advice might have clarified their thought processes? Would they have benefited from advice from a disinterested party to make the additional phone call to get as close to the primary source as possible? I think so.

We don't know the extent to which Isom and the East Carolinian staff discussed how the photos of the streaker should be played. But we have accounts from Onward State about how it arrived at its decisions, of which the news site ProPublica reported:

The fateful Tweet was no snap decision. The site has a complex editorial process that's designed for the Web and has earned praise for its vision — but like any editorial process, it can easily be disrupted by bad reporting and pressure-packed situations.

And so, presumably, was the editorial process at CBS Sports, which picked up Onward State's account. In both collegiate cases, student journalists made decisions that have come back to haunt them. But we all know that goofs are inevitable from time to time; even the master carpenter is resigned to the inescapable collision of thumb with hammer, and most of our student journalists are apprentices of sorts. But too often in our ranks, advisers are finding themselves marginalized, if not fired, following controversial news coverage over which they have no control but that now can be read globally instead of only on campus. According to the Student Press Law Center, some 15 advisers have been fired in recent years following the publication of controversial content or because they refused requests from administrators to overstep legal bounds to control content.

In this edition of CMR, Debra Landis reports on steps advisers can take to protect themselves from administrative efforts to hold them accountable for student content. Landis' news package also examines how advisers who feel the economic squeeze from administrators or campus student agencies displeased over news coverage can avoid that pressure without compromising the news mission of their publications.

One campus institution that protects the integrity of student publications at many universities is the student publication board, which provides a buffer for publications and advisers. Those boards also have the potential to create additional pressures on advisers. In this edition, Fairfield University journalism professors James Simon and Lei Xie examine in their peer-reviewed research how these boards function and how they're received by advisers.

Also in this edition, Rob Kaiser tells the tale of his baptism by fire at a private university after the newspaper staff discovers allegations that student-athletes have been involved in some campus thefts.

And as always, let us hear from you about your magazine.

Robert Bohler, *Editor*