COLLEGE MEDIA
r e v i e w

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CONTENTS

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. For archival purposes, traditional volume and issue numbers have been replaced with a volume year, reflecting the publication cycle from July through June. CMR historically published a Research Annual each year. When publication frequency changed, some research articles were published online only. To avoid excluding any work, all online-published research articles are included.

College Media Review

Journal of the College Media Association

Navigating disasters and tragedy as a journalist
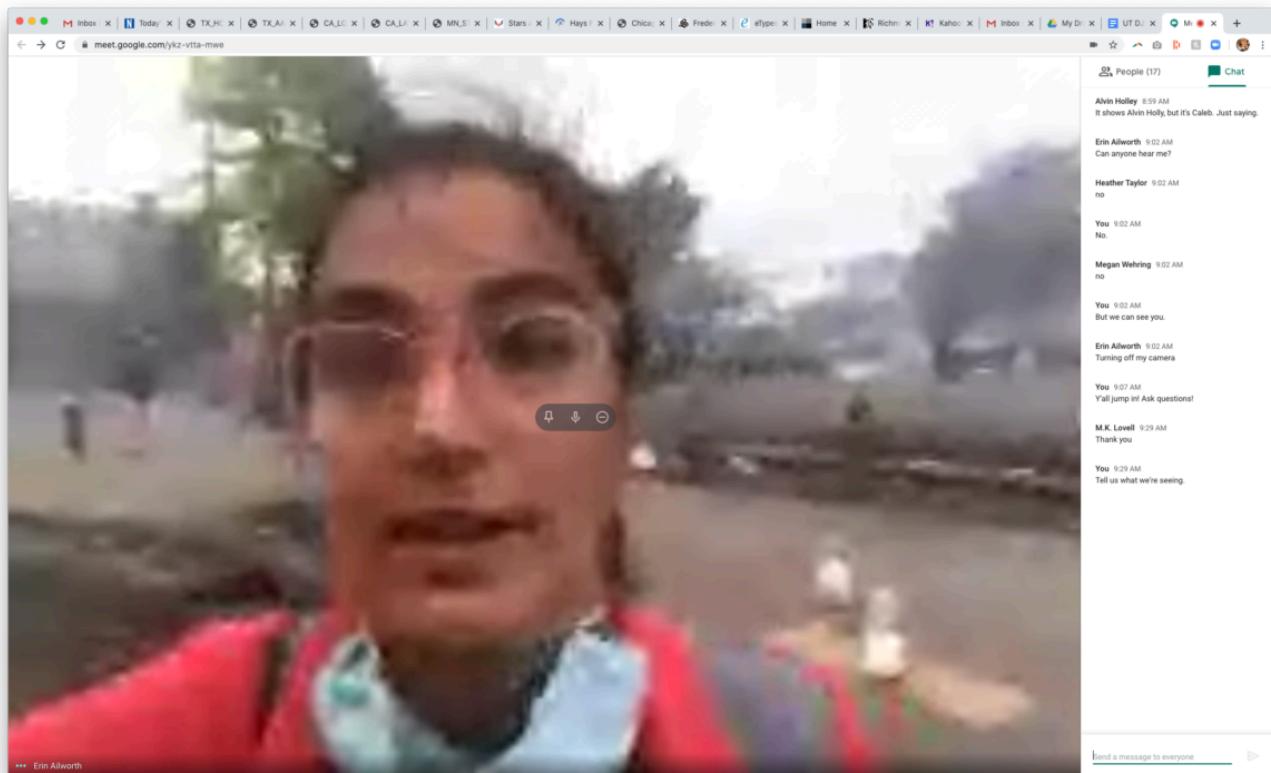
'Empathy to the forefront'

By Christine Bartruff

University of South Carolina Honors College

A chemical smell. A haze in the air. Broken windows. Abandoned jugs of milk. Through the eyes of a reporter, this was the scene in Minneapolis following protests against police brutality sparked by the killing of George Floyd.

Erin Ailworth, Midwest correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, spoke to students via Google Hangouts while she was on the ground in Minneapolis. Ailworth is well-versed in covering heavy subject matter. She's been *The Wall Street Journal*'s go-to disaster reporter since 2017, reporting on hurricanes, wildfires and, most recently, protests.

READ AILWORTH'S STORIES
IN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

When interviewing people, especially those who are traumatized by the events she's covering, Ailworth exercises empathy. Approach people gently, she said, without shoving a camera or notebook or recording device in their face. Start with introducing yourself, and then ask if they would be willing to talk with you.

The most important thing is to give the interviewee control and agency throughout the conversation because that has most likely been ripped from them, Ailworth said. She constantly checks in with the person she's interviewing, to see if they're OK and to remind them they can stop at any time.

"I remind them that a conversation is a two-way street. So I can ask a question. That doesn't mean they necessarily have to answer it. Or if they think I'm not asking the right questions, they can tell me and help guide the conversation," she said.

Ailworth said her beat can be taxing, both physically and emotionally. She stressed taking breaks and consulting a psychologist to help work through the experiences.

"Honestly, being able to tell somebody else about it helps," she said.

Lyndsey Brennan, a 2020 Dow Jones News Fund intern and a graduate student at Kent State University, said she appreciated Ailworth's advice on seeking help and recognizing that your reporting can affect your mental health.

Brennan said she thought about one of her own articles after Ailworth's talk. Brennan said she had once interviewed a homeless woman for a story and couldn't get out of bed the next day.

"I didn't connect that the reason that I couldn't get out of bed was because I had interviewed her," Brennan said.

She realized her coverage was causing an internal conflict after talking with one of her professors. As Ailworth said, it can be hard to keep everything from getting to you. For her, it's not practical to block out all emotions.

"I have to absorb some of it because I can't otherwise put it back out there, on the page, in one of my stories," Ailworth said.

Jordan Erb, a 2020 Dow Jones News Fund intern and a graduate student at Northeastern University, wants to be a foreign correspondent but said Ailworth inspired her to explore the disaster beat.

Erb said she liked Ailworth's focus on empathy, adding that she will take that advice into her career, regardless of which area she ends up in. This focus includes keeping stories focused on people, people who have emotions, people who just want to be heard.

For other young journalists considering this beat, Ailworth said the most important thing is to volunteer for these kinds of stories and to talk with others who have worked in the field.

"In some ways, it's as simplistic as saying, 'I want to try this,' but doing it in a smart way and where you're going in with as much knowledge about what you might encounter as possible," Ailworth said.

She emphasized making a safety plan with your publication's security officer and/or editors.

But no matter what, problems can arise when doing this kind of reporting. Ailworth said a lot of the work behind the disaster beat involves troubleshooting. Things like electricity, internet access and travel into disaster areas all present their own unique problems and can make it hard to file a story.

"You kind of just deal with that stuff," she said. "And, you know, you have to know what you can handle and what you can't, and be really good about telling that to your editors and sometimes telling them, 'No, that's not going to work.'"

Through all the logistics, travel, planning and uncertainties her beat brings, Ailworth said her favorite part of the job is finding that one person who will open up and speak with her.

"The grace that is required of people to talk to you in these moments, that is always humbling," Ailworth said.

[VIEW](#) the entire interview with Ailworth.

Erin Ailworth Speaks at Texas Residency 2020

▶

RESOURCES FOR JOURNALISTS:

- **Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma** — The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, a project of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, is dedicated to informed, innovative and ethical news reporting on violence, conflict and tragedy. Whether the topic is street crime, family violence, natural disaster, war or human rights, effective news reporting on traumatic events demands knowledge, skill and support.
- **How journalists can take care of themselves while covering trauma** — Poynter article by Kari Cobham
- **The Most Difficult Story: Covering Suicide on College Campuses** — *College Media Review* article by Jena Heath and Brooke Blanton, St. Edward's University.
- **Hight reminds student journalists to take care of themselves** — *College Media Review* article by Bradley Wilson, Midwestern State University
- **Suicide Coverage a Dilemma for Media** — *Communication: Journalism Education Today* series of articles by Bradley Wilson, editor

Christine Bartruff, a junior at the University of South Carolina Honors College, is majoring in journalism with a minor in political science. Bartruff works as the news editor for the school's independent student newspaper, The Daily Gamecock. This summer, she is

interning at the Stars and Stripes as a Dow Jones News Fund multiplatform editing intern, where she is excited to tackle the needs of a new audience.

Christine Bartruff

July 14, 2020 / Feature / breaking news, crisis journalism, erin ailworth, george floyd, journalism, minneapolis, wall street journal
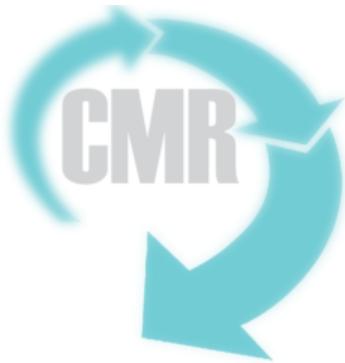
College Media Review

Journal of the College Media Association

College media reporting during a tumultuous spring

Community College student newspapers illustrate publishing trends

By **Richard Cameron**
Cerritos College

What types of stories do community college student newspapers publish on their online sites in a typical semester/quarter? That was the original purposed of a content review of 46 California community college student publications conducted for the spring 2020 term.

[perfectpullquote align="right" bordertop="false" cite="" link="" color="" class="" size=""]"It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data." Sherlock Holmes, "A Study in Scarlett" (Arthur Conan Doyle)[/perfectpullquote]

Of course, the spring 2020 term turned out to be anything but typical as COVID-19 caused a mid-term shutdown of campuses and a shift to remote instruction. While not intended, the bifurcated study was fortuitous in timing, however, as it appears

all campuses will start a new academic year with remote instruction, indeed the whole academic year may be remote.

Slightly less than 40% of California's 119 community colleges offer associate degrees in journalism, and an important component in those degrees requires course work on the student publication. Forty-six have online publications. The colleges offer multiple levels of enrollment in publication courses, from beginning to advanced, and nearly all combine up to four levels of courses into one newspaper staff, so the mix of experience on a given staff varies greatly from campus to campus.

The colleges' student publication sites' RSS feeds were monitored from Jan. 1 to June 15 and each of the 5,631 stories published were categorized by story type and story focus.

Story types were news, editorial/opinion column (opinion), sports, feature/opinion feature (feature), and other. Nearly all stories were text based, so others included photo stories, podcast, video, infographs, etc.

"Merely measuring something has an uncanny tendency to improve it." Paul Graham, co-founder at Y Combinator

Story focus included campus, community, and general (non-campus/non-community). Most publications put a heavy focus on campus news, while others favored community or general news. Nearly 57% of all content was campus focused, 26.7% was general focused — due largely to national- or cultural-based features and opinion features — and 15.5% was community focused.

Less than half of all content was news based, but that was the dominant form. Nearly 19% was feature/opinion feature based, and 16 percent was opinion stories. Sports accounted for 12.4%, but, predictably, most of that was before the pandemic hit and sports schedules were suspended.

Three stories particularly captured the attention of nearly all publications during the term.

1. The death of retired professional basketball player Kobe Bryant in February;
2. The COVID-19 virus and its impact to campuses, community, and nation; and
3. Local and national protests on race relations resulting from the death of African American Minnesotan George Floyd while in police custody and the national/international protests and violence that followed.

The study also looked at days of the week publications posted stories. Not measured by the study directly, but observed, was that many publications still follow a print deadline mindset and large blocks of stories would be posted once a week, once every, other week, once every third week, etc. around the release of their print editions. This, of course changed for many colleges once print publications ceased because campuses were closed. About one-third of the colleges continued posting PDF versions of a print-style publication, however.

Nearly a quarter of all stories were published on Wednesdays and the rest were fairly scattered throughout the week. Thursday and weekend postings saw an increase, as a percentage, after the campus closures.

While statewide leaders in various categories were identified, this was not an attempt to identify winners and losers, but rather to emphasize possibilities and provide a basis for self-comparison. Included in the study were college-by-college charts of their own data, with the hope that they would use the information to establish strategic goals.

Based on the nature of the production courses being integral to the education processes, the weekly percentage of stories produced each week dropped after the campuses closed. Many inequities faced the campuses: some schools had started terms earlier than others and had more time to develop cohesive staffs, some instructors were better prepared than others to shift to an online atmosphere, and many students did not have access to computers and/or reliable internet. While most publications did see a drop in weekly production, that was not true for all. One college, for instance, managed to double its output. Overall, there was a 14% weekly

average increase because of these publications. Others saw as much as an 86.3% drop. The average publication saw a 36.7% drop.

[perfectpullquote align="right" bordertop="false" cite="" link="" color="" class="" size=""]"What gets measured gets improved."
[Peter Drucker](#), "founder" of modern management[/perfectpullquote]

While sports coverage all but disappeared after the shutdowns, campus-focused news stories increased, community-focused news stories increased, and general-focus news stories increased. So did general-focused feature/opinion feature stories, largely because of an increase in first-person experience features and stories recommending what to cook, eat, read, listen to, watch, or do while staying at home.

Campus-focused stories as a group declined, while community-focused stories and general-focused stories increased.

The term was divided into 23 Monday-through-Sunday weeks to help compute weekly averages. The state-wide stay-at-home order came at the end of week 10. Some colleges started publishing early enough to have 10 weeks under their belts, while others had just one to three.

An unintended observation in the study, evident from posting patterns and the lack of online-centric presentation of interactive or experiential content such as podcasts and video stories, was that most publications are still print-centric and deadline patterns are still heavily based on the print product; the online site serves as an archive of the print product.

While a third of the publications still pushed out digital copies of a print product after leaving campus, one wonders how many will continue if kept away from campus for another year. Will the print publications still be relevant and sustainable after that long without an audience? Print frequency was already dropping as advertising has dropped off, shrinking budgets fail to keep up with printing costs, and campus readership of the print product has decreased. The loss of a campus audience for the print publication may serve as the final nail in the coffin.

Spring 2020
California Community College
Student Publication Content Review

An Online Elsewhere Research Report
By Richard Cameron

July 2020

1

VIEW the complete study.

Richard Cameron retired from teaching journalism three years ago after a 42-year career in the California community college system. His last 21 years were at [Cerritos Community College](). Throughout his career he has done a number of studies on California community college journalism. He also publishes a college journalism education newsletter five days a week throughout the academic year.

Cameron

July 28, 2020 / College Newspapers / college news, community college, covid-19, george loyd, kobe bryant, newspaper, race relations
College Media Review /
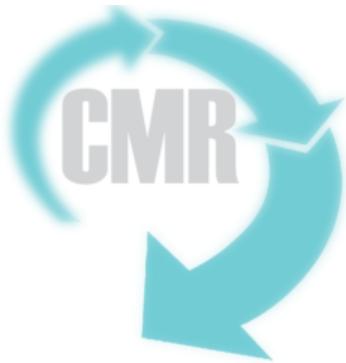
College Media Review

Journal of the College Media Association

Survey: College media continue despite pandemic

'State of College Media' survey results.

Special to College Media Review

Ninety-four percent of college media outlets continued production during the COVID-19 pandemic amid campus shutdowns and restructuring operations to work virtually, according to the results of CMA's 2020 benchmarking survey.

The fourth annual "State of College Media" survey provides a snapshot of what college media operations face and also identifies industry trends. Approximately 135 CMA members nationwide completed the survey, which was distributed electronically on June 4, 2020.

The survey was sent to all 635 CMA members. This yielded a 44% open rate and a 34% click through rate. A follow-up reminder on June 16 had a 41% open rate and a 20% click through rate. Results were released on June 26, 2020. With a total of 135 members participating, the overall response rate is 21%.

## What forms of student media are present at your college or university?

Form	Percentage
Newspaper	89.6%
Website	88.2%
TV	42.9%
Radio	68.9%
Yearbook	23.7%
Magazine	35.6%
Literary Journal	49.6%
Strategic Comm.	17.8%
Other	14.8%
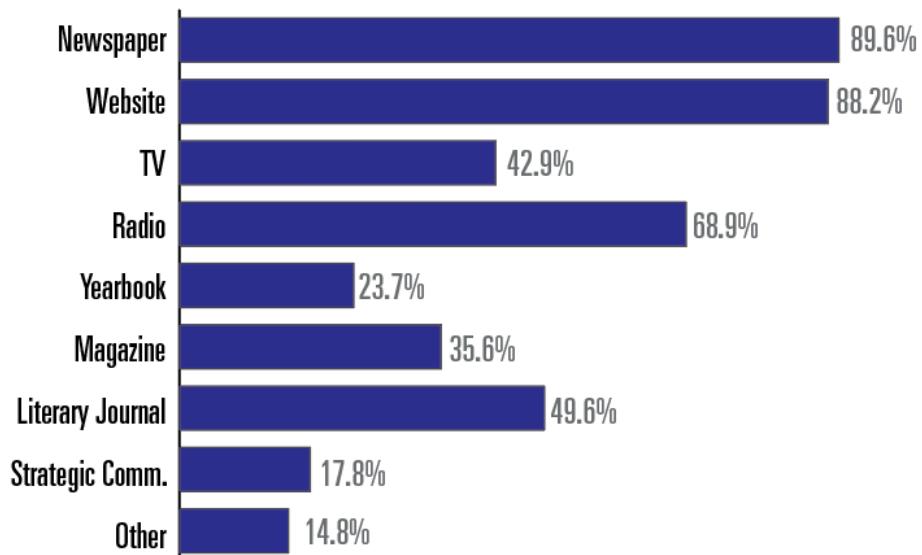
Production continued during the early months of the coronavirus pandemic despite advertising taking a big hit and continued worries about future funding. More than a quarter of advisers said advertising revenue dropped more than 20% over the last academic year. Additionally, many respondents noted concerns that funding would worsen as schools wrestle with reopening in the fall.

Select the option that best describes student media advertising sales at your college or university.

Response	Percentage
Advertising revenue has been flat for more than a year	27.4%
Advertising revenue has risen year over year.	3.7%
Advertising revenue has declined less than 10% in the past year.	6.7%
Advertising revenue has declined 10 to 20% in the past year.	14.8%
Advertising revenue has declined more than 20 percent in the past year.	25.9%
We do not sell advertising.	17.8%
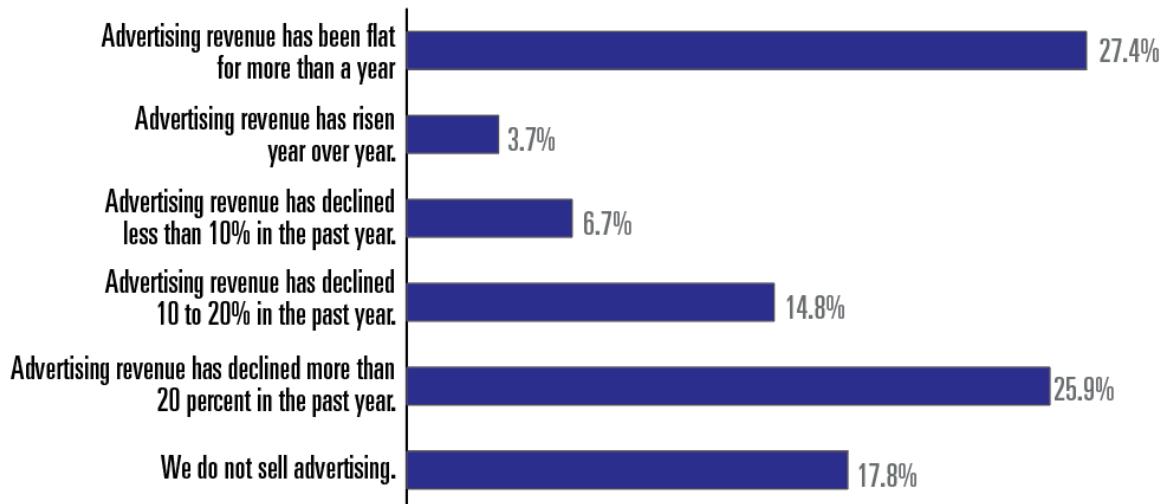
"It has decimated virtually all of the revenue we were supposed to receive and had been counting on from advertisers, and we are told that our funding next year from the university will also decline significantly," one adviser wrote.

Nearly 58% of respondents said they reduced the number of printed newspaper copies during the last academic year and 42% said they permanently reduced print frequency.

What initiatives have you undertaken to replace declining print revenue?

Initiative	Percentage
Solicited alumni donations	23.5%
Sold digital advertising	56.3%
Enacted student-centered/GoFundMe projects	1.7%
Reduced copies of newspapers printed	57.9%
Created niche print products/special editions to sell advertising in	26.1%
Offered new services like event management, photo sales or a creative agenc	14.3%
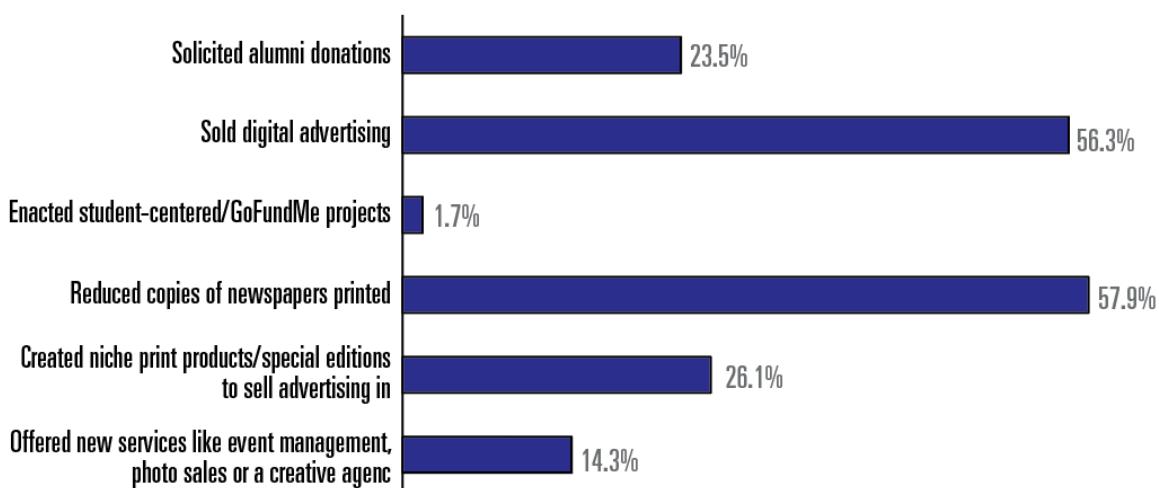
But, 42% of advisers said their staffs are adopting new delivery models, such as podcasts and e-newsletters, in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

[VIEW](#) the entire survey and results.

View past surveys [HERE](#).

College Media Review / September 8, 2020 / College Media / college media, covid-19, newspaper, pandemic, State of College Media, survey, website, yearbook
College Media Review /

College Media Review

Journal of the College Media Association

Research (Vol. 58): What's in an Editorial Frame?

How Award-Winning Student Newspaper Editorials Framed COVID-19

By **Brittany L. Fleming**
and **Emily A. Dolan**
Slippery Rock University

Abstract: The current study explored the content of initial COVID-19 editorials from award-winning student newspapers across the country in an effort to understand how these editorials framed the issue. Using both qualitative and quantitative analyses, we found that top student newspapers framed the issue largely around morality and economic issues. Other frames were also employed (e.g., conflict), albeit to a lesser extent. Our analyses also provide details on the common language editorials employed within each frame and how frames were strategically employed across editorials. Our discussion provides an in-depth analysis of the structure of initial COVID-19 editorials and a framework for editorial reporting on crises in the future is proposed.

Introduction

The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a national pandemic on March 11, 2020. As universities around the country began responding with announcements of extended spring breaks and the transition to online learning, student journalists working at college newspapers were forced to react to an unprecedented situation. In addition to news coverage, many decided to publish editorials addressing the situation, and in these editorials, they had to choose which angle or frame to address the impact of COVID-19. Given the importance of editorials in news discourse (Bonyadi and Samuel 2013), it is important to understand the content of these editorials, and specifically those that first addressed the COVID-19 pandemic, in an effort to understand how student newspapers can and should consider framing in the editorial process, especially in response to a crisis.

The current study examined the language of initial COVID-19 editorials in an effort to not only understand how these articles framed the crisis, but also to develop a framework for student newspaper editorials to follow in a crisis. Following a similar

framework as other studies examining student media content (e.g., Bergland 2020; Brockman, Bergland and Hon 2011; Terracina-Hartman and Nulph 2016), we focus specifically on the first COVID-19-related editorials published online by 21 student newspapers that have been recognized as finalists in major student journalism contests in the last three years. Our investigation includes a combination of two content analysis techniques: a quantitative analysis using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program and a qualitative textual analysis.

Examining the editorial content focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic from top student newspapers has implications in both applied and theoretical contexts. Given the caliber of the national contests used in this study, it can be assumed that student newspapers that earn recognition through these organizations serve as exemplary publications. From an applied perspective, understanding the content of top student newspaper editorials focusing on COVID-19 would provide student media advisors and student journalists with a framework for addressing crises through editorials in the future. By using the LIWC program to examine language associated with framing, student journalists may be able to identify how language plays into different frames and the importance of carefully selecting language within editorials in order to achieve their intended goals. With both these applied and theoretical contributions in mind, we hope our observations and conclusions will help contribute to the progression of the field of student journalism.

Literature Review

Student Newspaper Editorials

Student newspapers define themselves as forums for student expression. Files (1987) argues that whether a student newspaper fulfills this role tends to rely on four questions, one of which refers directly to the inclusion of editorials: "Is the publication open to free expression of ideas in news and editorial columns as well as in letters to the editor?" To that end, newspaper editorials continue to play a vital role in shaping society's agenda and opinion. Newspaper editorials may be published as a way to bring relevant issues to the attention of the public or authorities, or in response to a specific event (Eilders 1997; Marques and Mont'Alverne 2019). Editorials require a thoughtful selection process, as the purpose of an editorial isn't

merely to inform, but, in many cases, is to persuade the readers to subscribe to the ideology of the paper (Alfred and Oyebola 2019). The power of a newspaper is undeniable, and this assertion may even prove to be truer in a time of crisis (Valentini and Romenti 2011).

Through coverage, media contribute to shaping public opinion about specific situations, actions, and/or organizations' behaviors, particularly in the instance of a crisis (Valentini and Romenti 2011). This includes whether the newspaper decides to employ editorial writing to take a definitive stance on an issue, in which case the newspaper's news and opinion agenda temporarily align (Adam et al. 2019; Eilders 1999).

Marques and Mont'Alverne (2019) describe editorial writing as a strategy journalistic organizations use to present opinions and propose debates on issues of social relevance. Unlike traditional news coverage, editorials function as the "mouth-piece of a social class" and ultimately, through facts and valid arguments, intend to persuade readers to agree with their stance on a particular issue (Alfred and Oyebola 2019). Because of this proposed underlying intention and the significant difference between news reporting and editorial writing, it can be argued that editorials are particularly robust artifacts for examining press attitudes toward issues of controversy and, in turn, should be investigated (Eilders 1997; Richardson and Lancendorfer 2004).

There is a lack of research on editorials in both commercial and student newspapers (e.g., Firmstone 2008; Marque and Mont'Alverne 2019). Because of an editorial's topic-specific nature, much of the research that does focus on newspaper editorials utilizes a content-analysis methodology to investigate a series of editorial perspectives through the lens of framing (Richardson and Lacendorfer 2004; Valentini and Romenti 2008). Boyandi and Samuel (2013) found that, from the start of the headline, editorial writers not only aimed to inform the audience of the topic of the editorial, but also used persuasive and rhetorical devices to express the newspaper's preferred ideology. Similarly, studies in transitivity have found that editorials may syntactically position subjects in a controversy based on the staff's attitudes and beliefs (Alfred and Oyebola 2019).

Student newspapers may publish a variety of editorials about a particular situation over time. However, it can be argued that the first editorial published about an issue is possibly the most important editorial, as it sets the tone for successive editorials about the situation. From an audience perspective, the first editorial to emerge about a situation helps to provide an initial frame of reference for audiences (Entman 1993) and allows them to know the newspaper's perspective on a given issue. Past research (e.g., Kuttschreuter, Gutteling and De Hond 2011; Gortner and Pennebaker 2003) examining initial editorial content on a given issue further emphasizes this point. Therefore, understanding the content of editorials, and particularly the first editorial published about a given issue, is incredibly important.

Framing Editorial Content During a Health Crisis

When covering a given issue, journalists make a series of choices throughout the news process, specifically how to frame the issue. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, may be framed in a myriad of ways: public health, risk, economics, and conflict. When considering the issues covered in editorials covering a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, a useful theoretical paradigm is framing. Entman (1993, 52) argues, "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation." Issue frames provide readers with heuristic cues that allow them to view an issue through a specific lens, and as such, they call attention to some aspect of an issue while ignoring others. As an effect, issue frames influence how audiences perceive, evaluate, and remember a story (Entman 1993; Entman 2007). The connection between issue framing and public perceptions of issues has been demonstrated across countless studies examining news content (e.g., Nelson, Clawson and Oxley 1997; Richardson 2005).

Previous research identifies common frames across news content covering crises (e.g., An and Gower 2009; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000; Valentini and Romani 2011). These frames include (1) Agent of responsibility, which addresses the individual(s) or groups responsible for the crisis; (2) Morality, which addresses moral tenets, such as religion and social processes; (3) Human interest, which addresses emotional components; (4) Economics, which considers money and

work-related factors; and (5) Conflict, which addresses conflict between individuals, groups, and/or organizations. Given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, we propose two additional frames: *Risk*, which focuses on the dangers and threats associated with a crisis, and *Health*, which focuses on framing pertaining to physiological and mental wellness.

The Current Study

The current study examined the framing of initial COVID-19 editorials published by top student newspapers in effort to understand how student newspaper editorials first covered the issue. To gain an in-depth understanding of the framing of these editorials, we employed two types of content analysis: quantitative LIWC coding, and qualitative textual analysis. Our sample comprised the first COVID-19-related editorials published online from 21 award-winning student newspapers from major student journalism contests over the last three years. This list of selection criteria is similar to other studies examining content of student media (e.g., Brockman, Bergland and Hon 2011; Terracina-Hartman and Nulph 2016; Bergland 2020). A central research question guides this study: How was the COVID-19 pandemic first framed by top student newspapers in their editorials?

Methodology and Data Analysis

Sample

In effort to understand best practices for collegiate newspapers when first covering a crisis, we collected the first student newspaper editorials published that covered the COVID-19 pandemic. We chose to employ a methodology used in past newspaper research and obtained lists of the 2017, 2018, and 2019 Associated Collegiate Press Newspaper Pacemaker, Columbia Scholastic Press Gold Crown, and College Media Association Pinnacle award winners from four-year degree-granting institutions (Bergland 2020; Terrancina-Hartman 2016). Any newspaper that won the award more than once was included only once in the sampling frame. A total of 34 collegiate newspapers were included in the sampling frame, and of those newspapers, 21 newspapers (62 percent) featured an editorial about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Collection period

Because the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, we used this date as the start date for collecting editorials. Data collection ended April 17, 2020.

Editorial Selection Criteria

We selected the first COVID-19-related editorial published in the aforementioned sampling frame. This inclusion criteria were employed by examining the headlines and body of editorials published in our time frame. If an editorial addressed any aspect of COVID-19 in the headline or body of the editorial, it was included in this study. Both staff editorials and letters from the editor were included.

University	Newspaper	Headline	Date
Auburn	The Auburn Plainsman	Editorial: Stay Home	3/19
Ball State	Ball State Daily News	Letter from the Editor: The news doesn't stop, and neither does the Daily News	3/13
Calif. State, Sacramento	The State Hornet	Editorial: Sac students are asking for transparency and safety, not a vacation	3/11
Columbia College Chicago	The Columbia Chronicle	Editor's note: The Chronicle will not stop reporting, no matter the ups and downs	3/26
Iowa State	Iowa State Daily	Wells: We are here for you	3/12
Kent State	The Kent Stater	Editorial: We've got your back, Kent State	3/17
Knox College	The Knox Student	Editor's Notebook: Planning for Spring Term	3/23
Oregon State	The Daily Barometer	Letter from the Editor: No March 20 print edition, but online presence will elevate	3/27
Syracuse	The Daily Orange	Letter from the Editors: The D.O. will publish online for remainder of semester	3/19
Texas A&M	The Battalion	Letter from the editor: Continuing to report amidst crisis, whether in print or online	3/17
UNC, Chapel Hill	The Daily Tarheel	Editorial: UNC's coronavirus response- the good, the bad and the ugly	3/22
Univ. of Minnesota	Minnesota Daily	Editorial: The University is taking COVID-19 seriously, and we appreciate it	3/20
Univ. of California, L.A.	The Daily Bruin	Letter from the editors: Daily Bruin will cease printing and move online for rest of academic year	3/20
Univ. of Kentucky	The Kentucky Kernel	Letter from the editor: The Kernel goes on	3/24
Univ. of Penn.	The Daily Pennsylvanian	Editorial: As coronavirus pushes classes online, let's change Penn's competitive culture	3/13
Univ. of Pitt	The Pitt News	Editorial: Students, it's time to take social distancing seriously	3/15
Univ. of Southern Calif.	The Daily Trojan	Letter from the editors: As classes move online, the Daily Trojan moves to weekly	3/13
Univ. of Texas, Arlington	The Shorthorn	Editorial: Journalists' role during the COVID-19 crisis is to provide facts, not spread fear	3/18
Univ. of Texas, Austin	The Daily Texan	Double A is only fair grading system for unprecedented semester	3/23
Virginia Commonwealth	The Commonwealth Times	From the editor: Students, we're with you	3/19
West Kentucky	College Heights Herald	Letter from the editor: We're still here	3/13

Table 1. Sample

Data Analysis

To explore our research question, we used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Quantitatively, the texts of the 21 COVID-19 editorials were submitted to the LIWC program. One way to reveal frames and tone of voice in media content is through an examination of the linguistic content of news stories, specifically by examining the words used (Entman 1993). The LIWC program provides a means to accomplish thistask. LIWC is a text-analysis program that analyzes text and counts the percentage of words that represent different types of linguistic devices, grammar and psychological processes. (Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010.) This program has been used and validated in studies examining the psychological meaning behind language (Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010) and captures over 86 percent of the words people use in communication (Pennebaker, et al. 2015). This program has also been used and validated in studies examining news and editorial content (e.g., Gortner and Pennebaker 2003; Pennebaker, et al. 2015) and has emerged as a unique way to capture systematic patterns in the framing of news and editorial content.

We used the LIWC program to code for five major frames identified in previous research as well as the two additional frames proposed in this study. See Table 2 for each frame, their LIWC coding categories, and examples of language falling under coding categories.

Frame	LIWC Coding Categories	Examples of Language
Agent of Responsibility	Causation	Cause, consequences, reaction
Morality	Social Processes	Talk, people, encourage
	Family	Grandparent, neighbor
	Friends	Friend, buddy, contact
	Affiliation	Help, we, Tweet
	Religion	God, church
Human Interest	Affect	Serious, avoiding, importance
	Positive Emotion	Ideal, best, care, better
	Negative Emotion	Difficult, desperately
	Anxiety	Uncertainty, struggling
	Anger	Villain, war, hate
	Sad	Abandoning, low, miss
Economic	Work	Effort, responsibility
	Money	Spend, expenses, rent
Conflict	Achievement	Limiting, celebrations, goal
	Power	Manage, comply, students
Risk	Risk	Stop, safety, lose
Health	Health	Lives, sick, infected

Table 2. Frames, LIWC Categories, and Examples of Language with Categories

Source: Examples of language partially derived from Pennebaker et al. (2015).

We used results from our quantitative LIWC analysis to complete a qualitative textual analysis of the editorials used in this sample. Doing so provided a means to triangulate upon and provide further context to our quantitative findings. We used Cresswell's (2009) framework for qualitative data analysis to complete our textual analysis. This framework was used to analyze the editorials by extracting themes that appeared across editorials in effort to illuminate overarching themes within the entirety of the data. We used our quantitative LIWC findings to help us focus our analysis of framing, and specifically focused on patterns of how the common language within each frame was employed across editorials in effort to understand these frames in their totality.

Following Cresswell's (2009) framework, qualitative analysis went as follows: First, each researcher reviewed the quantitative data from the LIWC analysis and independently examined how this language was employed across editorials. Each researcher took field notes. The researchers discussed their notes and then analyzed the data, frame by frame, to ascertain themes of the language employed within each frame. This analysis included factors such as (1) commonalities among editorials in terms of types of information and language covered within each frame, (2) where these frames appeared within the body of the editorial, (3) how headlines played into these frames, and (4) how the frames related to one another.

Results

We conducted analyses on the 21 editorials included in our sample. These editorials featured an average of 509 words. The shortest article featured 257 words, while the longest article featured 993 words.

RQ1: How was the COVID-19 pandemic first framed by top student newspaper editorials?

Each editorial was submitted to the LIWC program. This program coded every word within each editorial for the presence or absence of each of the LIWC categories related to the frames of interest. In total, 5,302 total words were examined. The following section reports the total number of words relating to each frame present across editorials. Figure 1 presents a pie chart detailing the prevalence of each of the seven frames we examined in our analysis. The LIWC program also details the specific language occurring within each frame; we present the language for each frame in the form of a word cloud. These word clouds feature the most prevalent language for each frame in large, prominent font. Guided by our LIWC results and previous research (e.g., An and Gower 2009; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000; Valentini and Romani 2011), we also conducted qualitative analyses for each frame to provide a more robust description of how initial COVID-19 editorials from top student newspapers employed each frame.
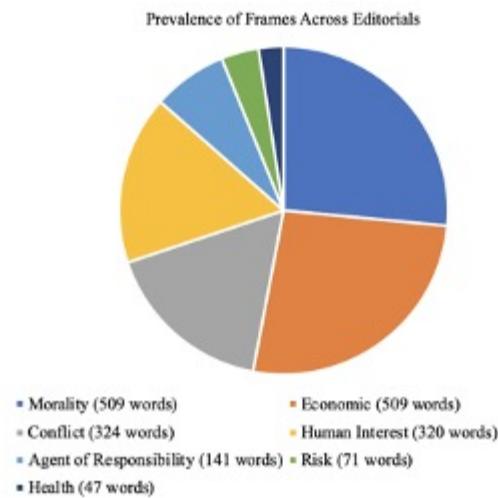

Figure 1. Prevalence of Each Frame Across Editorials

Risk and Health. To understand framing related to risk, we examined the LIWC category of risk. The LIWC program examined each of the 5,302 words contained across editorials for the presence or absence of 103 risk-related words (e.g., "danger," "safety"). In total, 71 words across editorials contained risk-related language. Figure 2 details the language used within this frame.

Figure 2. Word Cloud representing the language used in the risk frame

Similar results emerged for health framing. To understand framing related to health, we examined the LIWC category of health. The LIWC program examined each of the 5,302 words contained across editorials for the presence or absence of 294 health-related words (e.g., "clinic," "flu"). In total, 47 words across editorials contained health-related language. Figure 3 details the language used within this frame.

Figure 3. Word Cloud representing the language used in the health frame

Results of our analyses indicate that the majority of editorials did not frame their coverage around health and risk. Of the editorials that did discuss health and risk, mention of these factors was fleeting. Our qualitative analysis suggests that health and risk appeared briefly in editorials in two major ways. First, many editorials that discussed health and risk discussed these factors in regard to how the newspaper planned on keeping their staff safe (e.g., "how we keep our staff safe while continuing to provide thorough, factual, responsible, well-reported information"). Second, many editorials mentioned health and risk briefly at the end of the article,

almost as a sort of "sign off" to their audience (e.g., "listen to health officials. Wash your hands. And don't go out in public unless it's absolutely necessary"). Although there were two editorials in our sample that were framed largely around risk and health (e.g., headlines such as "Stay Home" and "It's Time to Take Social Distancing Seriously"), our results indicate that despite COVID-19 being a situation of high risk and health concerns, editorials were not framed in ways that align with these issues.

The lack of framing around health and risk suggests that editorials were angled around other factors. If editorials were not framed in a way that tapped health and risk concerns, how did they frame COVID-19? Our results indicate that editorials framed COVID-19 largely in regard to economics and morality. We discuss our findings for these frames, as well as the three remaining frames, below.

Morality. To understand how COVID-19 editorials were framed in regard to morality, we examined a variety of LIWC categories. The LIWC program examined each of the 5,302 words contained across editorials for the presence or absence of 1,391 words across five LIWC categories: social processes (e.g., "talk"), affiliation (e.g., "ally"), family (e.g., "grandparents"), friends (e.g., "buddy") and religion (e.g., "church"). In total, 509 words across editorials contained language related to morality. Figure 4 details the language used within this frame.

Figure 4. Word Cloud representing the language used in the morality frame

Conveying social affiliation in spite of physical distancing during COVID-19 emerged as a popular theme throughout the throughout the period of this study, as evidenced through PSAs, advertising and national-level publications. Results of our qualitative analysis indicate that student newspapers framed their editorials in ways consistent with the frames of other entities (e.g., "as a community, as a family, we all need to pull in and make sacrifices"). Editorials reinforced their relationships with their audience by letting them know that they would continue operating (e.g., "We've got your back, Kent State") and by encouraging their audience to remain in contact with them via digital media technologies. Overall, editorials overwhelmingly angled themselves around creating a sense of togetherness, social connection and community with their audiences by conveying a "we're all in this together" mentality.

Economics. To understand how COVID-19 editorials were framed in regard to economics, we examined two LIWC categories. The LIWC program examined each of the 5,302 words contained across editorials for the presence or absence of 670 words across two LIWC categories: work (e.g., "job") and money (e.g., "cash"). In total, 509 words across editorials contained language related to economics. Although there were words related to money present, the "work" subcategory yielded far more data for this category. Figure 5 details the language used within this frame.


Figure 5. Word Cloud representing the language used in the economic frame

Our qualitative analysis revealed that within this frame, 12 out of 21 editorials focused on the publications' action plans for delivering the news. Our qualitative analysis further revealed that within editorials delivering an action plan, the following features were typically included: (1) statement of commitment, (2) sense of community (e.g., "we're all in this together), (3) how to access digital coverage, (4) the status of the print publication, and (5) means of contacting the newspaper. Therefore, editorials in our sample framed their stories largely around the economic-work-related implications of COVID-19 by specifically delivering their action plans for the remainder of the spring 2020 semester.

Conflict. To understand how COVID-19 editorials were framed in regard to conflict, we examined two LIWC categories. The LIWC program examined each of the 5,302 words contained across editorials for the presence or absence of 731 words across two LIWC categories: achievement (e.g., "success") and power (e.g., "superior"). In total, 324 words across editorials contained language related to conflict. Figure 6 details the common language used within this frame.

Figure 6. Word Cloud representing the language used in the conflict frame

Our qualitative analysis provides strong evidence that the conflict discussed in editorials was largely centered around man versus nature. The virus itself was presented as a sort of antagonist and students were presented as victims to its effects. Many editorials started with conflict specifically by discussing the effects the virus had on students' lives. This includes both the general student body as well as the staff of the publications. Although there were few exceptions to this rule, the

majority of articles did employ a student-versus-virus conflict frame. In most cases when conflict was presented as students versus virus, after discussing this conflict, publications then moved into their main frames of the situation: economics and morality, which were used as a means of providing some type of solution to the conflict posed by the virus.

Human Interest. To understand how COVID-19 editorials were framed in regard to human interest, we examined a variety of LIWC categories. The LIWC program examined each of the 5,302 words contained across editorials for the presence or absence of 3,239 words across six LIWC categories: affect (e.g., "emotion"), positive emotion (e.g., "nice"), negative emotion (e.g., "nasty"), anxiety (e.g., "worried"), anger (e.g., "hate") and sadness (e.g., "grief"). In total, 320 words across editorials contained language related to human interest. Figure 7 details the common language used within this frame.

Figure 7. Word Cloud representing the language used in the human interest frame

Our qualitative analysis indicates that in the majority of the editorials, words falling within this frame (e.g., "best") were used to encourage readers to protect themselves and/or to stay informed through the newspaper (e.g.: "it's important that students do their best to implement social distancing,"), or to describe the efforts the newspaper was taking to continue operating throughout the pandemic (e.g.: "continue to give our best as each day passes"). In either context, the majority of the editorials communicated a sense of optimism to their readers during a time of

uncertainty. Many of the editorials included words that implied the severity of the issue, using phrases like, "Stay safe." From a human-interest perspective, focusing on how to stay safe, rather than dwelling on the potential fear and anxiety of having to stay safe, further implies that the sampled newspapers aimed to frame their COVID-19 editorials in a more positive—as opposed to negative—light.

Agent of Responsibility. To understand framing related to the agent of responsibility, we examined the LIWC category of causality. The LIWC program examined each of the 5,302 words contained across editorials for the presence or absence of 135 causality-related words (e.g., "effect", "because"). In total, 141 words across editorials language relating to agent of responsibility. Figure 8 details the language employed in this frame.

Figure 8. Word Cloud representing the language used in the agent of responsibility frame

Our qualitative analysis of this content provides evidence suggesting the identity of the agent. Specifically, our analysis found that editorials were less focused on human parties as the agent of responsibility (e.g., administrations), and more focused on the virus itself as the agent of responsibility. Editorials were focused on the ways the virus was responsible for a variety of factors, including the shift to online learning and the functionality of the publication. Few editorials placed blame on administrations and students and instead blamed the pandemic for the changes.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our findings suggest that when dealing with a crisis such as COVID-19, it is important to first select a frame and then strategically select the language to use within that frame. Most importantly, as evidenced by our sample of top student newspapers, it is important to tailor messages directly to audiences, so that they are made aware of the effects the crisis has on them, as well as on their relationship and engagement with the publication. Furthermore, and likely in times of uncertainty and crisis, it is important to frame messages in ways that communicate affiliation in effort to allow audiences to know the publication stands in solidarity with them.

By triangulating qualitative and quantitative data, we were not only able to ascertain common frames employed across initial COVID-19 editorials, but we were also able to better understand how these frames were employed, how they co-occurred with one another, and the general structure of initial COVID-19 editorials. Our results suggest that while morality and economic frames were the most prevalent frames, other frames were also employed, just not to the same extent. While many editorials focused their stories on how the paper was going to proceed for the remainder of the semester, they also addressed other frames such as health and risk, conflict, and agent of responsibility, albeit to a lesser extent. There also appeared to be a formula to these editorials, such that the body of the editorial started out with a brief mention of conflict caused by the virus, and then quickly went on to discuss a solution to the conflict. These solutions included morality-related issues (e.g., sticking together) and economics-related issues (e.g., the newspaper's work plans). These solutions comprised a bulk of the editorials, and thus were identified by the LIWC program as the two most prominent frames across editorials. While discussing these issues, editorials employed a human-interest angle by providing encouragement to their audiences to stay safe and informed. Lastly, the majority of articles provided some type of health and risk message, usually in a few sentences, encouraging audiences to stay safe and practice social distancing.

Given that our sample was comprised of the top student newspapers, and many common themes emerged across editorials, we believe our study may be used as a means of providing a framework for editorial reporting on crises in the future. This framework is discussed in the proceeding paragraphs.

First, we would be remiss to not address the fact that, of our sampling frame of 34 award-winning schools, 13 did not feature an initial COVID-19-related editorial during our sampling time frame. As an active student newspaper, it is important to address the audience during the time of a crisis and understanding the role an editorial plays during the time of a crisis is crucial. This leads us to our first recommendation: In times of crisis, it is important to address your audience in a timely manner.

Once a student newspaper decides to address a crisis in the form of an editorial, it is important to consider how to frame the issue. Issue frames call attention to some aspect of an issue while ignoring others. As an effect, issue frames influence how audiences perceive, evaluate and remember a story (Entman 1993; Entman 2007). Of course, in any given crisis, there is a variety of angles that can be covered while other angles are largely ignored. It is important for student journalists to consider the frames they employ and how these frames may co-occur. The current study identified language associated with each frame that was employed in the initial COVID-19-related editorials. Student journalists need to be cognizant of how language may play into particular frames of an issue, as these frames influence audience perceptions. For instance, student journalists might ask themselves, "Are we meaning to cover the story from a conflict position?" If the answer is no, then they must be careful of using language such as "forced," "allowed," or "limiting." This leads us to our second recommendation: Pick a frame to focus on and be aware of how language plays into that frame, as well as others.

Our results demonstrate that multiple frames were employed across editorials, but to varying degrees. Although most of the editorials in our sample started with a conflict frame, the discussion of conflict was limited. After discussing the conflict, editorials moved on to possible solutions to the conflict. The solutions were the main frames employed in the editorials and comprised a considerable portion of the editorials. In the case of initial COVID-19-related editorials, the proposed solutions fell within the economics-work and morality frames, which may have been specific to the pandemic itself. Research demonstrates that editorials are oftentimes written in light of conflict; therefore, it makes sense that the conflict itself must be addressed. However, the weight of the editorial itself must focus on a solution, and the staff must select a specific angle from which to discuss this solution. This leads

us to our third recommendation: A situation may call for multiple frames to be employed, but the main frame must propose some type of solution to the problem.

Students cannot employ these recommendations alone. In order to effectively communicate during a crisis, advisors and organizations need to provide assistance. Training materials and workshops should be conducted on both the local and national level to help student journalists understand the difference between news and editorial coverage, as well as how to employ these recommendations in the future.

Limitations and Future Research

The results in this paper cannot be generalized to the larger population due to our focus on only award-winning student newspapers from three major contests over the last three years. However, recognizing the caliber of these contests, the purpose of our paper was not to generalize, but rather to describe and propose a framework for how student newspaper editorials should cover a crisis. It is hoped that the framework proposed in this paper can be used to guide editorial writing in the future. Applying our proposed framework to different types of crisis situations (e.g., issues of social justice, politics, the economy, etc.) would likely be fruitful, as such research may be used to further understand and generalize these findings to student newspaper editorials as a whole.

Future studies should compare the framing between news stories and editorial coverage to further understand the totality of a newspaper's coverage. Exploring differences between how the inverted pyramid is employed compared to how framing is used could add insight to the findings of the current study. Ideally, a longitudinal study could provide more insight as to how particular editorial boards operate in a crisis; however, this situation is unrealistic considering the consistent turnover in student media. Applying this framework to professional news organizations, though, could make this study possible.

Future research should also consider social media and audience feedback to further understand the impact of editorial framing on audience perception. The current study was limited to one artifact: the initial COVID-19 editorial, itself. However,

understanding how the audience reacted to specific frames through feedback (i.e. "likes," "retweets," comments, etc.) would provide insight on the external impact of editorials.

Finally, we noticed patterns in the visual and in-text features of editorials in our sample. For instance, calls to action (e.g., surveys, petitions), photos and graphics, use of links and direct and indirect quotations were prevalent across editorials. Future research should examine these factors, as well as the interplay of these factors and framing.

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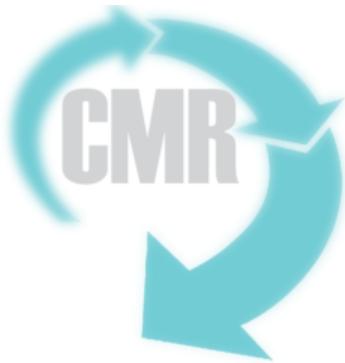
College Media Review

Journal of the College Media Association

Book Review: Media Ethics

A Guide For Professional Conduct by SPJ

Reviewed by **Carolyn Schurr Levin**

There is no shortage of course materials for media ethics classes. Yet, can there ever be too many? I'd argue no – the more the better. That is also clearly the position of the Society of Professional Journalists Ethics Committee, which on June 25, 2020, released the 5th edition of its ethics handbook and collection of cases. Both the new edition and the 4th edition, which was released in 2011, are the effort of the Ethics Committee of the Society of Professional Journalists, and were edited by long time journalist Fred Brown, a former chairperson of the Ethics Committee and former SPJ national president. (The first three editions were primarily the work of the Poynter Institute.)

In the six years since the 4th edition was printed, everything has changed, and nothing has changed. The SPJ Journalists Code of Ethics still imparts the profession's collective wisdom, and remains the focus of the book – "the news industry's widely accepted gold standard of journalism principles," according to the book's promotion. Like the four editions before it, this book is organized around the

SPJ Code of Ethics, whose basic principles are reflected in many other codes of ethics across a wide range of communications disciplines, Brown said.

The new edition expands beyond journalism to those other communications disciplines and a growing number of technologies. "Media Ethics: A Guide for Professional Conduct" is intended to be used as a college-level textbook in ethics classes whose students are not just aspiring journalists, but strategic communicators such as P.R. professionals or workers in political campaigns," Brown said. And, the new edition is, for the first time, available in online form as well as in print, to be both more accessible and less expensive for those students. (The paperback is $24.99 and the ebook is $19.99.)
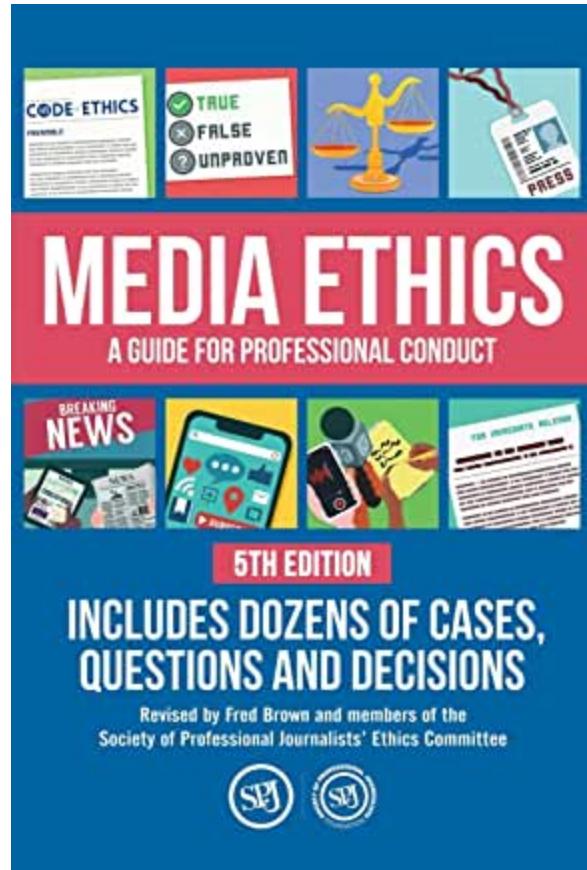
Book Review: Media Ethics: A Guide For Professional Conduct, 5th edition, Published by the Society of Professional Journalists, Revised by Fred Brown, editor, and members of the Society of Professional Journalists' Ethics Committee

"Media Ethics: A Guide for Professional Conduct" begins with not just the SPJ Code of Ethics, but also the ethical codes of the Radio Television Digital News Association, the Online News Association, the Public Relations Society of America, and other professional media groups.

This new handbook is much more than just a collection of codes though. It gives students tools and procedures for using these codes for ethical decision-making. What makes it unique are the case studies that intersperse its pages. Some of them will feel familiar from previous editions or other media ethics books (Deep Throat, and His Motive, for instance, about the Watergate story and protecting sources). But what excited me about this book were the new ones – timely case studies that will intrigue our students and (hopefully) lead to lively discussions. Brown described the new case studies as "all from real life" and addressing "other disciplines" in

addition to traditional journalism. The best way to teach and learn ethics is to practice, and these case studies provide engaging ways to do just that.

Here's an example: In the chapter on truth, accuracy and fairness is a case study entitled "A Confrontational Confirmation." The case study involves President Donald Trump's 2018 nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the allegations that Kavanaugh committed sexual assault when he was a teenager. The question posed by the case study is whether unmasking the identity of Kavanaugh's accuser was "fair game" or "necessary for a full account" and whether the media was "correct to air these allegations in the late stages of the confirmation process."

And another example: In the chapter on privacy, a case study entitled "A Controversial Apology" analyzes the apology that The Daily Northwestern at Northwestern University offered in November 2019 for its coverage of demonstrations that took place when former Attorney General Jeff Sessions spoke on campus. The student newspaper's apology for its coverage became a "firestorm" from students who felt victimized by the coverage, on the one hand, and from journalists, Northwestern alumni and others who accused the newspaper of apologizing for simply doing its job, on the other. This case study, in particular, seemed invaluable to me. If media students can discuss, think about and analyze situations such as the one experienced by The Daily Northwestern, they can be so much better prepared to respond when similar situations arise at their own campus media outlets, because they undoubtedly will.

In addition to the case studies, other useful aspects of "Media Ethics" are the checklists at the end of the chapters. The "Fairness Checklist" reminds journalists and journalism students to ask, among other things: Is the meaning distorted by over- or under-emphasis? Are facts and quotations in proper context? If sources are not fully identified, is there a justifiable reason? The "Photojournalism Checklist" poses questions to ask before taking a still or moving image: "Am I invading someone's privacy? If so, is it for an appropriate reason? Am I acting with compassion and sensitivity? Does this image tell the story I want? Certainly, all of the questions in these checklists are helpful not only for students learning the craft, but for professionals as ongoing reminders of the best ethical practices.

Students in my media ethics classes debate, during the first week of the semester, whether ethics can even be taught. As this book points out in Chapter One, "it is certainly possible to be an ethical person without knowing any of the history or terminology of moral reasoning." I frequently hear students take that position. Yet everywhere around us are instances of ethical lapses, whether intentional or unintentional, and journalists find themselves "spending an increasing and regrettable amount of time identifying and apologizing for" those lapses, according to "Media Ethics: A Guide For Professional Conduct." So, teaching journalism and other communications students to ask the right questions, to recognize ethical issues and anticipate ethical dilemmas, and to develop analytical skills to arrive at defensible solutions to those problems is unquestionably beneficial.

The SPJ's Ethics Committee's purpose, according to its website, "is to encourage the use of the Society's Code of Ethics, which promotes the highest professional standards for journalists of all disciplines." That too is the purpose of this highly usable book.

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Legal Analysis: Nicholas Sandmann v. 'The Media'

The image and the reports–and seeking the truth behind them

By **Carolyn Schurr Levin**

We've all seen the video or picture, or both. What we may not know, unfortunately, is the truth behind them.

In January 2019, 16 year old Nicholas Sandmann participated in a school trip to Washington D.C. along with other students from Covington Catholic High School in Park Hills, Kentucky. Sandmann, who wore a Make America Great Again hat, participated with his classmates in a March For Life rally and then went to the Lincoln Memorial to wait for the buses that would bring them home to Kentucky. While at the Lincoln Memorial, Sandmann encountered 64-year-old Native American activist Nathan Phillips, who was standing in front of him, playing a drum and chanting at an Indigenous Peoples March.

Sandmann's interaction with Phillips was captured in photos and videos, which went viral. In addition to being reported by mainstream media outlets CNN, the Washington Post, NBC, and others, a video of the encounter was uploaded and widely shared on social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, receiving millions of views. The video led to widespread accusations of bigotry by Sandmann. Almost universally, the media coverage of the encounter portrayed Sandmann as the smirking aggressor. That is not, apparently, what really happened.

Days later, new video provided additional context and showed that the initial media reports had omitted key details of the

encounter. In the new video, a group of black men who identify as members of the Hebrew Israelites was seen taunting the Covington Catholic High School students with disparaging language and shouting racist slurs at participants of the Indigenous Peoples Rally and others.

Here's Sandmann's version of the events, told to CNN:

"When we arrived, we noticed four African American protestors who were also on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. I am not sure what they were protesting, and I did not interact with them. I did hear them direct derogatory insults at our school group. . . The protestors said hateful things. . . Because we were being loudly attacked and taunted in public, a student in our group asked one of our teacher chaperones for permission to begin our school spirit chants to counter the hateful things that were being shouted at our group. The chants are commonly used at sporting events. They

are all positive in nature and sound like what you would hear at any high school. Our chaperone gave us permission to use our school chants. . . After a few minutes of chanting, the Native American protestors, who I hadn't previously noticed, approached our group. . . The protestor everyone has seen in the video began playing his drum as he waded into the crowd . . . I did not see anyone try to block his path. He locked eyes with me and approached me, coming within inches of my face. He played his drum the entire time he was in my face. . . I never interacted with this protestor. I did not speak to him. I did not make any hand gestures or other aggressive moves. To be honest, I was startled and confused as to why he had approached me. We had already been yelled at by another group of protestors, and when the second group approached I was worried that a situation was getting out of control where adults were attempting to provoke teenagers. . . I would caution everyone passing judgement based on a few seconds of video to watch the longer video clips that are on the internet, as they show a much different story than is being portrayed by people with agendas."

But, Sandmann's statement about what happened on January 18, 2019 did not end this matter. He subsequently filed eight lawsuits against media outlets, including the Washington Post, CNN, the New York Times, NBC, CBS, ABC, Gannett, and Rolling Stone. All of the suits accused the media outlets of publishing false and defamatory reports that cast Sandmann in a negative light, bringing public hatred and threats to him and and his family. In essence, his argument was that in a rush to get the story out, media outlets ignored vital context in favor of "pre-conceived false narratives."

Here's the language from one of the suits: Sandmann's February 19, 2019 lawsuit against the Washington Post, which sought $250 million in damages, accused the Post of engaging in a "modern-day form of McCarthyism by competing with CNN and NBC, among others, to claim leadership of a mainstream and social media mob of bullies which attacked, vilified, and threatened Nicholas Sandmann, an innocent secondary school child." It stated that "The Post ignored basic journalist standards because it wanted to advance its well-known and easily documented, biased agenda against President Donald J. Trump ("the President") by impugning individuals perceived to be supporters of the President." It then alleged that "The Post bullied an innocent child with an absolute disregard for the pain and destruction its attacks

would cause to his life." And "The Post did not conduct a proper investigation before publishing its false and defamatory statements of and concerning Nicholas." President Trump cheered Sandmann, tweeting: "Go get them Nick. Fake News!"

Several of Sandmann's lawsuits are still working their way through the federal district court in the Eastern District of Kentucky, with motions to dismiss by the media outlets pending. At least two, those brought against CNN and the Washington Post, have ended with out-of-court settlements on terms that have not been made public. The Washington Post explained its decision to settle its case: "News organizations sometimes settle defamation claims rather than face a trial. Even with a favorable judgment at trial, the costs of defending against such a suit can be substantial." Sandmann commented after his settlement with the Post, tweeting, "The fight isn't over. 2 down. 6 to go."

Thorough and balanced reporting and meticulous editing are not only journalistic tenets, but are key to the avoidance of lawsuits. Although he was thrust into the national spotlight, Sandmann would likely be considered a private citizen for purposes of his libel suits. Thus, his standard for proving defamation would be lower than it would have been had he been a public official or public figure. All states require proving negligence or carelessness for a suit brought by a private individual (although the level of fault for private individuals does vary by state). Sandmann would also need to show that he was identified by the allegedly false statements by the media and that they were statements of fact, not opinion, which a judge in at least one of his cases has ruled he cannot show. Statements of opinion are not actionable in libel actions. Motions to dismiss the cases against the New York Times, Rolling Stone and ABC News are pending on several of these bases.

Whether or not the remaining cases are dismissed by motions, go to trial, or eventually settle out of court, there are so many lessons for student journalists from the Sandmann incident. CMA member and professor Vince Filak, astutely reminded students of three important takeaways from the Sandmann reporting and lawsuits (https://dynamicsofwriting.com/2020/09/17/throwback-thursday-a-look-back-at-the-covington-catholic-kids-vs-native-american-protester-situation/)

1. Fast is good; accurate is better;

2. The duty to report is not the same as the duty to publish; and

3. Objectivity is still an admirable goal.

"The goal here is not to pick sides and fight for only the people on it. You need to figure out what happened and report the content," Professor Filak said. We should all heed his sage advice: "Stick to the basic tenets of journalism and you'll be fine."

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Carolyn Levin

Zachary Press, an associate at Miller Korzenik Sommers Rayman LLP, assisted with the research for this column.

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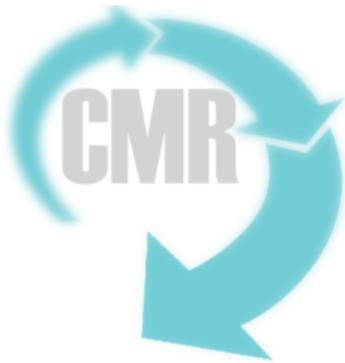
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How student journalists learn to file public records requests

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Abstract: This interview-based study examines the experiences of college journalists who have filed freedom of information (FOI) requests. Sixteen college journalists were asked about specific public-records requests they filed and their feelings about FOI in general. This study finds that college journalists generally learned how to file FOI requests not in the classroom, but rather from their peers. Students filed requests that tended to seek records from their home institutions rather than from other agencies. College journalists were generally optimistic about the potential of FOI to yield newsworthy information, despite that many of their requests went nowhere. College journalists also believed their status as students put them at a disadvantage. Finally, some students recognized that the outcomes of requests were highly situational, based on the records officers handling them.

Using freedom of information (FOI) requests to access public records can help journalists add credibility to their reporting and shed light on previously untold stories. FOI requests have unearthed records that showed the federal government was undercounting the number of immigrants who died while crossing the U.S. southern border (O' Dell, González and Castellano 2017); that former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt misused government resources, leading to his resignation (Lucas 2018); and that often, doctors who were disciplined for sexually abusing patients were allowed to practice medicine again (Teegardin and Robbins 2018).

However, journalists often find it difficult to use FOI requests to access newsworthy information. FOI laws are complex and open to interpretation. The long wait times needed to fulfill some FOI requests can be incompatible with increasingly short newsroom deadlines (Barnhurst 2011). Fees to access records can be prohibitively high for financially strapped news organizations (Associated Press 2015). Records officers may redact documents so heavily that they become useless (Arizona Newspapers Association 2016). The act of filing an FOI request may alienate sources who are suspicious of the reasons behind the request (Kimball 2016). FOI laws themselves are continually at risk of being limited by the officials they were designed to hold accountable (Bovard 2019). It is not surprising, then, that most journalists avoid filing FOI requests (Cuillier 2011).

Given the value of using FOI requests to acquire newsworthy information, but also the challenges journalists have experienced accessing information, do student journalists see a brighter future? How do student journalists who have filed FOI requests feel about the process? This study, based on semi-structured interviews with 16 college journalists who have FOI experience, examines these questions.

Literature Review

 FOI in Journalism: FOI laws are a subset of open government laws, which are aimed at helping the public obtain information related to the deliberations and decisions of elected and appointed officials. Open government laws, which also include open meetings laws, help citizens to engage in democratic societies (Meiklejohn 1948), help governments operate efficiently (Larbi 1999), and hold power to account (Stiglitz 1999). The adoption of open government laws has been connected to democratization and anticorruption movements around the world (Relly 2012).

Open government laws are often connected to the practice of journalism, which aims to provide the public with information that promotes self-governance and civic engagement (see, e.g., Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014). Journalists see FOI laws as an important tool to that end (Davis 2016; Kwoka 2016). Journalists have been involved in the creation (Schudson 2015) and enforcement (Jones 2011) of FOI laws. Although past studies have suggested that journalists have not been among the most frequent

FOI requesters (Cuillier 2011; Kwoka 2016), that may be changing, at least at the federal level (Brust 2019).

Journalists use public records in part because they are perceived to be high quality sources. As government documents, public records are seen by journalists as more credible than lesser-known sources (Carlson 2009; Gans 1979). Journalists and their audiences often presume published records of any kind to be trustworthy (Cox, Wallace and Wallace 2002), even though such presumptions can be misguided (Bond, Brown, Luque and O' Hara 2014). The affordances of online media allow journalists to link to or embed entire public records in their articles, helping them "show their work" (Davis 2016). Using public records can also help journalists build trust among news audiences at a time when public trust in journalism is at near-historic lows (Jones 2019; Tuchman 1978). The popularity of data journalism has also fueled interest in public records, since governments are rich repositories of quantifiable information (Anderson 2015).

In the U.S., the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is the primary federal law governing access to public records. Enacted in 1966 but amended several times since, FOIA allows "any person" to access public records held by agencies in the executive branch of federal government. Requesters do not have to complete a specific form or provide a reason in order to gain access. Agencies have 20 business days to acknowledge FOIA requests, although completing requests can take much longer (Mordock 2018). Agencies may deny FOIA requests for records that fall under one or more of nine exemptions, such as national security, trade secrets, or matters that would violate personal privacy.

Although FOIA itself may seem straightforward, the process of filing a request can be deceptively complex. Separate laws apply to records at the state and local level, and they may differ from the federal FOIA in many ways, such as in their definitions of which kinds of documents are available, how long requesters must wait for responses, whether fees may be charged, and whether requests are too "burdensome" to require compliance (Bevarly 2018; Fink 2018, 91-115). Thus, experienced public records requesters advocate a thorough understanding of relevant laws as an important first step in preparing to file requests (Kambhampati 2018).

Still, understanding FOIA and other public records laws is only part of the challenge. Outcomes of FOI requests are highly situational. Records officers have broad discretionary power to interpret FOI laws when determining whether requested documents should be released fully, partially, or not at all (Brennan 2013; Cuillier 2010). Records officers resist cooperating with requesters whose motives they question or who they otherwise believe to be "vexsome" (Kimball 2012). Requesters who appeal denials from records officers rarely win (Baker 2015), and officials who are found to have wrongly denied access are rarely punished (Hull 2004). Some records officers fail to keep up to date on their obligations under public records laws (Bertot, McDermott, and Smith 2012). Experts believe access to public records has been getting worse in recent years (Cuillier 2017). Backlogs are common, as the number of public records requests filed each year has generally increased (U.S. Department of Justice 2018).

The challenges of obtaining information under FOI laws have prompted calls for reform. Particularly during so-called "Sunshine Week" each March, journalists opine about the flaws of FOI and call on lawmakers to pass amendments (see, e.g. Jones 2019). Legal scholars have advocated for prioritizing responses to requests from the press (Carroll 2016) and/or deprioritizing requests from commercial parties (Kwoka 2016). Meanwhile, organizations such as the Society of Professional Journalists, MuckRock, National Freedom of Information Coalition, and Investigative Reporters and Editors offer resources to help requesters, such as request-letter templates and contact information for particular records officers. Still, the outcomes of FOI requests remain highly individualized based on, among other factors, the information requested, the agency holding the records, and how the request is worded (Kimball 2003; Peters 2017).

Student Exposure to FOI: The attitudes that future journalists develop about FOI depend in part on their exposure to it as college students. The ideas and routines formed in early adulthood have remarkable staying power (Perry 1999), and colleges and universities play a significant role in personal and professional development (Astin 1984; Mayhew et al. 2016). Thus, the impressions that college journalists form about reporting practices can have lasting effects. Those impressions are driven by multiple sources, including students' personal media consumption habits, internships, academic coursework, and participation on college newspapers

(Gutsche and Salkin 2011). Research on what students think of FOI is limited, but journalism-education scholarship offers some insight into the latter two of those sources: academic coursework and participation on college newspapers.

Academic Coursework: College journalism programs offer varying levels of instruction on FOI. Shemberger (2015, 2017) found several barriers to teaching FOI in college journalism programs in Tennessee and argued those barriers likely applied elsewhere in the U.S. She found journalism educators often lacked personal experience filing FOI requests, and believed the complexity and variability of public records laws made them difficult to teach (Shemberger 2015). Other impediments to improving instruction on FOI included resistance from journalism educators who believed their curricula already sufficiently addressed the topic, even as they also believed students did not understand it well (Shemberger 2017).

Limited attention to FOI may be due in part to pressure on college journalism programs to cover an ever-expanding list of topics, from fundamental reporting skills such as interviewing and writing as well as those that track the latest trends and innovations, particularly related to digital media (Carlson and Lewis 2019). Journalism curricula can also vary widely due to disagreements among educators as to whether coursework should focus more on theory or practice (see, e.g., Blom and Davenport 2012; Josephi 2009) and criticism from news professionals that students are not learning what they need to be prepared to work in journalism (Knight Foundation 2011). Still, news executives have expressed a preference for students who are well educated in media law (Dickson and Brandon 2000).

Even when students learn about FOI in the classroom, they may never gain hands-on experience filing requests. As noted in the previous section, seasoned FOI requesters believe a "learning by doing" approach (Greenberg 2007; Schon 1987) is the best way to gain experience. Such an approach is associated with experiential learning (Kolb 1984), which has been advocated by journalism scholars and professionals to "allow aspiring journalists to test their budding knowledge in a context that resembles the workplace, while providing support" (Ross 2017, 87), not to mention help universities keep pace with rapid industry changes (Robinson 2013). In courses that have taken an experiential learning approach to FOI, educators found that students felt filing requests helped prepare them for careers in journalism

and/or government, and made them more aware of their rights as citizens (Pulimood, Monisha, Shaw, and Lounsberry 2011; Simon and Sapp 2006). Assigning public records requests can also benefit students by helping them overcome fears of contacting government officials (Burriss 1986) and unearthing legitimate scoops (Santus 2014).

College Newspapers: College students may also form impressions of FOI through their work on student newspapers. Understanding the operations of college newspapers is important, given their role in fostering civic engagement on campus (Ingelhart 1993) and helping journalism programs improve their curricula (Gutsche and Salkin 2011). College newspapers also serve as training grounds for professional news organizations (Hardin and Sims 2008). College newspapers sometimes even stand in for professional news media, given that financial challenges have led many local news operations to scale back or shut down (Abernathy 2018). College media sometimes even beat professional news organizations to breaking stories (Blatchford 2018).

Although the work of college newspapers may overlap with professional news organizations, the environments in which they operate differ—which can affect their uses of, and experiences with, FOI requests. Most college newspaper coverage is focused on campus, reflecting the news interests of students (Payne and Mills 2015). Thus, college journalists would likely be most interested in filing FOI requests with their own institutions. However, using FOI to obtain information from colleges and universities can be difficult, for a number of reasons.

For one, laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) and Clery Act, which are aimed at protecting student privacy, are often cited by higher education institutions to justify withholding information (Greenberg and Goldstein 2017; Janosik and Gregory 2003; Rosenzweig 2002). Critics have often accused universities of improperly invoking these laws to avoid releasing information that could reflect poorly upon their institutions (Greenberg and Goldstein 2017; Sidbury 1999; Silverblatt 2012). Universities are also increasingly transferring fundraising and other activities such as athletics, scholarships, capital projects, and payroll decisions to nonprofit foundations or private corporations, which are exempt from FOI laws (Capeloto 2011–2013; 2015). Some states have also

approved exceptions or loopholes to help universities avoid releasing information such as emails (Hobson 2019).

Students who attend private universities face additional constraints. Private universities operate in a "pseudo-public sphere" (Salzano and Lisosky 2017, 17) that is largely exempt from FOI laws and in which First Amendment protections are limited (Steffen 2002). Courts have dismissed numerous legal cases against private universities over speech restrictions because only public universities are considered to be "state actors" (DeCresenza 2009). Although many private universities claim to have policies that support free expression, they "at the same time maintain policies that restrict their students, donors, and faculty's speech" (Sarabyn 2010, 147). Student news media at private universities that have published information that was considered embarrassing or critical have been censored or shut down (Steffen 2002; Young 2019). Some private universities have also restricted the speech of potential news sources, such as student athletes (LoMonte 2014).

Finally, even college newspapers at public universities may feel a "chilling effect" on information seeking (Safire 2005) because of their dependence on their institutions. Most college newspapers receive financial support from their institutions. Student journalists who fear losing that support may refrain from asking tough questions or covering controversial stories (Gutsche and Salkin 2011), such as those that would require filing public records requests. Only 29 percent of college publications carry advertisements, and revenue has generally been declining (College Media Association 2018). Even student newspapers that claim to be financially independent often receive indirect benefits, such as office space and utilities, from their institutions (Ingelhart 1993). Additionally, courts have ruled that legal protections for professional journalists do not always apply to students (Peters, Belmas, and Bobkowski 2016).

Other resources: Third-party organizations also play a role in how college journalists develop an understanding of public records laws, particularly when those organizations help with legal challenges involving student media. The Student Press Law Center offers guidance on FOI, including a letter template that has been used more than 350,000 times (Student Press Law Center n.d.). The SPLC has also conducted live and recorded presentations on FOI for journalism educators and

student news organizations and offers a pro-bono network for legal assistance in FOI disputes. Another press freedom organization, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, has provided advice on how to use FOI to gain access to university records and offers to defend students who feel their rights on campus have been violated (Steinbaugh 2020). Professional and academic associations, such as the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, have hosted events for educators and students to learn about FOI (Wilson 2016).

These third-party organizations have offered legal advice as well as publicity to college news organizations seeking support for attempts to access public records. High-profile cases involving college media in recent years have included that of the *Lantern*, Ohio State University's student newspaper, which sued the school in 2019 in order to access the arrest records of football players. The *Daily Tar Heel* sued the University of North Carolina in 2016 to obtain the names and punishments of students found responsible for rape, sexual assault or sexual harassment (the case was resolved in the newspaper's favor in 2020). Also in 2016, *Knight News* successfully sued the University of Central Florida over records related to funding allocations for student organizations.

Considering the challenges that journalists have faced using public records requests, but also the challenges to learning about them as students, this study focuses on the perceptions of college journalists who do have experience in this area. Specifically, this research addresses the following questions:

- RQ1: How do student journalists learn to file public records requests?
- RQ2: How do student journalists use public records in their reporting?
- RQ3: What obstacles do student journalists face in accessing records?

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 student journalists at universities in the United States between 2017 and 2019. Interviewees were identified via online searches of college news media articles using keywords such as "freedom of information" and "public records request." Interviewees were

contacted by email if they wrote at least one article that indicated public records requests were used to access information for the story. Potential interviewees were also identified from responses to a survey that had been conducted for a study on a similar topic.

Recruiting participants for the study was challenging. Identifying journalists, college or professional, who have filed public records requests is difficult in part because journalists tend not to cite all the sources they use (Hallin, Manoff, and Weddle 1993). In other words, many articles that used FOI requests in their reporting likely eluded online searches. Additionally, college newspapers are often not well indexed by search engines. In spite of Google's claim that its search engine includes 50,000 news sources (Garber 2012), the company has not made available a full list of publishers, so it is unclear how many are college media. However, the Google algorithm appears to favor a small number of well-known legacy media (Trielli and Diakopoulos 2019).

This study takes an inductive approach based on constructive grounded theory (Charmaz 2014). Student journalists who were interviewed for this study were asked questions about specific FOI requests they had filed as well as more general questions about their experiences with the process, such as how they learned how to file requests, and how they felt FOI impacted their reporting. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were coded based on general themes that emerged upon the first round of review and categorized again upon further analysis.

This project received Institutional Review Board approval to identify students by name in published research, due to the individualized nature of their requests. Students granted permission to use their names as part of the informed consent process. Most interviews were conducted over the phone; one student was interviewed in person. Interviews lasted an average of one hour.

Findings

RQ1: How do student journalists learn to file FOI requests?

Most interviewees said they learned to file public records requests through their work on college newspapers, not in the classroom. This finding is consistent with prior research (Shemberger 2015, 2017) that suggested college journalism programs tended to spend little time on FOI. Most interviewees also said they learned about public records requests from peers, not from journalism instructors or other mentors. According to Ethan Edward Colson with the *Triton* at the University of California-San Diego:

The only reason I learned how to do them was because my editor had taught himself how to do public records requests and then he taught me how to do them. And now I have other staffers to do them. But without that knowledge, we wouldn't have been able to file those requests. So I think there's a lack of resources available to student journalists when it comes to learning how to use resources like public records.

Some students said FOI came up in journalism courses. However, their in-class exposure to FOI often took the form of discussions rather than hands-on work. Students did not file FOI requests for their courses, the type of "learning by doing" assignments advocated by Robinson (2013) and other journalism educators. Some students said they wished their journalism classes had helped them learn FOI. However, Caity Coyne, who wrote for *The Daily Athenaeum* at West Virginia University, said she thought student newspapers were a better learning environment:

We always say you have to work at the student newspaper to really experience what student media is and how to actually do journalism before you enter the workforce. I think FOIA is a perfect example of that.

While most students learned from their peers how to file FOI requests, professional mentors sometimes assisted. Those mentors introduced students to public records requests as a general concept and/or shared materials such as request-letter templates with student journalists. Emma Finkbeiner, who wrote for *The North Wind* at Northern Michigan University, said she consulted her student newspaper's adviser when specific questions arose: "How do I narrow this email FOIA, or how do we go about requesting financial records."

Kenny Jacoby, a journalist with the *Daily Emerald* at the University of Oregon, said faculty members came to his defense when his FOI request was denied. They "took on my complaint and brought their concerns to the university from a more official standpoint than just having the student kind of fight his own battles."

RQ2: How do student journalists use public records in their reporting?

College journalists used public records requests most often to access information from their own universities, rather than from other public agencies. Students were generally positive about the potential of FOI, although many of their requests did not yield useful information.

Consistent with earlier findings (Payne and Mills 2015) that students were most interested in news on their own campuses, the college journalists interviewed for this study filed almost all their requests with their own institutions. The topics of requests varied. Some related to crime and public safety. Other requests related to university spending, such as on employee salaries, construction, real estate, and payments to musicians and speakers who visited their campuses. Finkbeiner, the Northern Michigan University student, said public records requests helped her investigate spending by the university's board of trustees.

Students have a very low awareness of who they are and what kind of power the board of trustees has regarding decisions that are made at the university. And our tuition at NMU rises every single year, like most universities… you know, there are these people that are making decisions, and who are they?

Finkbeiner's requests led to stories about the university's spending to cover the travel expenses of trustees, including reimbursement for the use of a private plane.

Students also requested records related to hiring and employee misconduct. For example, Marjorie Kirk with the *Kentucky Kernel* gained national attention and support from open records advocates in her battle with the University of

Kentucky for records related to sexual misconduct allegations against a former professor.

Two women had come to me and said that they went through this Title IX process and they weren't happy with the result, because the professor was going to be able to leave campus by resigning, not going through what they thought was a real, like, punishment process… He was going to be able to go to another university without anyone knowing what he had done and what he'd been found responsible for.

Although the university sued to block Kirk's request, she eventually received the records she requested, and wrote at least eight articles about the professor. Seven other students indicated that they had tried unsuccessfully to use public records requests to investigate allegations of sexual misconduct or report on sexual assault more generally. In all cases, records officers cited FERPA in denying the requests, consistent with earlier findings (e.g. Greenberg and Goldstein 2017) that universities often use privacy laws to justify the withholding of information.

University records officers also cited FERPA in denials of other types of requests, according to the student journalists. Michael Tobin with the *Daily Emerald* at the University of Oregon said he filed an FOI request for the names of donors to student government campaigns after learning that candidates were allowed to do whatever they wanted with unspent money. The university released a list that was almost entirely blacked out.

All the parents' names, all the students' names were redacted, and they cited FERPA for it.… A university is withholding the names of donors to a student government campaign and they're saying that these donation records are educational records, which is absurd. We need to figure out who's donating to our student government campaign campaigns, like who's influencing these.

Sometimes, students would submit requests based on their own curiosity, or to test which information they could actually get. Benjamin Blanchet with the *Spectrum* newspaper at the University of Buffalo submitted a public records

request to see how his student ID swipe information was being collected and used:

I was always obsessed with it. Like, every student has a card. So I wanted to see whatever information is disclosed or kind of scattered, and who gets to see it. What type of like overview those type of people have on student information, I guess. And then seeing like where that information goes. So say, like, how many times I swipe in to a dorm. Who gets to see that?

A small minority of students interviewed for this study did make requests to agencies outside their universities. For example, Andrew Clark with the *Oklahoma Daily* at Oklahoma University requested an autopsy report from the local medical examiner's office for a student who died at a fraternity party. Alex Yoon Hendricks, who wrote for the *Daily Californian* at the University of California-Berkeley, sought emails from a local school district to try to learn why a high school principal had suddenly resigned.

Students rarely sought records from private universities. As Steffen (2002) and others have noted, private universities face fewer obligations to respond to records requests. That could discourage students from even trying to ask for information. Katie Goodrich said her student newspaper, the *Butler Collegian,* never tried to request records from Butler University, which is private. She assumed the requests would be denied. Nick Buzzelli, who began his undergraduate education at a private university, said he only realized the power of public records requests after transferring to a public institution, Kent State University: "I realized that because it's public, you know, we'd be able to do all this different reporting. You know, money-based, numbers-based."

RQ3: What obstacles do student journalists face in accessing records?

College journalists felt that their status as students put them at a disadvantage in using FOI requests. Students also recognized that using FOI effectively was more complicated than just knowing the law; it was additionally about managing communications with records officers.

Many student frustrations with FOI echoed those of professional journalists. Students accused records officers of being unresponsive or combative, improperly withholding information that should have been public, and charging exorbitant fees. But college journalists also faced challenges that were particular to their status as students. Requests could be forgotten by students or records officers over semester breaks, or because of changes in student newspaper staffing. Keeping up with requests was also challenging since students, unlike full-time journalists, report in their free time. Some students said they believed records officers were aware of how difficult it was to keep following up and used that to their advantage. Records officers always served in a university relations or other promotional capacity, even when the records themselves were kept by other departments. Records officers "actively do things to wait until we graduate and leave," said Alejandra Reyes, who wrote for the *Daily Bruin* at UCLA. "Like with this request that I've been waiting on for a year, I'm pretty sure that [the records officer is] aware that I left." Some students said they also noticed that professional journalists would get faster responses than they did to FOI requests.

The descriptions students provided of their experiences with FOI revealed an understanding that the outcomes of requests depended on much more than knowing relevant laws and what records were available. Accessing the information students wanted also depended on their ability to cultivate relationships with records officers, and their understanding of how records are kept and retrieved. That kind of knowledge generally came after filing many requests—successful and unsuccessful. Eleven of the 16 college journalists interviewed for this study had filed at least 10 requests in the most recent academic year. Cody Boteler, who reported for *The Towerlight* at Towson University, said when filing requests, "you learn so much. You learn how to navigate difficult situations, you learn to negotiate a little bit back and forth—well, what if we requested this, what could you do then?"

Some students also recognized that the act of filing a FOI request itself made a statement. As Kimball (2016) found in her research on records officers, filing FOI requests can come across as an adversarial gesture. University of North Alabama student Harley Duncan, who wrote about his own public records

request challenges as Editor in Chief of the *Flor–Ala* newspaper, said he has come to believe journalists should use public records requests sparingly.

I don't think there's necessarily anything wrong with just randomly asking for information. It's people's right and I believe that they should exercise that. I think that just reporters should be really responsible with what they do, because there's just so much distrust nowadays between the press and the public, and certain institutions and the press.

Duncan said requesters who push hard for compliance with FOI requests may burn bridges with sources or feel repercussions from their universities. In the *Flor–Ala*'s case, the university removed the newspaper's faculty adviser.

Conclusion

This study aimed for a deep examination of the experiences of student journalists with FOI requests. It is not clear how common filing FOI requests is among student journalists as a whole—although past research suggests that, just as is true for professional journalists, the practice is rare (Silverblatt 2012; Cuillier 2011). Still, this study is limited due to challenges identifying and recruiting college journalists with FOI experience. Future research could survey college journalists about their use of FOI requests and attempt to identify relationships between FOI practices and, as examples, student newspaper staffing, publishing frequency, and/or funding; whether their schools are public or private; whether they offer journalism majors and/or are accredited; and the roles and professional backgrounds of college media advisers.

This study found that college journalists share some challenges of professional journalists when attempting to access public records, but also face challenges particular to their status as students. First, they often lack guidance from experienced mentors to help navigate complex request processes. Second, students lack the time to wait for responses and the standing to pressure records officers to comply with FOI laws. Despite those challenges, students believed knowing how to file public records requests was valuable.

Students and college media advisers seeking to bolster their efforts to access public records may benefit from resources offered by student press advocacy organizations referenced earlier in this paper. The Student Press Law Center, in addition to providing a FOI request template and legal advice, also offers guest speakers on FOI and press freedom. Other press advocacy groups such as the Society for Professional Journalists, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and National Freedom of Information Coalition, also offer online resources on obtaining public records.

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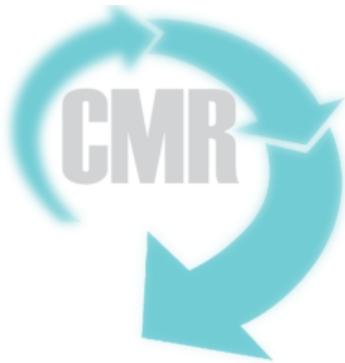
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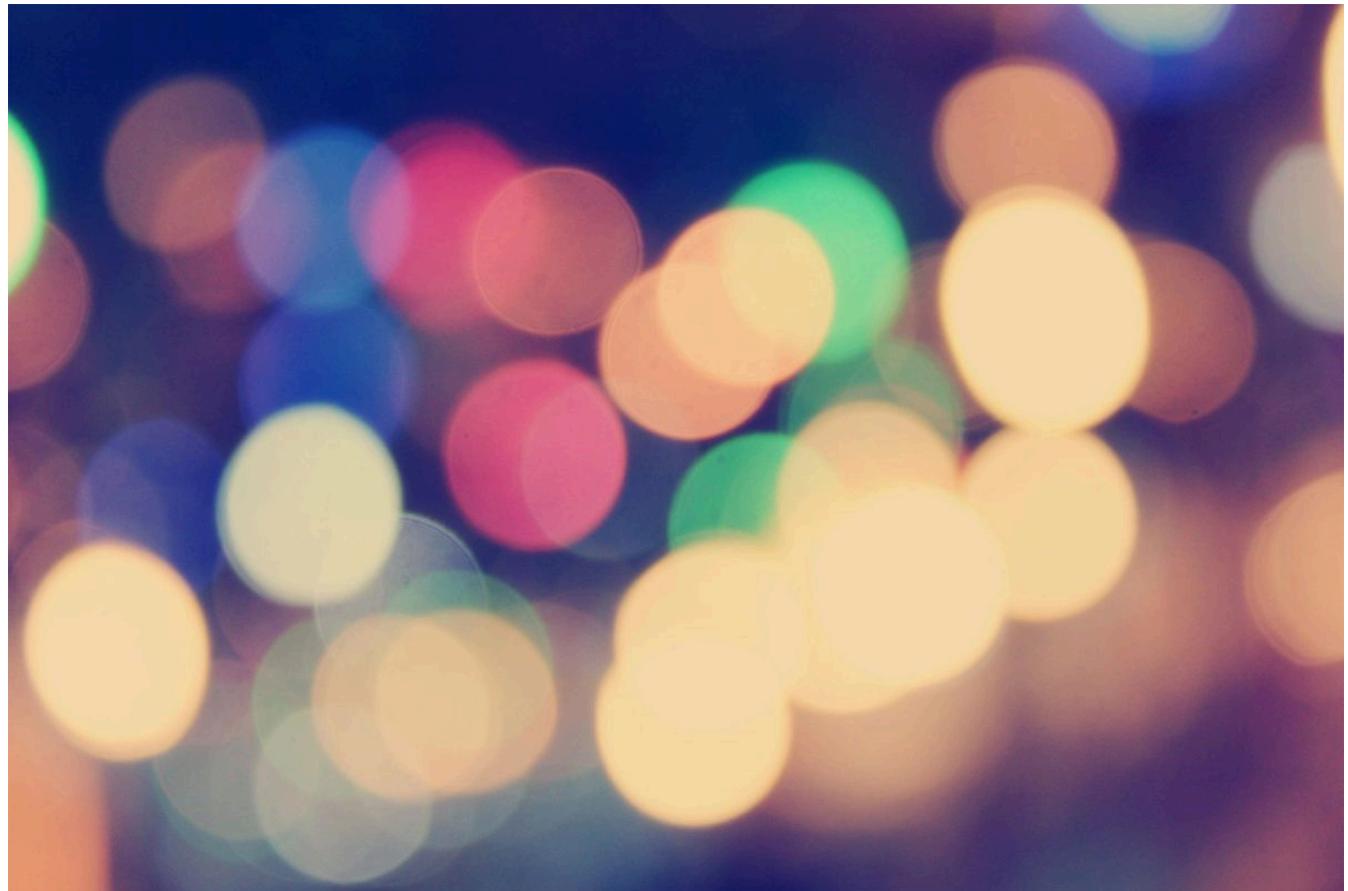
Finding news in new places during an isolating time

By **Susan Coleman Goldstein**

Mount Wachusett Community College

"I don't have any ideas for my next beat."

This is a common lament, particularly at my school, a small, rural Massachusetts community college, where most of the students enroll in my basic news reporting course to check off an elective. They usually have no desire to enter the journalism field or to even write professionally, unless it's creative writing.

In the old pre-pandemic days, I relied on our campus for beat ideas. I stood in the classroom and talked about the importance of covering the Student Government Association, for example— "follow the money," I'd say passionately into faces that usually showed no reaction. But that was okay because then I could take them on a forced field trip, down three flights of stairs to the Student Life Office, where they met Kathy, the woman who gave them the agenda and minutes for the next SGA meeting, the woman who provided contacts to campus clubs, and the woman who supplied background and details about upcoming events.

What about a beat focused on the library? Tutoring services? Advising? The Student Lounge? "Line up! Let's take a stroll around campus and get to know these people." Along the way, we often practiced short impromptu interviews in the hallways with passing students. There would be embarrassed laughs, shaky hands taking notes, or the occasional bravado of someone comfortable with talking to strangers, but the lesson was learned: story ideas were everywhere on campus.

And I wondered, back in March, when we were suddenly off campus and in quarantine, and I wondered again, over the summer, as I prepped for September, "How do I replicate this kind of magic as I move my course completely online for the entire semester?"

When a mandatory quarantine took effect in Massachusetts in the middle of March, I started following this account on my personal Instagram called *Off Assignment.* Followers submitted mini-stories, one or two paragraphs, of people or sights they saw in their neighborhoods during this momentous time. The stories were often sentimental but rang true for the experiences many of us were living, such as getting to know neighbors again, finding previously unknown and beautiful places to explore just down the street, and appreciating small human connections during this isolating time.

Eureka!

This worked well as a first practice assignment in my news reporting class. Students, new to Journalism, took my assignment to heart and practiced close observation, developing story ideas and writing short, tight pieces just by walking out their front doors. One student wrote poignantly about her elderly neighbor who never had visitors, and who sat outside at the same hour in her yard, lifting her face to the sun. Another student described the kid on his street practicing his drums and how he habitually listened every morning. He wrote, "Your music makes me smile...I sit outside and just enjoy this performance." Another student described satisfaction in watching the neighbor's daily car washing ritual, just before the sun sets, and she described in detail the green hose, the soapy scrub, the wet streaks lovingly wiped dry with a towel.

For the first time in my 15 years of teaching news writing, I gave students more freedom in choosing the geographic location of their stories (pre-pandemic, I strongly urged them to cover stories related to campus). I decided this semester would be different. See how successful this practice assignment was? I was determined to encourage them, in this pandemic setting, to cover the communities around us, and I knew these stories would be rich in detail and insight.

Well, not quite.

One student pitched a profile story about the new pastor at her church, the same church Martin Luther King visited once, located 60 miles away. Another student randomly wrote about the COVID impact on small businesses but interviewed two restaurants in his hometown...in another state, about 40 miles from campus. A third student wrote a profile about a single mother who earned her doctorate and who offered inspiring quotes about the importance of education and perseverance....she lives 30 miles away, in another state, and she also never went to school anywhere near around us.

Interesting ideas, all of them, but perhaps I gave too much leeway with these assignments. Could a few local restaurant owners near one of our campuses be interviewed instead? Could the writer find an alum from our college who persevered in her educational pursuits? My initial invitation for them to "just walk outside their front door and find stories around them" seemed to backfire. Then again, we are living in the midst of a pandemic, with a group of students who have no interest in newswriting, with a classroom that is completely online. Given these factors, I did something that I never would have done before: I accepted the small business story and I accepted the inspiring single mother story (the pastor profile seemed too disconnected) because they contained a universal relevancy that is still applicable to the newspaper's audience.

There were also stories submitted that were pleasantly quirky and definitely newsworthy, regardless of having no connection to students. Who wouldn't want to read a profile story about the 20-year-old snake catcher two towns away who's been catching snakes since he was 5 and who spoke at length about the snakes he finds in this area and what he learns from them? Who wouldn't want to read a news story about professional musicians in Massachusetts, who no longer have indoor venues as we enter the cold months of winter, and who have lost money, opportunities, and the chance to do what they love? Who wouldn't want to read the perspective of a harried town clerk three towns away, who spoke about ballot counting and harassment at the polls over the mandatory mask policy?

This is what I have learned in my years of teaching: I am always learning. I consistently tweak my courses, omitting assignments that seemed to flop, exploring new ideas, and adding different material. The pandemic is the unexpected teacher and I am the unprepared student. Could I have assigned clearer assignments? Could I have ushered students more to the campus for story ideas? Yes and Yes.

Still, I remain determined to allow more flexibility with beat ideas next semester. I might regret this decision when I read the pitches, but I'll take that chance because, hidden within the pile of ideas, there just might be another snake catcher.

Susan Goldstein worked for 10 years for daily and weekly newspapers in North Central Massachusetts as a beat reporter and then as a freelance columnist, publishing personal essays in the local daily newspapers on a weekly basis, for over 10 years. She re-introduced the student newspaper to the Mount Wachusett Community College community college 15 years ago. She is the adviser and teaches basic newswriting courses and literature and English Composition courses.

Susan Goldstein

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Journal of the College Media Association

Five inaugurations on the front lines with student journalists

Three Doane University students at the 2001 inauguration of George W. Bush, the only one of five inaugurals covered by students in which students could get close and actually sit to watch it. The students are, left to right,

Amanda (Millard) Memrick, Elizabeth (Zaborowski) Spencer and Jonathan Hoke. (Photo courtesy David Swartzlander)

Bearing witness to democracy on the road presents challenges but pays an enormous dividend

By **David Swartzlander**

Past President, College Media Association

Attending my first inauguration was a dream come true.

Literally.

After I was hired in 1999 as a journalism instructor at Doane University in Crete, Neb., I was told I had a month to come up with an idea to teach a course for a two-week interval between fall and spring semesters. Students learned through mini-courses on campus or they traveled off-campus for academic reasons.

For days, I searched in vain for an idea. When my head hit the pillow one week before the proposal deadline, I still was clueless.

That's when I dreamed I attended the 2001 presidential inauguration. And I realized that it happened every four years on Jan. 20, perfect timing for the class. I had my course.

A million dollar view for students from the "cheap seats." (Photo courtesy David Swartzlander)

Over my 22 years at Doane, I led dozens of students to five presidential inaugurations — from the "hanging chad" election of George W. Bush to the magically historical inauguration of Barack Obama to the "American Carnage" inauguration of Donald Trump. We traveled as one news organization, reporting and sharing stories with students and readers/listeners in Nebraska.

During those five inaugurations, we never lost luggage or a student — though one went AWOL for three hours one day, and we inadvertently left a blind student to fend on his own, briefly, at a Metro station. Your heart sinks when you hear another student yell after the Metro train doors closed: "We left the blind kid!" That "blind kid," by the way, is now the press secretary for the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee. Incredibly, we made it through every checkpoint along the way to be witnesses to democracy in action.

But it wasn't easy. It's not a trip in which you say the morning of Jan. 19, "Hey, let's go to the inauguration." Hundreds of thousands of people descend every four years on the nation's capital. To attend the inauguration takes months of planning.

In addition to foresight, you'll need lots of patience, buckets of money and a willingness on Jan. 20 to deny yourself essentials such as food, a bathroom and warmth for hours.

Is it worth it? My students and I would shout a resounding, "Yes!"

Here's how we did it:

1. **Students … and cost.** You need students, but getting them to go on the trip is one of the easiest tasks. Journalism, political science and history students love the chance to attend. The main concern will be cost. You likely can't pay for all the students to go. They will need to secure funding. How much depends on how long you intend to stay. In 2017, we spent two weeks in Washington, D.C., acting as one news agency, interviewing members of the media and Congress, seeing the sights and sending dispatches home each day to our Doaneline web site, daily papers and radio stations in Nebraska. The cost per student was $2,650. Figure about $200/student/night in DC. That cost included hotel, airfare, ground transportation, museum memberships and breakfast.

2. **Hotel:** Even if you're staying just one or two nights, you'll need a place to stay. You need to grab that place early, as hotels fill up quickly. Be prepared: inn keepers realize they can double or triple their rates during Inauguration Week. Consider searching for suites to allow as many students as possible to attend as cheaply as possible. Look for suites with dorm refrigerators and microwaves in the rooms to allow students to make their own meals. We also wanted a hotel that offered free breakfast, was close to the White House, had several delis and cheap eats nearby, was on or close to a Metro line and near medical help, just in case. We settled on the Best Western Georgetown Hotel and Suites. It turned out to be such a good choice that we stayed there for all the inaugurations. Consider enlisting the help of a travel agent to book the hotel, though. A travel agent saved us money by knowing the hotel contract inside and out.

3. **Flight:** Unless you live within driving distance, you will need flights to DC. Again, consider relying on a travel agent to make those arrangements. Once you know the number of students, the agent will search for the lowest price. We flew from Omaha to Washington, D.C. on a direct flight, a real plus. The travel agent will need student names, their driver's license or government IDs and the dates of birth.

4. **Ground transportation:** You'll also need a way to get from the airport — we flew into Ronald Reagan – to the hotel. I recommend Super Shuttle. You can schlep your bags and yourself to the Metro from the airport, but it's more comfortable to herd everyone into a shuttle, have the driver load the bags and get to the hotel directly. It costs more money, but it's a small perk that's worth it to avoid the hassles. You can make those arrangements with Super Shuttle well in advance or ask the travel agent to do it for you.

5. **Metro:** You'll need Metro tickets to get around Washington, D.C. and to get to the inauguration. You cannot just drive up to the Capitol. Streets will be closed to traffic. You can walk, but your feet will be tired from standing all day anyway. I recommend buying SmarTrip Metro cards. These are permanent, reusable cards — you can add value once your money runs out. You'll have to buy them once you arrive. You can get 1-day and 3-day cards, but we got $30 cards since we were going to be in town for two weeks. You can buy them at any Metro station.

6. **Swearing in or parade?** Chances are small you will be able to see the swearing-in ceremony AND the parade. Too many people will create too many obstacles to do both — unless you're lucky enough to know someone with an apartment on Pennsylvania Avenue (as we were). So you'll have to decide which to attend. My students liked the parade, but were adamant about their need to witness the historic swearing-in ceremony.

7. **Inauguration Tickets:** Do you need them? No. You can stand hundreds of yards away to watch it on one of the Jumbotrons posted in the area. But journalists prefer to be where the action is, so the students will want to be closer. Press passes would be ideal, but they're not happening. Press passes are for professionals only, not college students. Still, you can try by visiting the S. Senate Press Gallery web site. If you're unable to secure press passes, you can still get Inauguration tickets. Request tickets through a U.S. senator or representative from your state. You'll likely be rejected if you ask a senator from the same political party as the president-elect, though. Those tickets often are already

accounted for by family, friends, campaign workers, lobbyists, etc. Your best bet is to ask a U.S. Senator from the opposite political party. Republicans, for example, are likely to be absent from President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration. They'll happily give tickets away. Simply call your U.S. Senator's office and request the number of tickets you need. The staff will walk you through the process. The tickets are handed out 10 days before the inauguration to the elected officials. Then, you just pick them up at the senator's Washington, D.C. office before Jan. 20. They will be standing room tickets.

8. **Inauguration Day:** Get plenty of sleep the night of Jan. 19. Inauguration Day starts early and is long. It's also cold. Dress in layers — lots of layers. The average low temperature in Washington, D.C. in January is 25 degrees. You will stand in that cold for five hours before the inauguration begins. The average high is 43 degrees. The inauguration will be over before the thermometer reaches that temperature. Pay special attention to your extremities — ears, fingers and toes. Buy hand and foot warmers BEFORE you go. Prices for them will be marked up in Washington, D.C. Consider buying cheap ponchos or trash bags to keep yourself dry in case of rain. Umbrellas are banned. Before leaving the hotel, make sure you have your Metro card and your Inauguration ticket. The tickets are color coded for five access points. You take the Metro line that will deliver you to the correct color-coded access point. And then you wait — for two hours or so. Gates open at 9 a.m., but if you arrive at the gate at 9, you will be last in line — and be farther away than you want to be. You will need to pass through a checkpoint. Packages, coolers, thermos bottles, mace, pepper spray, weapons and supports for signs or posters are prohibited. You can take small food items — granola bars and plastic water bottles, for example — but our apples were confiscated as potential missiles. Other items that will be confiscated include: selfie sticks, balloons, drones, backpacks, glass or metal bottles and animals, unless they are service animals. Once inside the gate, you'll wait for another two hours or so. Ceremonies begin at 11:30 a.m. with welcoming remarks. The president is sworn in about noon. Expect an exhilarating, yet exhausting, day — even before you begin to produce your stories. When the ceremonies end, stay together. The crush of people leaving will be enormous. Don't lose each other.

Obama Inaugural. Via Flickr: Nick V

If you plan to arrive earlier or stay later in Washington, D.C., the following include tips for an extended trip:

1. **Itinerary:** The adviser will need to work on what students will do before or after Inauguration Day. Prepare an agenda for the trip, with activities for each day, including interviews with media representatives, interviews with elected officials, visits to museums, etc. Most museums are free. If you decide to tour the Pentagon, try to access the White House or other federal offices, you'll need to submit everyone's name, date of birth and Social Security numbers to the appropriate authorities. The staff of your elected representatives can help with this. They can also help arrange various tours.
2. **Alums:** To set up those interviews/meetings, first contact your alumni office. I didn't think this idea would pan out since Doane is such a small school. But it turns out that one Doane alum became an architect who built the U.S. Navy Memorial — and the mixed-use complex behind it – on Pennsylvania Avenue. He

and his wife welcomed us to their penthouse apartment on Pennsylvania Avenue, where they fed us, allowed us to use their bathroom and joined us to watch the parade on their balcony. I also learned that two U.S. Secret Service agents were Doane alums, providing us access to a Secret Service tour, normally off limits to tourists. In addition, several Doane alums worked for elected officials and secured access to those officials and the U.S. State Department.

3. **Home:** Contact media professionals who hail from your home state for tours/meetings. Nebraska is a small state in terms of population, which makes it easier to keep track of journalists and other media professionals who work in Washington, D.C. We gained access to the Washington Post from Jenna Johnson, a reporter who covered the Trump campaign and was editor of the Daily Nebraskan when my son attended college there. She agreed to answer students' questions and even introduced the students to Post Editor Martin Baron. CNN's Jeff Zeleny, from the tiny town of Exeter, Neb., was an intern at the Lincoln Journal Star when I covered city politics there. He arranged a CNN tour for my students and me … and then fielded questions for an hour from the students. We found many ex-Nebraskans were helpful in making the trip successful.

4. **Code of conduct:** Develop a code of conduct for students. When hundreds of thousands of people flood into an already bustling metropolitan area, such a code is needed to keep track of everyone. Be prepared to send someone back to Nebraska — at the student's expense — if they fail to abide by the code of conduct. Students need to know that there will be a curfew, that they are required to attend all activities and that they are not allowed to leave the hotel without two other people going with them. Students quickly will learn that going out on the town in Washington, D.C. is pricey, usually way beyond their means. That's when the dorm refrigerators also come in handy — they keep the beer cold for students who then party in their rooms rather than on unknown, potentially dangerous streets.

5. **Health insurance:** Make sure you have copies of the health insurance cards of each student. If they lack health insurance, they cannot attend. If something were to happen on the trip, the adviser is responsible. You need that information available to access it immediately. I never needed to use it, but it eased my mind that I had it readily available.

David Swartzlander retired in June after 22 years of teaching journalism and advising Doane Student Media at Doane University. He also served as vice president and president of College Media Association and is a member of the CMA Hall of Fame. Previously, he reported for 23 years for six daily newspapers in four states. This is the first inauguration in 20 years that he will miss.

David "Swartz" Swartzlander

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College Media Review

Journal of the College Media Association

# Review of 'The Diversity Style Guide,' by Rachele Kanigel

Printed revision and update for the style guide

Reviewed by **Carolyn Schurr Levin**

Originally a project of the Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism in San Francisco State University's journalism department in the 1990s, the "Diversity Style Guide" was a collection of terms from other style guides that existed at the time. That original guide, which was available in PDF form but was never published, was updated and expanded into a searchable website, https://www.diversitystyleguide.com, in 2016. The goal of the website, which is still available and regularly updated, was to "make journalism more inclusive from the classroom to the newsroom." The website offered "guidance, context and nuance for media professionals struggling to write about people who are different from themselves and communities different from their own."

While editing the website, Rachele Kanigel, Professor and Chair of the journalism department at San Francisco State University, realized that "there were a lot of issues and context that needed further exploration, and that a book would be a better

format for that information." The result was the book version of "The Diversity Style Guide," a highly useful and usable tool for students, professors and professional journalists alike. Although published in 2019, what better time to explore this book than now?

"All media professionals have to face decisions about the language they use whenever they set out to write about the human experience," Kanigel writes in the book's Introduction. "Is it better to call the son of a Guatemalan immigrant Hispanic or Latino? Should you refer to a member of the Passamaquoddy tribe in Maine as an American Indian or a Native American, an Indigenous American or a Native person, or avoid racial descriptors altogether. . . Is a man in his 80s elderly, a senior citizen or just a senior?" "The Diversity Style Guide" provides journalism students and media professionals with an understanding about the role of diversity in journalism and about "the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that words can alienate a source or infuriate a reader." The book can be used as both a teaching tool in journalism classes and a reference tool that students and student newsrooms can have on the shelf.
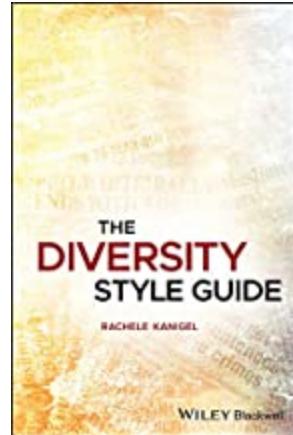
The "Diversity Style Guide" website remains available, free of charge, and is updated on a weekly basis. So what is the benefit of investing in the book version of the guide? "The content is very different," Kanigel explained. "The only part that's similar is the glossary of terms. The content in the chapters of the book isn't on the website and the website has some terms that aren't in the book." Kanigel added that there is "a lot of information in the book that isn't available anywhere else."

The book is divided into two parts, "Covering a Diverse Society" in Part I and "The Journalist's Diversity Toolbox" (an alphabetical style guide defining and explaining terms and proper usage) in Part II. The chapters on Black Americans, Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, mental illness, substance abuse, suicide, and gender equality in Part I are timely and valuable, Kanigel said. Not only do these chapters provide recommendations for reporting, but they also offer tip sheets, ways to avoid misinformation, discussion activities, and additional readings and resources. The last chapter, "Diversity and Inclusion in a Changing Industry," might give student

journalists and advisers ideas for making student media organizations more inclusive. "Simply hiring people from different identity groups isn't enough to diversify a staff," the book states. "[N]ewsroom leaders must be committed to creating an inclusive newsroom – one where all people are valued and listened to."

Is "The Diversity Style Guide" about political correctness? Absolutely not, Kanigel said. This is a book about being "accurate and respectful," she explained. "If you call people by the wrong pronoun or use an antiquated or offensive term like 'sexual preference," or 'transsexual,' you look foolish, out of step or insensitive." The book is a gentle – or perhaps not so gentle – reminder that we all look at the world through a particular lens and "whether we like it or not, we have blinders that keep us from seeing parts of a story."

Kanigel has used some of the book's diversity and inclusion activities in her own classes and in workshops with her student newspaper staff. The activities, such as Diversity Bingo, Step Forward Step Back, and Welcome Circle, are aimed at helping students explore and understand diversity, identity and inclusion.

So much has happened even since the book's publication less than two years ago. After the killing of George Floyd and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, for instance, many media organizations have changed their guidance on capitalization of Black and other terms related to race. In that respect, the website is beneficial because the content is fresh and regularly updated.

But, the book version of "The Diversity Style Guide" has its own immense value. It assists journalism students in understanding the power and nuances of language. In that respect, it feels critically important, if not essential, for journalism students today. "The Diversity Style Guide" caringly urges them to: "Consider the role you play in perpetuating and busting stereotypes. Think carefully about the words you use." And, perhaps warns them: "A single journalist's mistake may be picked up and repeated for years. Now, more than ever, journalists need to choose their words carefully."

Carolyn Schurr Levin, a media and First Amendment attorney, is of counsel at Miller Korzenik Sommers Rayman LLP in New York. She was the Vice President and General Counsel of Newsday, Vice President and General Counsel of Ziff Davis Media, and Media Law Adviser for the School of Journalism at Stony Brook University. She teaches Media Ethics & Law at City University of New York's Baruch College, and has also taught media ethics and law at Stony Brook University, Long Island University, and Pace University. From 2010-2019, she was the faculty adviser for the Pioneer, the student newspaper at Long Island University, during which time the Pioneer won 28 awards.

Carolyn Levin

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College Media Review /

College Media Review

Journal of the College Media Association

Collegiate photographer: 'Chase your passions and what you love to do'

Elias Valverde II

Like so many college students, **Elias Valverde II** started his college career pursuing a degree in architecture. Then he changed to political science. Then he switched to art with a concentration in photography. It's clear he found his passion.

He took a photography class at Tarrant County College.

As he tells it, "The class was centered around a weeklong trip to Cuba where we spent our time walking the streets of Old Havana, mainly doing street photography. However, we often stopped and talked with the local people, asking questions and getting to know them. We found out quickly that the Cuban people were just as curious as were, asking where we were from and why we were visiting. The experience was something I'll never forget because it was almost like traveling back in time to a place before cellphones and Wi-Fi and that environment really made you live in the moment without distractions."

But it was also where he discovered what turned into his passion.

"The trip also planted that photojournalist seed in me where I would want to tell the stories of other people through the lens of my camera."

Now, Elias is a graduating senior at the University of Texas at Arlington where he serves as the multimedia editor for the student newspaper, *The Shorthorn.*

SLIDESHOW

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1. You go to a school that has a communication degree but only a specialization in journalism and no specialization in photojournalism. A strong student newspaper but no yearbook. Why UTA?

I ended up at UTA sort of by default after changing my major to political science while at Texas Tech. There was really no need for me to spend the extra money on tuition and an apartment when I could live at home and go to UTA which was just down the street. I applied to work at *The Shorthorn* after attending an informational session with newsroom adviser Laurie Fox. She said they were looking to hire photographers and I thought to myself, "I know how to take pictures, I should apply." So I did, and I was hired on without truly knowing what I was getting myself into at the time.

2. You've been successful as a college photojournalist winning awards in the top contests nationwide. To what do you attribute that success?

I would like to say it started with my photography professor at Tarrant County College, she was always supportive of my work from my very first critique in my first photo class. I also learned from her and our trips to Cuba and Puerto Rico how to be compassionate and listen to what other people have to say so that you can learn from them.

The Shorthorn has a knack for training and developing really strong photojournalists. I'm hardly the first award-winning photographer to come out of here. We have several Pulitzer Prize-winning alumni like Robert Hart, Tom Fox and Brad Loper who regularly visit with us to offer critiques and training. I think most of what I learned came from the time spent talking with them and just being like a sponge and absorbing everything they had to say.

AWARDS:

- **College Photographer of the Year** Award of Excellence | Spot News
- **Texas Intercollegiate Press Association** Photojournalist of the Year 2020
- **Associated Collegiate Press** 2020 Photo of the Year, second place and third, News Photo; honorable mention, sports feature photo

3. What advice would you have for other college photojournalists in terms of entering contests?

Don't be afraid of entering every contest you can find whether it be a small regional contest or something larger like the contests at the College Media Association and Associated Collegiate Press conventions. And while your work might not place in one contest, don't be afraid to enter it elsewhere if you feel strongly that it's a standout photo because each contest has different judges who might see your work differently. It's also a good experience to critique and edit down your own photos from the past year or quarter.

4. How has the pandemic impacted your work as a student photojournalist?

At the beginning of the pandemic my work practically came to a standstill with school closing and everything going virtual or just being canceled. It took about a month or so before I started shooting and I started with just a simple photo a day challenge. I would go out every day and venture off somewhere that I hadn't been before in Fort Worth. This got me thinking creatively again and I just began to chase the light around where I lived.

The spring semester was slow at the beginning but picked up with press conferences attended by Gov. Greg Abbott and city council meetings before transitioning to coverage of large-scale COVID-19 testing sites. Over the summer and fall we did a lot of portrait work outside and socially distanced. The portraits were welcomed as we were able to photograph actual people after a spring of photographing empty streets and closed businesses.

Living in Texas meant a quicker return to "normal" in the fall with sporting events coming back although with no fans and us photographers on the main concourse, a long way from our usual spot along the baseline underneath the basket.

The biggest challenge has been with everything being farther away, how do you still get those intimate and emotional photos? In some cases that means longer lenses and other times like during the summer with the social justice protests just trusting that everyone around you is wearing a mask and not sick.

5. Pick one of your favorite assignments during college. Tell me about it. Why that one?

At UTA there's a student organization called The Drivers Club and they have car meets on campus. It's a bunch of car people that just meet and hang out to talk and show off their cars. We had covered their meetups before, and I really wanted to just find a student that worked on their own car, changing the oil and stuff like that. But I got lucky and found a student who not only worked on her own car but also competed in drift racing. She was welcoming and let me get photos while she was working on her car in the shop and invited me to the next event she was participating in.

When I arrived at the event her car was on jacks with no tires and she was scrambling to find new tires so she could continue to drift throughout the weekend. Luckily she found a set and she quickly got them mounted and installed them on her car by herself. I was able to ride in the passenger seat as she made several runs around the course, hitting more than 80 miles per hour before whipping the wheel around to induce a controlled slide of the car. It was thrilling and all the while I was able to snap photos and record video from inside the car. It was a really fun and

unique experience, and I'm proud of the work I produced from it because it was the first photo story I sourced by myself. It also ended up being the first story that I would write which was terrifying for someone who usually only writes two sentences. It also placed at the [Texas Intercollegiate Press Association](#) contest, so that was a nice reward after everything.

6. You work on one of the strongest college newspapers in the country. What are some of the take-home lessons from working there?

Just not being afraid to cover any and every news event that was relevant to our readers (is certainly a take-home lesson I learned). Our adviser (Laurie Fox) always encourages us to apply for credentials to any sort of major sporting event that we like, as long as it's newsworthy or will get us clips for our portfolio. One example was when we covered the first protests in Dallas and Fort Worth following the death of George Floyd. Our team of editors sensed this could be the start of a large movement, and we felt the need to cover it despite there not being a direct tie to UTA or the city of Arlington. We went and it was a great learning experience for when protests began to happen in Arlington and on campus in the following days and weeks.

7. If "college Elias" could tell "high school Elias" one thing, what would it be? Why?

I would tell myself to chase your passions and what you love to do. I went into college thinking I needed to get a "real degree" which is why I was in political science even though it was stressful, and I didn't really enjoy it. The smartest thing I did was to major in art and photography because it's something that I love to do.

8. In addition to working on *The Shorthorn*, you've done other work as a photojournalist while in college. Where? Why? What did you do?

I've freelanced for the *Dallas Morning News* since the fall and I first made that connection in the summer when they picked up a couple of my photos from the protest and ran them in print. Then in the fall, I started shooting high school football just to build my portfolio and I sent some of my work to the photo editors at the *Dallas Morning News.* They critiqued it and said I had good work but needed to work on cropping tighter. After that I began covering games every week through the fall and working on a tight deadline, filing photos from the stadium in the press box or from my car in the parking lot. Once football ended I did some basketball before shooting portraits and some features including the major winter storm that hit Texas in February.

9. So, you're graduating next month. What's next?

I've applied for some fellowships and internships like Report for America and the Poynter-Koch Media and Journalism Fellowship. I don't have anything officially lined up yet but I have had some interviews in the recent weeks. So at the moment I'm just waiting to see how those will turn out.

RELATED STORY: "[For photojournalists, internships are a must](#)"

May 1, 2021 / College Media / arlington, photography, photojournalism, shorthorn, texas, uta
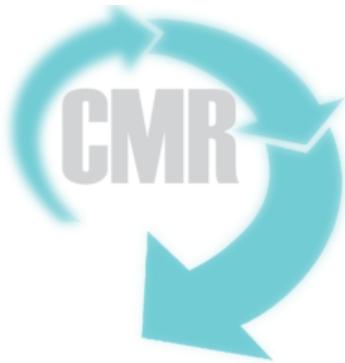
College Media Review

Journal of the College Media Association

College radio perseveres, adapts to COVID-19 challenges

KZLX's Nerdmageddon and the owner of a bar named The Pub. From left to right are The Pub's owner, Jeff Zeller, and then the Nerdmageddon crew: Molly Hauser, Simon Clark, Corie Herzog, and Mckenzie Duval.

It's not 'the end of the world'

By **Mason Bigler**
Special to CMR

Borrowing from Matchbox 20, going to spring break in 2020 was like "waking up at the start of the end of the world" for college radio. Luckily, the world's not over just yet.

Because of COVID-19, some college stations were abandoned for the spring semester, only on air because of automated systems. Others had to fight for their right to keep student DJs through strict rules and sanitation. As outlined below,

some of those rules are still in place, while at other universities, precautions are being relaxed and the radio stations are returning closer to normal.

Savannah College of Art and Design

At the Savannah College of Art and Design home and Atlanta campuses, COVID-19 forced them to vacate both stations and leave them running only on automation.

In an email correspondence, SCAD radio adviser Jessica Clary said both stations lacked live DJs from March 2020 to April 2021.

"We closed completely," Clary said. "Both studios are in on-campus residence halls, and we didn't want to put people at risk."

No one was allowed into the stations during that time, but the automated system continued to broadcast live music.

Clary also said that in January one student DJ per week went to go into the station to add or remove music from the stations' playlists. These DJs weren't allowed to do shows during this time—only to update the automated playlists. After reopening in April, both stations were allowed one live student DJ per day.

Each DJ goes through a health screening and on-site temperature check before entering the station as well. They're all given individual mic screens stored in zip-top bags, have to wipe down the entire station with antiseptic wipes after their shows, and can't go live until 12 hours after the previous DJ was live.

Rice University

Rice University, in Houston, also temporarily closed its radio station but was better able to keep new programming running on the station through that time.

From March 2020 to August 2020, Rice's station KTRU wasn't allowed to have people in the station. To get around this, the station worked to create hour-long,

daily automated shows. Rice Director of Student Media Kelley Lash said the show was made with downloaded and recorded assets.

"We were spending a lot of time to have one hour a day that felt like it was programmed by a person and not by an automation system," Lash said.

Whenever the show was not playing, the automated system took over completely.

KTRU was also lucky enough to have plenty of support from DJs in the community to fill this hour-long slot with content. However, non-student DJs weren't allowed in the station after KTRU was reopened because the university could not require them to take weekly health checks.

When it came to sanitation after reopening, Rice had headphone and microphone covers, disposable headphones, UV wands and boxes, 45-minute shows with only one DJ to allow sanitation time and social distancing, and mandatory hand washing prior to shows.

Rice's media department was also allowed to keep excess funding from the prior year to put the money toward new systems that could help with COVID-19 mitigation. During normal years, money not spent by the end of the fiscal year is returned.

Neumann University

Neumann, in Aston Township, Pennsylvania, saw its station recover quickly from the initial panic of the pandemic.

To start, Neumann Media Director Sean McDonald was able to acquire funds that he used to ship microphones to students. Neumann's WNUW also took advantage of applications like Zoom and Discord to record or do live shows remotely during March and April 2020. Once students and faculty were able to return to campus in August 2020, McDonald improved the existing editing bays to allow shows that sound like all DJs were together while being in separate rooms.

The WNUW student staff also worked to get on- and off-campus listeners involved by encouraging them to use their phones to record and send in content to the station. McDonald said this also helped to get the station back on its feet quickly.

When students returned for the fall 2020 semester, WNUW banned headphone sharing, had microphone and headphone covers, installed air filters, required all surfaces and objects to be wiped down, and required social distancing and masks at all times while in the studios.

However, in the spring 2021 semester, even when multiple people were in-studio, as long as students were live on air they did not have to wear masks. However, once they turned off the microphones, they were again required to wear masks.

With sports coverage, McDonald said he got the live feed from games for one radio host and one television host to watch and commentate on individually from separate studios.

"I made a deal that we would cover our basketball stuff only if I could get the feeds from the arena into our TV studio, if I could get the scoreboard information, and I could control the cameras," McDonald said. "They (the hosts) had to call play-by-play just looking at those couple camera angles we had."

McDonald said this was all possible due to previously installed infrastructure and equipment.

Northwest Missouri State University

NWMSU, in Maryville, Missouri, was very relaxed compared to other schools in the United States.

When students were returned home in March 2020, the station was left to run on automation. Meanwhile, students were required to record 10-minute minimum shows or air shifts that would then be uploaded onto the station's automated system by KZLX faculty adviser Alex Kirt.

When students returned for the 2020-2021 academic year, shows were allowed multiple DJs and guests but required social distancing and masks if more than one person was in the studio. All surfaces still had to be wiped down before and after each air shift or show, but there were complications Kirt had to address.

"At the radio station we use Shure SM7Bs, and those just have a big foam windscreen on them," Kirt said. "I did some more research and found out that they (companies) actually make products for disinfecting microphones that you can just spray on them and it dries almost immediately and just kills the germs."

KZLX is also split into five sub-practicums: sports, promotions, news, music and production. These practicums act like parts of a professional station that assigned students work on when not doing their shows or air shifts. The sports and promotions sub-practicums had to completely change their approaches in order to keep content running smoothly at KZLX.

Prior to COVID-19, KZLX's promotions was in charge of creating posters, giveaways and general student show promotion. Running the KZLX social media was only a side project.

After COVID-19 began, the promotions sub practicum changed to focus entirely on the station's social media. All promotional materials or giveaways were moved to one of the four social media accounts.

Sports, on the other hand, didn't have an obvious alternative to their usual content and had to get creative. Kirt said they explored sports history and used weekly themes.

Conclusion

College radio did not die because of COVID-19. College stations across the United States adapted, and it was difficult, but they didn't disappear. Even the stations that had to shut down are seeing their doors reopened to students again. Thousands of students also received greater training in remote broadcasting. If COVID-19 couldn't stop it, then college radio in the United States still has a bright future.

Lash said there were bright sides that can be focused on and used to move forward.

"I don't know if we'd have the new system if it hadn't been for COVID. I don't want to say that good things have come from this, but we took advantage of not being able to spend that money the last year," Lash said.

RELATED STORY: "College Radio: Great Hopes, Great Fears" by Rob Quicke

Mason Bigler is a 2021 Northwest Missouri State University graduate who works in radio and print journalism.

Mason Bigler

May 18, 2021 / College Media, College radio / college media, coronavirus, covid-19, pandemic, radio
College Media Review /

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Journal of the College Media Association

Newsroom staffs: 'think inclusively'

'Post' managing editor, Krissah Thompson, also tells students to share their passion for journalism

As the managing editor of diversity and inclusion for *The Washington Post*, Krissah Thompson's goal for all newsrooms can be summed up in two words: "Think inclusively."

That was her message to 86 college interns working for the Dow Jones News Fund this summer.

"I think of my role really rooted in coverage and also in jobs," Thompson said.

She emphasized how diversity, diversity in sources and diversity in who is reporting the stories, helps to develop trust.

"Talking about diversity in sourcing goes to the heart of why diversity matters," Thompson, the first Black woman to hold the title managing editor at *The Post*, said. "(Consumers) want to see their communities reflected in all their nuances. They're looking at who is telling those stories. Do those folks reflect the community they are talking about?"

Thompson got her start working for the college newspaper at the University of Texas at Austin — *The Daily Texan*.

"I was in the basement of *The Daily Texan* like from day one," she said. "I'm a big believer in college newspapers."

She earned her master's of journalism from the University of Maryland. She was a Dow Jones Newspaper Fund business reporting intern for the Houston Chronicle, a business reporter, covered presidential campaigns, and wrote about civil rights and race as well as Michelle Obama, politics and culture.

She told the interns working in programs for editing, business reporting, data reporting and digital media that it is important for the people serving as gatekeepers to represent the diversity of their communities.

"We have to be really careful that we are not stuck in silos, that we are collaborating across fault lines," she said. "Diversity comes in sourcing, but it also comes in our

story idea generation meetings."

Kaylee Pippins, a junior at [Tarleton State University](#) (Stephenville, Texas) and intern at the *Azle News* this summer, said, "Thompson spoke about diversifying the newsroom and subsequently seeking diverse sources and how that will provide a more inclusive, in depth, and rich media source for both the journalists and the readers. ...[A] journalist's job is to advocate for the reader, so seeking to represent the demographics of your reporting area is a priority."

For Thompson, diversity was more than race. She also discussed diversity such as class, geography, sexual orientation, "all the things that make us who we are."

Krissah Thompson, Washington Post managing editor, spoke to college student interns about diversity in the newsroom.

"We all have different perspectives," she said. "My experience is very different from some others."

She said for leaders at *The Post*, that has really meant thinking about where reporters live and where they come from. Living inside the Washington, D.C., Beltway can

create an inside-the-Beltway mentality, and, she said, there's more happening in the world than what's happening in D.C.

Further, there is sort of a growing awareness and awakening that reporters for *The Post* miss stories when the staff doesn't include people who know other parts of the country.

Megan Menchaca, a spring graduate with a degree in journalism, said this point resonated with her.

> *"It's very important to advocate for yourself. You have to be a good journalist, a good reporter. Have your facts and information." Krissah Thompson*

"As a UT-Austin graduate interning at *The Houston Chronicle*, I'm really inspired by her career path. It was great to hear that *The Washington Post* is aware and working to emphasize geographic diversity among their reporters and sources," Menchaca said.

Abigail Russ, a junior in journalism and economics at the University of Maryland and summer intern with patch.com, agreed.

"I enjoyed hearing how *The Post* is dedicated to expanding diversity in gender identity, religious identity, socioeconomic status, geography as well as racial diversity," Russ said.

To college students who might be entering the workforce in the next few years, Thompson pointed out that they might encounter some form of discrimination. She advised them to do their homework.

"It's very important to advocate for yourself," she said. "You have to be a good journalist, a good reporter. Have your facts and information."

She said, it is experience that makes a young person stand out when applying for jobs. She said she expects them to have internships and work experience, so they can show what they've done beyond the essays required as part of the application.

She challenged students to tell the stories they feel called to tell whether that is in sports or business, where she got her start, or in the story of race in America, a "huge" story.

Along the way, Thompson also shared her passion for the profession.

"I really do feel journalism is a calling."

The DJNF annual program, which provides pre-internship training in business and data reporting, digital media and editing, placed emerging journalists in more than 50 newsrooms, from community-based nonprofits to the nation's top media companies.

The News Fund collaborated with the Emma Bowen Foundation and the Texas Press Association to train additional students from underrepresented communities. This year's class includes five students selected by the foundation, four from TPA and three DJNF interns from 2020 who deferred due to the pandemic.

This year's internship class is the most diverse and inclusive in the Fund's 60 years, with 62% students of color, 75% women, 5% nonbinary/gender-nonconforming and several international and first-generation college students.

Full disclosure: Bradley Wilson is an associate professor at Midwestern State University. He co-directs the Center for Editing Excellence through the University of Texas sponsored by the Dow Jones News Fund and Center for Editing Excellence.

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