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

# Tarleton State students lead coverage in national story

[cmreview.org/tarleton-state-students-lead-coverage-in-national-story/](http://cmreview.org/tarleton-state-students-lead-coverage-in-national-story/)

College Media Review

June 1, 2013

## Collegians cover “American Sniper” murders

By Sarah Maben

When a former Navy SEAL sniper and his vet friend are shot in your proverbial backyard, you hope the student journalists will mobilize to cover the going-to-go national story and forgo that Super Bowl party.

“All of our reporters are at church” is how Sunday morning began when Texan News Service adviser Dan Malone called my house. The news conference about the murder of Chris Kyle and Chad Littlefield was scheduled for 2 p.m., and we were eager to help students with the unfolding story.

The story: “America’s deadliest sniper” Chris Kyle and fellow Iraq War veteran Chad

Littlefield were killed Saturday at Rough Creek Lodge, in Glen Rose, Texas, about 30 miles from our Stephenville campus.



Our sports reporter, Caleb McCaig, had posted a first story about the deaths of former Tarleton student Kyle and Littlefield Saturday night with preliminary details. After a tip, he pursued the story. It wasn’t a scoop, but Texan News Service was on the front edge of the story.

After church services, reporters mobilized after calls from Malone and Editor-in-Chief Landon Haston. They headed to the news conference where all of our student platforms were represented. Team members were capturing video, live-blogging, snapping pictures and taking notes. Haston was writing requests under the state open records law for additional resources, like the offense report of the shooting, the arrest report of the suspect and an audio recording of a 911 call.

In the meantime, staff writer K’Leigh Bedingfield was busy writing a story from an interview with one of the victims five days prior to the shootings. We believe this was the last interview Kyle gave and the content was surreal. When Kyle’s book “American Sniper” topped the charts last year, Bedingfield interviewed him for a story. The interview on Jan. 28, 2013, was a follow-up because Kyle had been recently named a distinguished Tarleton State alumnus.

Haston, Malone and I listened to the audio to see if it would be appropriate to post in its entirety on the Texan News website. In a more chilling moment, Bedingfield asks Kyle what he wants his legacy to be. He replies, “I would love for people to be able to think of me as a guy who stood up for what he believed in and helped make a difference for the veterans.” He also talks about taking vets on hunting trips to help with post-combat issues.

And it was on one such trip that the shooting took place. Eddie Routh, a veteran who Kyle and Littlefield took to Rough Creek Lodge in order to help him, was arrested on charges of capital murder.

Reporters from YahooNews! and the New York Times are asking for Bedingfield’s interview. A short story with an audio file of the entire interview are posted and then picked up by national outlets.

Now it is Friday, less than a week from the original story and students continue to work on follow-up stories. The Texan News Service site has seen web traffic like never before (18,000 downloads of the interview file alone) and has been picked up by other news outlets. We want our journalists to seize this new audience with fresh content and not rest on their laurels. Students are securing wi-fi so they can live-blog from the memorial service at Cowboys Stadium next week.

The Texan News Service team will continue to cover the story, competing with the pros, as it unfolds in the weeks and months ahead. A lasting impression for Haston, the editor, has been how he and fellow students came together on Super Bowl weekend to prepare news for multiple platforms. Some of the challenges have been dealing with staff emotions and being “thrown into real-world journalism.” One of the lessons learned for Haston was how the students really became a team of journalists through this experience, using various forms to deliver the news. He suggested getting the whole team involved for additional ideas and story angles. He said, “Don’t be afraid to jump in head first.”

As for instruction, this has been a case filled with lessons to be shared with advisers and students:

- **Immediacy.** We seem to beat our heads against this barrier more than I would like to admit. The Super Bowl party must wait. Yes, 10 minutes makes a difference in a news cycle. Tweets and updates must be made as soon as possible.
- **The macabre and professional distance.** For reporters, death is part of the job and we were reminded that our students are not yet calloused to these types of stories. In a staff meeting following the initial coverage we were able to talk about how to handle tragic news and how it can affect you as a person.

- **Multiplatform.** Students told the story via special broadcast, live-blog, online news portal and in social media. We were competing with other news outlets and posted our news on all of our outlets. We were able to show what a multiplatform story looks like to our classes in real-time. Having the interview on audio was more valuable than just having a reporter's notebook.
- **Student-run.** In the excitement of a national story, advisers must remember to guide and not do, and that is hard when your inner journalist kicks in.
- **Areas for improvement.** In a breaking news story, you can easily see the weaknesses in your system. For us, we saw a need to have a reporter on-call each weekend. And, we want the students to find a police scanner app for the newsroom computer. Cross-training is another must – our new website demands more know-how, which more students need to learn.
- **Transparency.** The audio interview with Kyle was posted in its entirety. It's not a perfect interview and Kyle even pokes a bit of fun at the school honoring him as an alumnus when he did not graduate. While unfavorable to our university, it is part of the story, as we explained to the students.
- **The unusual calls.** So far, two suspicious calls have been directed at one of our reporters and instructor Kathryn Jones. One caller asked the student to go somewhere private so he could tell her a story. He kept repeating it and would not give a name. Another caller said some SEALS were going to be very unhappy with the coverage. As a news team, the students talked about safety protocols and newsroom access.
- **Records.** When a big nasty spot news story hits, someone needs to start thinking documents on Day 1—the professional organizations will be. And, students should be too, so they will get the records when they are released to everyone else. (There's that immediacy, again.) It helps if staff members have already learned how to file requests for records and are not having to learn on the fly in a hectic newsroom.

Dan Malone contributed to this article. Maben and Malone are assistant professors at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas. Their students manage Texan News Service, a regional wire service, available at [www.texannews.net](http://www.texannews.net).



Dan Malone



Sarah Maben

# Doing Social Justice Journalism

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 [cmreview.org/doing-social-justice-journalism/](http://cmreview.org/doing-social-justice-journalism/)

Lisa Lyon Payne

June 3, 2013

## Why social justice journalism?

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By Jeff Jeske

Guilford College

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Social justice reporting has distinguished American journalism nearly from its beginnings. Noted practitioners have included William Lloyd Garrison (civil rights), Dorothy Day (poverty), Nelly Bly (asylum conditions), Ida Tarbell (worker's rights), Upton Sinclair (factories), and later, Rachel Carson (environment), Jessica Mitford (prisons) and William Greider (globalization's effects on workers).

As the "fourth estate," journalism has long played a watchdog role with respect to government's legislative, executive and judicial branches. Should it not also explore the human cost of government policies? Certainly journalism has rich potential for such work.

When receiving a 2011 Top American Leader award from the *Washington Post* and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof cited journalism's ability to "shine a spotlight on subjects that are not on the agenda." Known for his international human rights reporting, Kristof has won two Pulitzer prizes for his op-ed work on such subjects as Darfur, Tiananmen Square and human trafficking.

## Why especially now?

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The "Great Recession" of 2008-12 has brought attention to an ever-widening income gap and to the statistic that 46 million Americans—one-seventh of the population—now live in poverty. Those realities have exacerbated virtually every important social issue, including immigration, health care, minority rights and stewardship of the environment.

Social justice issues are not, however, a chief priority of the media establishment. Corporate media are conservative by nature and tend to support the status quo rather than proactively focusing on the need for social change. Beholden to the bottom line in a tight economy, newsrooms also continue to be reduced, thus shrinking in turn the resources available for investigative and social justice reporting.

We also witness a serious blurring of the lines between fact, opinion and entertainment. Hence the rise of infotainment and a reality about which Sam Pizzigati says, in the introduction to Eesha Williams' *Grassroots Journalism*, "We spend ... the better part of our

everyday lives in a world that media create for us, a world, paradoxically, where everyday people are largely invisible.” This is not a world that promotes compassion for casualties of the political and economic order.

Social justice reporting continues, but often funded by private foundations and donors rather than mainstream media. Good work is being done by National Public Radio, the Public Broadcasting System and ProPublica. Internationally, where coverage has declined with the progressive closing of foreign bureaus, the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting funds 50 reporting projects annually on such underreported topics as Third-World water issues, food insecurity and women and children in crisis. Meanwhile locally, blogging and social media enable individuals to engage in original issues-based reporting, and the phenomenon of “street journalism” has emerged, with teams of individuals taking beats in a neighborhood, a cultural community, even a city block.

Within this scene, college newspapers are well poised to become leaders in social justice reporting. Without the restraints imposed by corporate control and with the knowledge of relevant social justice issues on campus and in the surrounding region, student reporters can fill a niche and even set an example for the mainstream media. With the multimedia age in college journalism still in its infancy, here is the opportunity to weld social justice reporting, multimedia and social media into a powerful tool making social justice journalism kinetic and potentially involving readers directly in social change

## **What forms can social justice reporting take?**

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Here are four:

1. Investigative reporting on under-reported social justice topics
2. Reporting on the social justice efforts of other, thus providing models for like-minded activists to duplicate
3. Promoting community discussion by hosting, and then reporting on, forums about social justice topics
4. Stimulating activism via informed editorials and activities such as coordinating online petitions (for a successful online petition model, see [www.change.org](http://www.change.org)).

Sample social justice topics:

- Food hunger
- Water and sanitation
- Environment and global warming
- Legal issues
- Civil rights
- Disease
- Immigration

- Disability
- Prisons
- Racism
- Workplace
- Gender discrimination
- Voting rights
- Exploitation of children
- Waste disposal
- Human trafficking
- Sustainability
- Animal rights
- Unions
- Gay rights
- Mental illness

## Getting mobilized

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Most important up front is to decide where to house social justice reporting.

One option is to anchor it in the news department. Another is to diffuse it throughout the organization. A third is to make it a separate entity. The *Guilfordian* at Guilford College makes social justice reporting a separate operation with a core staff that can be supplemented by the larger organization's writers, photographers and videographers as needed. Such a special creative unit functions much like what Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman Jr. in *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* term a "skunk works"—a separate unit of the blue-sky thinkers and inventors who operate outside normal institutional procedures.

The *Guilfordian* has placed a social justice tab on its masthead's section button-bar along with the regular sections': news, features, forum, world & nation, and sports. Clicking on it takes the reader to a social justice blog that is the center point for social justice activity, containing articles and op-ed pieces, and links back to relevant multimedia packages at the newspaper's main site, packages that the social justice team has commissioned, facilitated, then handed off for inclusion in the online news or features sections.

A social justice team, whether operating within or outside the newspaper's regular sections, can coordinate the organization's main social justice foci. A three-pronged approach can include reporting on campus, community and region and the globe.

Key people and campus & external constituencies:

- A committed leader: establishing an editor-level position can signal the importance of the social justice enterprise.



- An assistant editor to supervise concrete operations: e.g., establishing a campus social justice beat, providing a liaison with social justice groups out in the larger community, coordinating the assembling of teams for multimedia story packages.
- Student liaisons to on-campus student groups that are involved in service work. Faculty who deal with social justice issues in the classroom or in community work.
- Staff offices that oversee community-service and social-justice-related projects. Local/regional groups: Guilford College's social justice staff work with a directory of over 80 organizations belonging to the Guilford County (N.C.)'s Peace and Justice Network, soliciting both story ideas and items for the newspaper's social justice calendar.
- Global connections: The Pulitzer Center in Washington, D.C., offers partnerships with colleges and universities for crisis and social justice reporting. The relationship brings to campus professional reporters who are doing such reporting out in the world and offers fellowships enabling students to do crisis reporting abroad. Guilford is one of 15 colleges and universities currently participating in the Center's Campus Consortium.

Mobilizing also requires developing relevant coursework to train student reporters how to do social justice reporting, including the use of relevant multimedia tools. If the school is too small to field separate multimedia courses, such training can take place via modules integrated into existing courses.

See the Mindy McAdams syllabus in the resource list below for a multimedia course offering module-based training. The modules can also be integrated separately into regular journalism courses.

## Tools for social justice reporting

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Multimedia tools bring a social justice story to life in ways that a print-only story cannot, heightening reader involvement that may lead to action. Video enables showing a wheelchair-bound student failing to access an inadequate ramp, or a truck dumping sludge at a controversial landfill. Audio projects the voice from the wheelchair or from the residents of the neighborhood that the landfill is polluting. Using multiple tools can also effectively separate a single story's multiple issues, such as the landfill story's dual focus on environmental degradation and environmental racism.

Besides the movie and still camera, the shotgun mike and digital voice recorder, other useful tools to add depth and breadth to a multimedia social-justice package include:

- Dipity ([www.dipity.com](http://www.dipity.com)) creates interactive timelines that can be embedded in a multimedia package to provide historical background or group chronologically a series of investigative reports. Maps can contextualize an issue spatially. Maps drawn from Google at

- Mapsgoogle.com establish and illustrate locations, while interactive maps from websites like [www.ammmap.com](http://www.ammmap.com) can add related economic and demographic information.
- SoundSlides ([www.soundslides.com](http://www.soundslides.com)) combines a photo slideshow with an audio track, supplementing visual images with photographer or subject commentary, music or environmental sound.
- Social media like Twitter and Facebook enable the reporter to gather information via crowdsourcing but also enable the audience reading to register a reaction, talk with each other or join a group to take further action. The 2008 American presidential election and the Arab Spring beginning in December 2010 exemplify the power that social media grant their users.

The Web is also a vital tool per se. Social justice writers can mine it for resources to pass on to the reader via either sidebar or inline links. Every social justice story can potentially have links to both background information and sites with concrete action steps. A story on global hunger, for example, could include links to the World Bank, U.N. World Food Program, USDA, Food & Agricultural Policy Research Institute, Renewable Fuels Association and International Food Policy Research Institute

## Resources

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### ***Social justice journalism links:***

- JustNews: the digital hub for social justice journalism — <http://www.justicejournalism.org/>
- Journalists for human rights — <http://www.jhr.ca/en/>
- Global voices online — <http://globalvoicesonline.org/> [International community of citizen media bloggers who report on social justice stories]
- Sunlight foundation — [www.sunlightfoundation.com](http://www.sunlightfoundation.com) [Non-profit journalism focused on governmental transparency and accountability]
- Social justice journalism — <http://www.socialjusticejournalism.org/> [Note: This site was established in 2009 but is currently inactive]
- [article] “Justice journalism: journalist as agent of social change” — <http://www.media-alliance.org/article.php?id=437>
- Democracy Now — [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org)

### ***Research links:***

- American Fact Finder — [www.factfinder2.census.gov](http://www.factfinder2.census.gov) [Database of statistical information on housing, personal demographics, employment, incomes, property gathered in both the 2000 and 2010 censuses]
- Federal government data site — [www.data.gov](http://www.data.gov)

- FedStats — [www.fedstats.gov](http://www.fedstats.gov) [Provides information both national and local from over 100 agencies]
- Resource Center: Facts on Demand — [www.brbbpub.com/free-public-records](http://www.brbbpub.com/free-public-records) [Portal to free public records sites]
- Environmental Protection Agency — [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)
- Government spending — [www.usaspending.gov](http://www.usaspending.gov) [Searchable information on federal contracts, spending trends, housing assistance, student assistance, housing grants]
- ProPublica: journalism in the public interest — [www.propublica.org](http://www.propublica.org)
- Muck Rack — [www.muckrack.com](http://www.muckrack.com) [Allows subscriber to follow the real-time tweets of investigative journalists working for major news organizations]
- HARO (Help a reporter out) — <http://www.helpareporter.com> [This Twitter site merges reporters and sources. Journalists can either submit queries or serve as source]

### **Multimedia teaching:**

Mindy McAdams multimedia syllabus —  
<http://www.macloo.com/syllabi/mreporting/calendar.htm>

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Jeff Jeske serves as the Dana Professor of English at Guilford College and, in addition to journalism courses, teaches American literature and film. He also taught at the University of Akron, Clemson University and UCLA. He has advised *The Guilfordian* for past 27 years.



# Social Editing: Using Facebook groups to improve news content

[cmreview.org/social-editing-using-facebook-groups-to-improve-news-content/](http://cmreview.org/social-editing-using-facebook-groups-to-improve-news-content/)

College Media Review

June 5, 2013

## Exploring the social media site as a collaborative tool

By Lindsey Wotanis, Ph.D.  
*Marywood University*

Facebook. It's a social phenomenon and even an obsession for some, particularly among young people. An estimated 48 percent of adults between 18 and 34 check Facebook when they wake up, with 28 percent doing so before even getting out of bed, according to [Facebook Statistics, Stats & Facts For 2011 | Digital Buzz Blog](#).

In 2011, the [Pew Internet and American Life project](#) reported that 86 percent of undergraduates were using social networks. In classrooms and dorm rooms across the country, students are updating statuses, "liking" photos, and accepting invitations to the next Friday night party.

And, almost as soon as Facebook started gaining popularity, researchers began studying the impact its use among undergraduates would have on things like academic performance. Studies [like this one at The Ohio State University](#) report that students who use Facebook tend to have lower GPAs and spend less time studying.

But it's not all bad news. After all, at least we know *where* students' attentions are. They're on Facebook, and as they say, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em."


**[READ MORE](#)**



Afton Fonzo, social media editor, and Justin Wahy, multimedia editor, review content requests during a Wood Word editorial meeting.  
(Photo: Lindsey Wotanis)

# Diversifying your student media department

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 [cmreview.org/diversifying-your-student-media-department/](http://cmreview.org/diversifying-your-student-media-department/)

Lisa Lyon Payne

June 10, 2013

## Why you should recruit non-communications majors for campus media, and how to get started

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By Allison Bennett Dyche

*Assistant Director of Student Media, Savannah College of Art and Design*

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Maybe your university doesn't have anything resembling a journalism department. Or maybe you do, but those students are historically lazy and impossible to recruit and retain on staff for more than a year.

You don't have to wait around for your journalism/communications/writing majors to get to their senior year, realize they don't have a portfolio and are staring down the barrel of an impending graduation to join your staff out of desperation. So how do you convince students from other majors to not only see the value in student media, but to believe enough in what you do to actually become part of your staff?

Amanda Permenter Garlow was recruited for the newspaper staff by her freshman orientation adviser at Georgia Southern University. The double major in English and writing & linguistics ended up holding three section editor positions at the campus newspaper, *The George-Anne*, and serving as editor-in-chief of it for two years before she graduated in 2005.

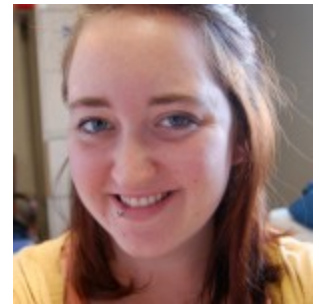
Garlow said the idea of seeing her name in print and being part of something bigger than herself is what drew her in, while the culture and the camaraderie is what kept her there. "It was like finding out I had a home planet," she said.

Garlow said student media gave her a way to apply both of her majors in a meaningful way, noting that she doesn't think she could've learned the same kind of things in the classroom as she did on the job. "There simply is no greater teacher than pouring your heart and soul into the job and then having to take responsibility for things you screwed up that actually got distributed to thousands of readers," she said. "It's devastating, it's humiliating, and it works."



Amanda Garlow

Caila Brown, a 2011 graphic design graduate of Savannah College of Art and Design, said brute force is what initially got her involved in student media. “I was actually kidnapped — literally thrown in a van — by some radio staff members who I had gone to high school with,” she said, explaining how she ended up at her first radio interest meeting fall quarter of her freshman year.



Caila Brown

Brown described her roles during her four years in student media: promotions team volunteer, promotions director and general manager for SCAD Radio; A&E writer for District, the news organization; and magazine art director and art consultant for District Quarterly, the literary arts magazine. “I was able to organize a concert within my first five weeks of being at school, and never would have been able to do that in any class,” she said. “I was given a level of responsibility that I never would have seen in a classroom.”

JaShong King graduated from San Jose State University in 2004 with a bachelor’s degree in journalism with an emphasis in photojournalism, but he started off as a computer science major. King said he spent all four of his senior years involved in the student newspaper, the *Spartan Daily*.



JaShong King

He joined because it was a requirement for the school, but he stayed because of the professionalism of the newsroom. The senior students had all completed internships with various media organizations, allowing them to bring that experience back and have their college newsroom operate on a professional level. “A lot of school newspapers were [operating] from a theoretical standpoint,” he said, citing that the professional atmosphere at the *Spartan Daily* is what “was vital to helping me get a job.”

Even though he did earn a degree in journalism, King saw his time in student media as the most important part of his collegiate education. The flexibility of a college newsroom allowed him and his colleagues to try innovative experiments to find ways to improve operational structures and further professionalize their organization.

“The classroom was fixed, teaching basic technical structure of reporting and journalism,” King said. “What the newspaper taught me was people management and how to deal with people, as well as pace. When you’re writing in a class, you’re writing one assignment a week. When I was a reporter, I was writing three to four stories per week.”

Citing the requirement of every student to write 33 stories by the end of each semester in order to pass the classes associated with the newspaper, he said, “When you write enough quantity, your quality will improve just by brute force.”

Ben Wright, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in industrial design and a minor in creative writing from the Savannah College of Art and Design in 2011, said his resume is replete with skills he gained from his time in student media: "AP Style, WordPress, some passable HTML, a little Google analytics," he said. "Not only do these pad my resume a little more, but they also have helped me freelance and build an effective website."



Ben WRight

Wright explained how having a diversified staff benefits the student media department as a whole. "Having student journalists in other majors report on special events and topics related to their majors is a great way to get knowledgeable, savvy reporting on a wide variety of topics," he said. "Getting other majors involved get your brand out there. I know when my radio show was broadcasting, I was telling all my friends in the [industrial design] department to listen in. Getting more people involved is an easy way to get out of the small, often insular world of journalism departments."

Brown also sees multiple benefits from expanding the pool of talent in student media beyond the boundaries of a communications department. "Everyone has hidden talents and wants to do things that are outside of their major," she said. "When you have students who are doing jobs or are involved with organizations outside of their major, it means that they really care for it and it's not just to help with their class credit. Many of them can turn this into a career, or at least their jobs in student media can provide them with valuable job skills they can use in the future."

If you're convinced that you're ready to try branching out to other majors, here are some ways to get started:

### ***Market your organization***

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A good mantra to have is no matter what the students' interests, you can always find a place for them. Promote student media as a place to put into action the theories that they learn in the classroom. It's also a place for any student to pick up marketable skills outside of their majors.

The best ways to ensure your recruitment marketing efforts are reaching the entire campus is to make use of your social media audiences; have your announcements included in your university's newsletter or email blasts to students and have your interest meetings listed in the college calendar; and reaching out to professors to see if there are ways you can collaborate and to request they send qualified students to your student media organization.

### ***Make recruitment a year-round goal***

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It's true that it's easiest to get new students in the fall. They willingly come to you, looking to find their niche on campus and excited about all the new opportunities that are before them. But it's also difficult to make them stick around for long. They can get easily distracted, or overwhelmed if they signed up to participate in too many things, forgetting that they also have to take classes.

Often the students who join the staff during the winter are the ones who stick around: they've got a quarter or semester under their belts, have found their footing in keeping up with their academics and they still want to join your organization. You might have to go looking for them rather than them coming to you, but it's worth the extra effort if they're easier to retain.

## ***Emphasize cross-training***

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Give them the opportunity to build skill sets they can't get from within their majors. Even if they don't end up going into the field of media upon graduation, everyone can benefit from on-the-job experience in writing on deadline, editing and interviewing.

But don't just push the written word. Get your writers learning photography, your photographers learning videography, your graphic designers learning visual journalism, your copy editors learning audio production. Not only will this cross-training benefit your students, but it will benefit your news outlet as you'll have an entire staff who can tackle any assignment put before them.

When they have the chance to try their hands at various roles within your organization, they'll also gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the roles their colleagues play in student media that will likely translate well to the professional world.

## ***Share your successes***

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The students might be winning awards for work they produce in your student media department, but remember that they're not just your students. When they win awards or when sections of your publication are faring well, let the professors of those departments know about those successes. The more benefits the professors see the students gaining from being involved, the more likely they are to encourage more students from their departments to join your student media organization. It can only help you to get professors on your team and to assist in your marketing and recruiting efforts.

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Allison Bennett Dyche is the assistant director of student media at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Savannah, Ga. She advises the online news organization District ([www.scaddistrict.com](http://www.scaddistrict.com)), the literary arts journal Port City Review ([www.theportcityreview.com](http://www.theportcityreview.com)) and the SCAD chapter of the Society for Collegiate Journalists. She spent five years working as a daily newspaper journalist before moving to advising in 2008.





Allison Bennett Dyche

# College newspapers: Not just for journalism students

[cmreview.org/college-newspapers-not-just-for-journalism-students/](http://cmreview.org/college-newspapers-not-just-for-journalism-students/)

Lisa Lyon Payne

June 10, 2013

## The culture of student media at specialty schools

By Jessica Clary

*Savannah College of Art and Design*

College student media groups are an integral part of the university experience at every school, and students have many reasons for getting involved. Whether it's for career experience, or just for fun, students from all different majors and programs come together through student newspapers, magazines, radio stations and more. But what about students at colleges where journalism isn't a major? What about specialty colleges, like art schools?

While some students going to art colleges to escape certain parts of the university experience (sports, Greek life or something else), plenty don't want to give up any of the activities and opportunities available at larger universities. Student media programs at art colleges are thriving across the country, and while some students involved may never use their student media experience in their pursuit of their dream career, plenty will, and have.



Illustration by Barry Lee

"I always wanted to be a writer, and came into graphic design starting in high school," explained Mark Ziemer, a 2011 graduate of SCAD Atlanta. "I joined student media at SCAD as a chance to develop both of these skills."

During Ziemer's time in student media, he helped start the award-winning student magazine, and says that experience and portfolio helped him land his job at Atlanta Magazine, less than a month after earning his bachelor of fine arts degree in graphic design.

"These specific responsibilities jumped out at my current employer more than the name of the school or the awards or the internships," he said.

Peter Leix , a 2010 BFA photography graduate from SCAD in Savannah, agrees that everything you can do during college to stand out will help. "There is so much to learn on the technology side of things these days, and it's impossible to learn it all in a classroom," he said. "It's a competitive industry, and anything you can do to differentiate yourself within school will pay in the long run."

Leix was able to do internships with various magazines while he was a student. "These were invaluable experiences," he said. "I think it's important to get a taste of what the actual potential jobs you can get after college will actually be like, day-in and day-out."

Currently, Leix is a graduate student, on full scholarship, at the University of Michigan.

Other photography students understand that working in the real world is important, and that journalism gives you a great opportunity to practice your craft.

"I think being a photojournalist for the Marietta Daily Journal newspaper really taught me the technical aspects of being a photographer," said Samantha Wilson, a current MFA student at SCAD. "We had 8-10 shoots a day, so I learned a lot about lighting, aperture, shutter speed, etc." She currently works part-time photographing events and working at Upscale Magazine.

Students agree that their fine-arts background is a positive on their resume, and sets them apart from other job applicants for jobs in the media. "The things I learned at SCAD are always in use while I'm shooting," Leix said. "My ability to 'see' how a scene should look come from the rigorous hours spent in critiques."

"Sketching skills and craftsmanship are invaluable no matter what field of art and design you pursue," Ziemer said.

Students from more traditional universities pursuing careers, or even internships, in journalism, need to know they're competing against students with specialized experience in the arts. Experience in student media will help you stand out among your peers, and the more you can try and learn when you're a student, the more competitive you can be in the job market.

"The management skills I learned as managing editor at SCAN Magazine are great to have in a job as demanding as mine where you're trafficking hundreds of ads, books and clients," Ziemer said. "The resume gets you in the door, and a quick scan of your portfolio site can

seal the deal for a callback ... my positions [in student media] stood out as something they needed.”

In a competitive and changing industry, every student needs to do as much as he or she can to land a dream job, and the job market for art-school graduates is strong in the media industry.

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Jessica Clary

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# Adapting to the changing media landscape

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 [cmreview.org/adapting-to-the-changing-media-landscape/](http://cmreview.org/adapting-to-the-changing-media-landscape/)

College Media Review

June 12, 2013

## The Story of *The Blue Banner*

By Sonya DiPalma and Michael E. Gouge  
*University of North Carolina at Asheville*

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**Abstract:** This paper chronicles the obstacles encountered by the advisor and staff of a small college newspaper attempting to make the paradigm shift from a traditional weekly college newspaper to a multiplatform system. The traditional college print newspaper runs the risk of becoming antiquated as more young adults seek news from digital and social media platforms (Hubbard 2011; Beaujon 2012; *The demographic* 2012). Within this case study, the authors discuss the growing need for academic departments to abandon “silos” within mass communication in order to embrace the multiplatform approach to reporting and the strategic use of social networks to attract a college audience. While college students embrace social networks as the primary fountain of knowledge, the adviser and staff question how best to achieve a social identity for their college newspaper.

## Introduction

For generations, working on the college newspaper was a training ground for aspiring journalists and editors. The skills learned on campus translated directly to entry-level positions that graduates enthusiastically filled. Cuts in newsroom staff have meant increased opportunities for college interns who often find themselves in the role of teacher for less technology savvy reporters (Thornton 2011). Increasingly newspapers seek interns possessing web and multimedia skills as well as strong writing skills (Wenger 2011). Keeping pace with the dramatic changes experienced in newsrooms across the country presents a challenge for college newspapers, particularly college newspapers at small colleges.

The traditional college print newspaper runs the risk of becoming antiquated as more young adults seek news from digital and social media platforms (Hubbard 2011; Beaujon 2012; *The demographic* 2012). Aspiring journalists need to be content-driven, producing copy for print as well as for social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Hubbard 2011). Journalists compete with the everyday person who is both a media producer and consumer (Buckingham, Harvey and Sefton-Green 1999; Jenkins 2006). This paper examines the transformation of *The Blue Banner*, the student newspaper at the University of North Carolina Asheville, from print to a multimedia format.

## Conceptual framework The Role of the Newspaper

The role of the newspaper in society has always been multifaceted. A newspaper is foremost a conduit between citizens and their government; next it informs a society about itself, provides a necessary means for challenging authority and seeking accountability and serves as a form of entertainment (Rusbridger 2005). Historically, the content and style of print news have been driven by technology. Technological determinism, the concept that new technology influences economy and culture, has been evidenced from the advent of mass circulation to dominant headlines from the local perspective to computer-assisted reporting (Pavlik 2000, Boczkowski 2004, Franklin 2008). The characteristics of print news have forever changed; the saying “putting the newspaper to bed” has been antiquated since news deadlines became rolling; print news is now a second-line product (Hall 2008). Additionally, newspaper readers are also online newspaper contributors who seek to learn the opinions of other readers on various topics (Hall 2008).

College students are less likely to read newspapers than older people and less likely to watch network news (Diddi and LaRose 2006, Trends 2012). However, students have shown an allegiance to their college newspaper over a free, regional daily newspaper (Collins and Armstrong 2008). Whether on a college campus or within a city, readers possess a stronger relationship with print news for a sense of their community (Mersey 2009).

### **Adopting new technology**

For many seasoned professional journalists, newsroom changes aren’t about adapting from print journalism to online journalism, but more so the shift in journalism philosophy that impedes their acceptance of online news strategies often referred to as watered-down journalism (Reinardy 2010; Thornton 2011). Although triggered by technological developments, adoption processes are shaped by organizational structure, work practices and representation of users (Boczkowski 2004). Organizational development theory (Lewin 1947) posits that a series of time-ordered events must typically occur in order to adopt a new process – preparing for change, implementing change and creating acceptance of the change – in order to return to a state of normalcy.

Technology enables communication while embedding social and cultural practices (Jenkins 2006). With Web 2.0, the journalism community witnessed the rise of social media and the continued decline in the social status of print journalism, which seemed incongruent given that online news sites have increasingly been considered an “inferior good” to the “normal good” of print news (Chyi and Lewis 2009, p. 48; Russial 2009). Journalists today are cross-platform content providers (Franklin 2008). Faculty across the nation struggle to fill the gap between academia and the media profession as the profession favors skills courses and academia favor conceptual ones (Dickson and Brandon 2002). Academics are constantly reminded not to teach to the media platform, but to encourage better journalism (Franklin 2008). However, the ability to write for multiple platforms must be coupled with a foundation in basic journalism skills (Pierce and Miller 2007).



The Pew Research Center's biennial survey found 50 percent of Americans follow news on a digital device rather than a newspaper or a radio station (Beaujon 2012; Trends 2012). College graduates are more likely than those with less education to use a smartphone for following news (*The demographics* 2012). Nearly 25 percent of 19-to-25-year-olds follows news on a social media platform (Digital 2013).

As college-aged adults increasingly embrace social networks as the primary fountain of knowledge, perhaps then college newspapers should progress into this realm (*The demographics* 2012). Diffusion of innovations theory posits that individuals adapt to technology when the advantages of the new device offset those of the familiar device; the new device becomes increasingly more user friendly and produces real or observable results (Rogers 1995). Therefore, if college students aren't reading a print newspaper now, they most likely never will (Diddi and LaRose 2006).

### **The Transformation of *The Blue Banner***

**Background:** The University of North Carolina Asheville is a small liberal arts school in the mountains of western North Carolina with an approximate enrollment of 3,700 undergraduate students. The adviser for *The Blue Banner* is also a lecturer within the Department of Mass Communication. The department was formed in the early 1980s and, like many journalism programs, originated from within the Department of Language and Literature.

During the mid 1980s, *The Blue Banner* converted from a tabloid to a broadsheet format in an effort to counter the prevailing view of tabloids as the supermarket purveyors of sensational journalism.

The new, more “newsy” paper was well received among faculty as advancing the program's devotion to student development and skill building. The campus administration was, and remains, a generous supporter of the publication with student fee money.

Two notable shifts ensued in the new millennium – a new faculty adviser and Web 2.0. The new adviser was adept in newsroom practices and an award-winning newspaper designer and editor, while the previous adviser's roots were steeped in scholarship and the conceptual underpinnings of media.

Web 2.0 facilitated the rise of multimedia journalism that eventually superseded print. Traditionally print journalism had been favored over visuals; visuals were perceived as a technical skill set rather than as a primary mode of communication (Abraham, 2002).



Figure 1: *The Blue Banner*'s early roots began as a tabloid, and converted to a broadsheet in the mid-1980s.

Internet-based news sites required news staff possessing technical computer skills in order to incorporate the integral components of digital journalism – immediacy, interactivity, and multimedia (Harper 1996).

### Tabloid versus broadsheet

Keeping with the broadsheet format while improving the overall design of *The Blue Banner* increased readership for a while.



Figure 2: The Blue Banner's last years as a broadsheet, 2007 and 2008.

As experienced by print media nationwide, readership and advertisers continued to dwindle in *The Blue Banner* as consumers increasingly moved online for their news, as evidenced by increased web traffic and social media followers. In 2009, the staff reverted to the tabloid format in hopes of boosting readership. Using Garcia's "Impact of the Compact" (2005) as an impetus, student editors used the layout and design class to design a prototype tabloid paper. Nearly two decades later, the stigma of a tabloid format no longer remained. Garcia's research shows tabloids — or compacts — are favored by younger readers, tend to be more successful when distributed for free, and have a more appealing and personal content. Garcia's (2005) findings meshed perfectly with *The Blue Banner's* college audience – smaller and livelier content equated to increased readership for *The Blue Banner*.





Figure 3: During the spring 2009 semester, *The Blue Banner* reverted to the tabloid format.

The print run increased from 1,500 papers to 2,000 with fewer returns from the racks piling up in the student publication's office. While the staff recorded no hard data, they noted fewer leftover issues. The problem of reader apathy seemed temporarily under control, but not for long. Readership of college newspapers is seemingly sporadic (Collins and Armstrong 2008).

### **Web 2.0, social media, and smartphones**

During the mid 2000s, *The Blue Banner* staff implemented a companion website to its print edition with the online version updated after the paper went to press. Requiring computer skills not taught in the department, the site often went neglected – like many newspaper sites – as only a promotional item for the print product.

Meanwhile, Facebook, a social network created by Harvard undergraduate Mark Zuckerberg, began to attract college students across the nation. By 2006, Facebook was mainstream, and by 2009 the smartphone had taken social networking mobile. At the start of the new decade, more people visited Facebook than the most popular search engine, Google (Dougherty 2010). Within mass communication classes, the adviser asked students if they read the print edition or the online edition of the student newspaper. The majority of students reported reading *The Blue Banner* online.

The college newspaper, historically a diversion for students to read between classes, seemed doomed by advancing technology and changing reader habits. Even the mass communication students who produced *The Blue Banner* admitted they didn't read the paper; they only glanced to see if their content made it through the editing process. Rare efforts by enthusiastic students produced the occasional audio interview posted on the newspaper's website, or a social network status post or tweet, but this was just an aside to the weekly goal of putting out a print product. The student newspaper, left unappreciated in the lobby rack, needed a profound transformation.

## Transforming *The Blue Banner*, one more time

In late 2009, the student newspaper joined the *Asheville Citizen-Times* as a participant in the Western North Carolina Local Information Cooperative (WNC LINC). The *Citizen-Times*, a Gannett-owned newspaper, received a grant to join the Networked Journalism Project sponsored by American University's J-Lab Institute and funded by the Knight Foundation. The project intended to partner a select number of community news and information websites across the region. The goals of this one-year, grant-funded project were to develop a collaborative model to offer news and information to western North Carolina's varied readers, increase web traffic and engagement among readers for network partners, and explore how the collaboration could be expanded and/or sustained over time.

The group also included websites by local people on varied community interests including a historic neighborhood association, local merchants group, a parenting website and a trio of college newspapers from the area. From its website, the *Citizen-Times* carried links to *The Blue Banner* and often ran the students' articles with the local news headlines. The partnership resulted in more web traffic and a more diverse audience for *The Blue Banner*. Unfortunately the web traffic data were lost when the newspaper staff changed website providers.



Figure 4: The Blue Banner website traffic increased in both fall 2010 and spring 2011 as a result of the Western North Carolina Local Information Cooperative.

In exchange, *The Blue Banner*'s website shared an RSS widget that updated headlines from the WNC LINC partners: *The Artful Parent*, *Ask Asheville*, *The Montford Neighborhood Association*, *The Tuckasegee Reader* and college newspapers from Western Carolina University, Mars Hill College and Appalachian State University. This helped drive readers from one site to another. *The Blue Banner* staff viewed the project as a success since it raised the profile of the student newspaper from just a newsletter about the university to a truly independent voice of the community, covering varied issues of interest for both college students and Asheville-area residents.

## New media, new methods

The partnership with the Western North Carolina Local Information Cooperative revealed the changes taking place in the newspaper industry. Some of these changes seem shocking: Reporters immediately post stories, photos and video directly to the newspaper's website and social media platforms – and consequently to the public – without prior review by a series of copy editors or other managerial oversight. Rapid response, immediate reader gratification and the word-of-mouth attributes of social media were undeniably necessary for any newspaper's survival. Editing occurred on the fly – fixing errors, updating information, adding photos and video as they become available. Through social media, journalists are maintaining their role in the agenda setting process (McCombs and Shaw 1972) as well as strengthening the concept of uses and gratifications (Katz 1974).

College newspapers must continue to adapt because the success of student reporters in the job market depends upon their ability to adapt a variety of skills for a variety of platforms (Fonteno 2009; Hubbard 2011). In the spring semester of 2011, UNC Asheville's Department of Mass Communication's faculty revamped its curriculum to stress student-learning outcomes (SLOs) and updated course offerings. The department's SLOs guide course content and syllabi by focusing on areas of student learning such as critical thinking, engaging in lifelong learning, community outreach and mastery of theoretical, legal and practical underpinnings of mass communication.

In light of these goals, the department undertook a rededication to the core mission of the student newspaper – providing objective, credible and newsworthy information to the student body, the faculty and staff and the wider university community — regardless of traditional formats. Instead of treating social networks as a mere pastime or entertainment, the staff purposefully shared links to the online articles of *The Blue Banner* on their personal Facebook and Twitter accounts. The social network's wallposts attracted new readers to the college newspaper. Alumni could see links to articles shared by their former professors and classmates. Undergraduates and faculty now read stories online, and Facebook's "like" function opened the door to a larger network of friends. This culminated into a boost in traffic to *The Blue Banner's* website.

In the year before launching the social media campaign, the website consistently registered a significantly higher number of page views than the number of printed editions of the paper. For the Spring 2010 semester, *The Blue Banner* website had 52,855 page views, but only 24,000 printed copies (2,000 issues per run x 12 weeks) circulated on campus. For Fall 2010, the page views were 47,625. Even during the summer months, when *The Blue Banner* was inactive, the website drew 6,331 hits. Of course, these numbers don't represent individual readers. Editors and others checking on the upload of material account for some of these page views. However, allowing for 100 hits by staff members during the four months of the semester or approximately 12,000 hits, this leaves 40,000 page views by readers now connected to our small liberal arts university.

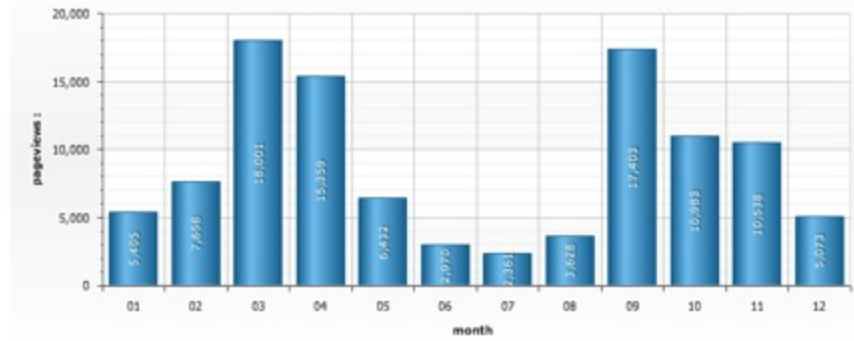


Figure 5: 2010 page views for The Blue Banner online edition trumped the popularity of the printed tabloid.

*The Blue Banner* changed website providers for the fall of 2012. A new design and new analytics provided a glimpse into online readership trends. From August 2012 to March 2013, the paper's webpage had 16,866 unique visits and 26,798 total page loads. The unique visitors represent more than double the total monthly printed copies of the newspaper. Given that the editors typically report an average of about half of the papers return unread, this is strong evidence that online readers are the paper's biggest audience.

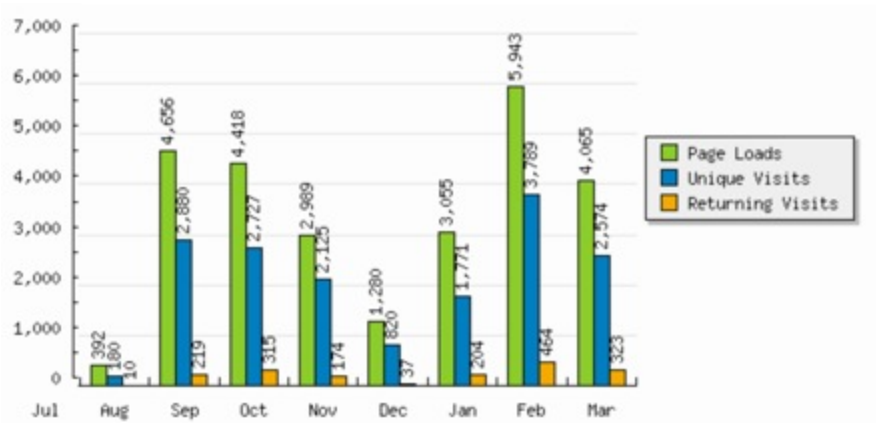


Figure 6: Unique page visits and page loads for The Blue Banner from August 2012 through March 2013.

*The Blue Banner's* Facebook page has 501 "likes" as of March 2013. The numbers from this social media page reveal some demographic details. As expected, the average Facebook visitor is college aged. Followers are mostly female (63.7%), which is not out of line with the university's student body (56% female).

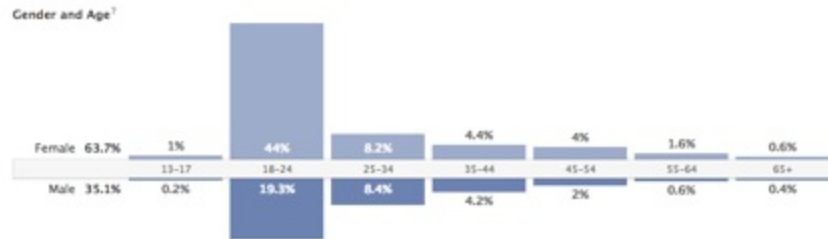


Figure 7: The gender and age of The Blue Banner's online readers closely parallels the demographics of the university's student body.

The reach of the Facebook page, how many views directly on the Facebook “wall,” peaked in early March 2013 at nearly 3,000 but slumped due largely to fewer status posts by the student editors.

### More to come

The Pew Center's *The State of the News Media 2013* revealed 39 percent of survey respondents followed news online or from a mobile device. The adoption of tablet computers by adults increased to 31 percent – nearly four times the rate of adoption reported in 2011.

Increasingly, tablet and smartphone users access news on these devices daily. In addition to increased use of mobile devices for following the news, almost 25 percent of 18-to-25-year-olds received their news from family and friends through social media platforms. No longer is media

consumption and production relegated to the home or office; no longer is a newspaper the primary means for following local news. Finally, the study found that adults who consume local news via tablet or smartphones are disproportionately young, affluent, highly educated and reside in non-rural communities. These characteristics are similar to the population of a college environment.

To address these changes, the staff of *The Blue Banner* were encouraged to view the printed newspaper as more of a promotional product to drive readers to the website. In addition, the staff needed to refocus their advertising efforts to online. Historically, print advertising revenue had exceeded online advertising revenue, but this was no longer the norm.



Figure 8: The Blue Banner's reach on Facebook. The organic numbers denote the views directly on the newspaper's page. The viral numbers are the views generated from shares.

Advertisers wanted the visibility social media offered. While advertising revenue is not the primary funding model for *The Blue Banner*, it is still necessary given that university funding remains unchanged since 2001.

For the 2011-2012 academic year, *The Blue Banner* struggled with technical difficulties – advertising revenue, staff changes – particularly the change in webmaster, a new Internet service provider, and implementation of Quick Response (QR) codes. For a college student QR codes may be the key to connecting with *The Blue Banner* online. As the 2012-2013 academic year is underway, the newspaper's reach grows online with 627 followers on Twitter and 439 likes on Facebook. Clearly, more redesign is on the horizon.

*The Blue Banner* has experienced tremendous transformations in a relatively short amount of time. The college tabloid newspaper has become a visual showpiece, providing compelling images, interesting headlines, and attractive layouts to entice a casual passerby to retrieve it from the rack.

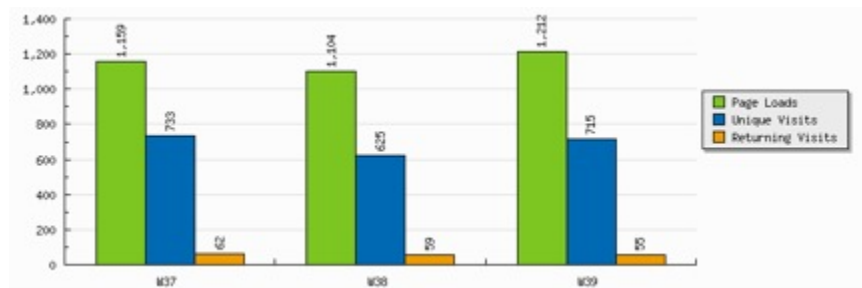


Figure 9: Weekly page loads, unique visits, and return visits for The Blue Banner for September 2012.

## ***Discussion***

This paper describes how the advisor and the staff of *The Blue Banner* continue to adapt to the changing newspaper landscape. Many factors influence readership on a college campus and therefore each advisor and staff will need to tailor how they choose to utilize social media platforms based upon the needs of their readership.

### **Should print go away?**

Inevitably people ask about the future of the newspaper. The answer for mainstream corporate-owned newspapers is much more complex than for a small, liberal arts college newspaper. As McLuhan noted, “Media are often put out before they are thought out” (as cited in Thorburn and Jenkins 2003, p.4). Technological advancements may drive competition, but endangered technology becomes more highly valued (Thorburn and Jenkins

2003). Television didn't eradicate radio; we just don't tune in for fictional dramas or adventure serials anymore. Delivery technologies change, but old media and emerging media still coexist (Jenkins 2006). The printed college newspaper still has its place.

### **The Silos**

Advisers who assist their newspaper staff in adapting to how we access the news by finding ways to coexist with and complement social media may be better prepared for the job market (Fonteno 2009; Hubbard 2011). The 2013 State of the Media report finds adults increasingly shifting to tablet computers and web-enabled smartphones to follow news. The technology changes may be easier to accomplish than the changing of minds. Academia, much like the newspaper industry, stands on tradition and a centuries-old sense of apprenticeship. Therefore, the most substantial barrier to adopting a multiplatform approach to the college newspaper may be in the classroom (Artwick 2002). Often referred to as "silos" in academia, areas of mass communication tend to be taught independently from one another – print, broadcast, public relations, and advertising. A print journalist today must also understand the broadcast component of a news story in order to produce a short webcast on a tight deadline to accompany the online and print content. Content is king. Pierce and Miller (2007) found computer skills and online writing have risen in level of importance among a survey of U.S. newspaper editors, particularly more so for larger newspapers.

Some other barriers to teaching journalism are inherent within the technology. Traditionally, journalists work in large teams, but digital technology tends to "individualize the process of production" requiring a need for reflection, deliberation and dialogue (Buckingham, Harvey and Sefton-Green 1999, p. 16). Newsrooms function as a group, and a news staff learns through osmosis; an established newsroom influences the behavior of new, younger staff (Breed 1955; Reinardy 2010). Nonetheless, the adoption of cross-platform reporting doesn't appear to have eroded the ability of students to develop specialized skills and critical thinking through conflict resolution.

The path behind us may offer little help in navigating the one ahead in this new world of rapid response where word-of-mouth is paramount. One goal within our Department of Mass Communication is to erode the invisible barriers between the areas of concentration: journalism, public relations, advertising and video production. These concentrations coexist within the profession even though curriculums often divide them into organized tracks. Instead of showing up to write a story for *The Blue Banner*, student reporters will find themselves capturing and editing stories TV-news style, creating a longer, thematic pieces or simply capturing interesting bits of visual campus life.

### **Directions for future research**



Students continue to favor the group dynamic of the college newsroom. And although they are digital natives, they do not instinctively think of the strategic uses of social media. Video clips, tweets, posts, pins and podcasts of interviews have become part of the basic journalism skill set.

Schudson (2000) posited that the academy should focus more on the consequences of technology transformation of news production. Cary (2009) recognized the need to assess the ramification on the academy as the preference for online communication increases. A review of the literature suggests both are needed when exploring what mediates the student journalists' adoption of the latest technology and the latest platforms, into the college newsroom.

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# South Dakota State University Students Resurrect Yearbook

[cmreview.org/south-dakota-state-university-students-resurrect-yearbook/](http://cmreview.org/south-dakota-state-university-students-resurrect-yearbook/)

College Media Review

June 17, 2013

*Jackrabbit* finds new life on campus

**By Susan Smith**  
***South Dakota State University***

In 2002, the students' association at South Dakota State University eliminated its Jackrabbit Yearbook. Interest in the book had declined. Fewer people were working on the staff, and boxes of the free publication were left unclaimed by the student body.

In 2012, that same group sought out an editor to bring it back. Vanessa Dykhouse, a senator from the university's arts and sciences college, answered the call and began planning to bring the book back to life. Dykhouse found an adviser, negotiated a print contract with the school's print lab and began recruiting staff. A small but dedicated group of students spent two nights a week in the lower level of the SDSU student union putting out the book – with no funding and little journalism experience. But it had the support of the university community. The Collegian, SDSU's independent, student-run newspaper, allowed the yearbook to use its office and computers to produce the book. The newspaper and radio adviser, Susan Smith, became the yearbook's adviser. The Union's Information Exchange front desk and the University Bookstore helped the group sell books.

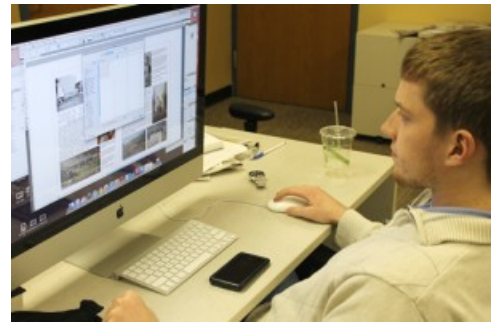


Vanessa Dykhouse (left), Editor Paul Dybedahl

Advertising Manager Austin Vanderwal sold \$4,500 worth of advertising, which paid for the printing costs. Students sold nearly 200 books, which paid for some scholarships for the fledgling staff. At the end of the 2012-2013 academic year, the students' association gave the group \$3,500 to pay for scholarships for the incoming staff.

Student Life Editor Paul Dybedahl said having a yearbook on SDSU's campus is a way to connect current students with the past. And, he said, yearbooks provide former students an opportunity to look back at their college years and remember the good times they had and the contribution SDSU made to their lives.

“Yearbooks are important to college campuses because it is a way to document what happened in the year on campus in one book and it lasts through the years,” he said. “For me it’s fun to look through the old Jackrabbit Yearbooks and see how things have changed. If we don’t have a yearbook today, 50 years from now other students will not get the same opportunity to open an old yearbook and look back on what happened.”



Austin Vanderwal

Susan Smith advises The Collegian, South Dakota State University’s independent, student-run newspaper, its radio station KSDJ and the Jackrabbit yearbook. She also teaches news editing class in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication and the summer Journalism Institute at S.D. State. Smith completed her master’s in communications, with a specialization in journalism in 2012. She is a native of South Dakota.



Susan Smith

# The Future of the Venerable Yearbook

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College Media Review

June 17, 2013



Embracing New Technology, New Ways of Doing Business

**By Susan Smith**  
**South Dakota State University**

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While the college yearbook may no longer be published on many campuses, other schools are still publishing yearbooks as they embrace new technology and ways of doing business.

In the last 18 years, the number of college yearbooks printed in the United States dropped from about 2,400 in 1995 to about 1,000 today, according to a 2010 National Public Radio story.

“No definitive list exists of all of the books out there now, much less how that compares to any point in the past (or how they’re funded),” said Lori Brooks, convention chair for the College Media Association who has chaired CMA yearbook committees. “It’s information I hope we can start tracking at some point soon.”

Abe Orlick, president of The Personalized Yearbook company, believes the decline of yearbooks on college campuses is due to such factors as rising publishing costs and social media diminishing students’ desires to see and sign a variety of photos in college yearbooks.

“The pricing of yearbooks went up and up and up and the resulting factor is participation came down,” Orlick said. “Once social media came into effect, the yearbook was a generic yearbook. It didn’t relate to the student.”

However, Orlick stresses yearbooks are still an important part of the college experience for several reasons, including being physical representations of students’ alma maters and the time they spent there. Such physical representations, he said, can aid university and college fund-raising as well as strengthen connections among alumni.

“No matter where students go, no matter how many times they move, they take their yearbooks with them,” he said.

The Personalized Yearbook currently works with 24 universities and colleges.

Yearbooks’ decline began in the 1960s and 1970s, according to a Jan. 27, 2010, Washington Post story by Jenna Johnson.

Johnson wrote, in part: “College yearbooks have been slowly disappearing as campuses expand and diversify and students’ lives move online, away from paper records of their college memories. The thick volumes can cost as much as \$100 each at a time when some students have difficulty paying for textbooks.”

Among the large schools folding their yearbooks in recent years, Johnson reported, include Purdue University, Mississippi State University and University of Virginia.

“Schools that have yearbooks have tried attracting the Facebook generation with year-in-review DVDs or online features or have switched to digital yearbooks to save money. Some universities have begun to fund the creation of the yearbook or added the price to student fees. Others campuses have transferred responsibility for the project to alumni associations,” Johnson wrote.

Orlick’s three-year-old company—its motto is “this is not your father’s yearbook—uses electronic billing and social media to curtail costs and thus help yearbooks remain afloat and vibrant. For example:

- The company markets a school's yearbooks through its website, [customyearbooks.com](http://customyearbooks.com). It also uses e-mail blasts and postal mail for yearbook promotions. Students and parents are marketed, because parents, after paying a lot of money for their children's college education, want something tangible, Orlick said.
- The company, not the schools, processes yearbook sales—prices range from \$60 to \$150 or more per yearbook—through Amazon.com and Paypal. This serves to reduce overhead costs.
- The company, which provides complimentary copies of hardback yearbooks to participating schools, charges a \$500 setup fee and an annual website subscription of \$499. Students can add 10 personalized pages for \$14.95, or 20 pages for \$24.95.
- At the end of this academic year, Orlick says students can go to [customyearbooks.com](http://customyearbooks.com) and sign their friends' yearbooks. Students also have the option of adding their own photos from Facebook or Instagram or whatever social media they prefer to use.

Logan Aimone, executive director of the National Scholastic Press Association, said yearbooks have to strive for a broad audience.

"It's not possible to cover every student and get them in the yearbook," he said.

The numbers of yearbooks on college campuses have indeed been declining for decades, according to Aimone. Today's yearbooks, he said, take advantage of new technology like video and Facebook photo albums to share news items. Others use online resources to provide supplemental material to the books via QR codes. Options are also available for students to personalize a standard book by adding more photos, he said.

Online yearbooks are still emerging, Aimone said, adding, "No one's gotten a hold of that growing market. Most traditional yearbook programs are still tied to print."

Marcia Meskiel-Macy has for years advised student publications and also worked as a yearbook rep for Balfour-Taylor. Yearbooks, she said, offer a different aesthetic than the digital world can ever provide.

"Students don't understand the value at all of being able to pick something up 20 or 30 years from now, and it's exactly the same as when you graduated from high school," she said.

Balfour-Taylor invested in new technology by providing its customers with a QR code and online space to host the information; this technology connects the printed page to the online world.

Declining sales nationally have caused yearbook companies to add more technological bells and whistles, Meskiel-Macy said. But for Meskiel-Macy, it comes down to the quality of the book and preparing students for jobs that haven't been thought of yet.

“For me personally it’s just me doing a better job of carving out a niche,” she said. “I’m not driven by the dollar; I’m driven by the quality of the book. I love watching that light go on and I love going to (yearbook) awards ceremonies and watching my schools winning.”

Andrea Watson advises La Ventana, the yearbook of Texas Tech University in Lubbock. She said she’s mystified that the students who seem not to function without social media don’t seem to embrace it as much for their publications. The Texas Tech yearbook is 352 pages with funding coming mostly from yearbook sales.

The Texas Tech students have tried different things throughout the year like QR codes. The website and yearbook staffs, she said, work together on some elements like videos that are paired with QR codes.

“We’ve embraced the philosophy of it can’t hurt,” she said of social media usage. “Added content is never a bad thing.”

Last year, La Ventana had five QR codes in the book. This year will be in the same range.

New options give La Ventana staffs the chance to push themselves to not just think of the print product exclusively but to plan packages that pair that with multimedia, said Watson, noting, “We’re baby-stepping our way towards that.”

Doane College in Crete, Neb., with 1,100 student students, is among the country’s smaller colleges that dropped their student yearbooks.

The yearbook was getting too expensive, said adviser David Swartzlander. The book, he said, cost \$25,000 to print. Student salaries and equipment purchases took another chunk of the profits. Students paid for their \$50 books via tuition, but many weren’t coming to pick them up. Swartzlander, who also serves as CMA president, said he has boxes stacked in the attic of the college’s media building.

“It just got to be too much,” Swartzlander said.

Swartzlander talked to his dean about evolving the book into something else. His dean suggested creating a general-interest magazine. Today, Doane students produce 900 copies of the magazine per semester, slightly less than the 1,100 yearbooks the school used to print.

The magazine name is 1014, the address of Doane College. It is a general interest publication and a cooperative venture between Doane’s English, journalism and art departments. Students plan content, choose what sections to include and negotiate the printing contract.



The cost of printing 900 copies of 1014 per semester is a fraction of what it cost to produce the college's yearbooks, Swartzlander said. Students, he said, appear engaged by the new publication; most of the typical 900-copy print run are picked up.

When Swartzlander first came to Doane, yearbooks were a "big thing." He had to tell people to remember to cross off the names of students coming to pick them up so they'd have a few left.

"Some years we ran out of books altogether," Swartzlander said.

Beginning in 2006 or so, that trend reversed. That coincided with social media's rise in popularity, but Swartzlander doesn't blame social media entirely on his college yearbook's decline. Cost played a big role, he said.

Swartzlander said that the yearbook started to go in the red because the college didn't increase student fees. When the fee increase finally happened, it put a target on the back of the yearbook, with people starting to ask whether they were getting their money's worth. Conversely, the magazine has sparked a degree of excitement.

"It's so new, who knows how long that excitement is going to last," Swartzlander said. "I hope it continues for years."

Swartzlander said whatever the type of publication a school produces, good journalism is the key to its success.

"As a journalistic endeavor, I love the idea of a magazine," he said. "To me, this is more real life than yearbook publishing – as far as my students go and what they might do in the future. I'm hoping that excitement continues."

But he's sorry that some yearbooks have gone away in recent years.

"They can be vital pieces of information – providing all sorts of stuff about the year and the past year. Losing that tradition is sad," Swartzlander said. "Since the college was willing to try a magazine for me, that was a journalistic experience for my students."

Swartzlander said more attention to the Doane yearbook might have saved it. But it's not enough to fill a page with five photos of the soccer team and tell people how they did, he said. Good journalism means getting two or three great photos and telling a great story.

"It's just good journalism, and we weren't practicing good journalism," he said. "We were putting up five photos and listing what the scores were. That's just not enough. With the magazine, we're doing good journalism."

To help students practice good journalism with the yearbook medium, Leslie Marcello had for a decade organized the National College Yearbook Workshop. The workshop has been cancelled for this year, but Marcello said her decision to cancel it was not connected to what is “happening with yearbooks around the country.”

“I had reached the point as a one-person operation where I didn’t want to do it anymore,” said Marcello of the annual workshop she started in 2002.

Marcello started the workshop after she retired in August 2001 from a 31-year career teaching and advising student media at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, La. She is a lifetime member of CMA, as well as a past president and Hall of Fame member of the College Media Association.

For 10 years, Marcello was a one-woman operation coordinating the hotel, operations and registration for the three-day New Orleans event. Marcello said she enjoyed creating the workshop and watching it grow.

“It was truly a labor of love,” she said.

Marcello said she’s seen several schools bring yearbooks back following their initial demise. The greatest example is the University of Oklahoma.

“Many universities who killed their book voted to bring it back,” she said. “They realized later that there were other things they should have cut besides the yearbooks.”

She hopes someone “takes up the slack” and continues the college yearbook workshop she began.

“I thoroughly enjoyed it,” she said of the experience.

After she announced she would not conduct the workshop this year she heard from several yearbook advisers expressing disappointment but wishing her well.

“They understood after awhile you just reach the end of the line and it’s not as much fun,” she said. “I’ve had no regrets.”