Authority and Balance in College Student Newspapers: A Journalistic Investigation
Essay

For my capstone project, I intend to write a 20 – 25 page research paper regarding the weight of higher authorities on the content of college student newspapers. More specifically, I want to show, through investigative journalism, how the hierarchy of ownership and control associated with a student newspaper ultimately determines what is and is not printed.

I intend to explore the role of internal authoritative positions and the overall maintaining of power balances within a student newspaper, as well as show what external factors contribute to who has power and how much power individuals in different positions maintain and exhibit. Some of these external factors include being a freelance or college-owned newspaper, the use and importance of advertising, the role new technologies play in decreasing newspaper popularity, and the existence of competitors. This research project will examine these different influences in order to illuminate the problems and conditions faced by student journalists, as well as to show that the “rules” of journalistic authority are learned at the college level and maintained at the professional stage.

By and large, this project was inspired by my own personal experiences working for the Gettysburgian as Opinions section editor and columnist, as well as my work experience at two other newspapers. I have dealt personally with issues of authority in a student newspaper both in the form of being asked not to print something because it may embarrass someone and in having my own authority questioned by writers. I believe my experience is a typical representation of troubles undergone by many editors in student newspapers, and this is a topic that I particularly want to investigate further.

This project will include in-depth interviews with many of the Gettysburgian editors and writers past and present, as well as with staff of the G-Burg Forum, the Gettysburgian’s only
major competitor. It will additionally involve interviews and content analysis of another college’s student newspaper (yet to be contacted) that is not owned by the college, in order to provide a contrast to the Gettysburgian, and to show the differences faced by freelance and college-owned newspapers. The comparative newspaper will theoretically be from another Pennsylvania liberal arts college, roughly the same size as Gettysburg College, in order to obtain the closest possible comparison. Some such colleges include Franklin & Marshal, Muhlenberg, Dickinson, and Lebanon Valley. In addition to working closely with my capstone advisor, I intend to work with the Gettysburgian’s advisor Joel Berg to obtain further insight into this project. He will also be interviewed as part of this project.

Some sample interview questions for writers and editors are:

- Who do you think has the most authority at your newspaper and why?
- Have you ever been told not to print something because it will embarrass an administrator, faculty member, or other important official?
- What rules govern what is printed in your publication?
- How does having a stipend from the college affect your printing decisions?
- Do you feel readers and writers respect your authority as editor?
- Do you feel, as a writer, that the editor over-edits your work?
- Do you feel you have as much press freedom as you want, why or why not?

In addition to interviews, I will employ many sources, including the ones below, to enhance my points and help tie in my independent study courses. My classes, moreover, will contribute significantly to my approaches in this project. While classes like Journalistic Writing and Public Address will help with interviewing, my Sociology classes will assist with my research methods and my writing courses will certainly allow for a more comprehensive and professional research paper.

Through this research project, I hope to better appreciate the complex nature of authority in student publications and provide a strong understanding of the complex and changing world of journalism for outsiders.
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Research Project Proposed Spring 2009 Timeline for IDS 464

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<th>Week of</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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| Jan 19  | Compile Research  
          Meet with Prof. Berg  
          Meet with Prof. Rhett  
          Contact comparative college newspapers |
| Jan 26  | Compile Research  
          Contact comparative college newspapers  
          Conduct Interviews with *Gettysburgian* Editors  
          Review *Gettysburgian* Editor-Writer recorded emails |
| Feb 2   | Begin Writing Research Paper / Compile Research  
          Meet with Prof. Rhett  
          Compile list of comparative newspaper interviewees  
          Conduct Interviews with *Gettysburgian* Editors  
          Review *Gettysburgian* Editing Policies |
| Feb. 9  | Write Research Paper  
          Compile list of comparative newspaper interviewees  
          Conduct Interviews with *Gettysburgian* Editors / Writers |
| Feb 16  | Write Research Paper  
          Meet with Prof. Rhett  
          Meet with Prof. Berg  
          Conduct Interview with *Gettysburgian* Adviser  
          Conduct Interviews with *Gettysburgian* Writers |
| Feb 23  | Write Research Paper  
          Conduct Interviews with comparative newspaper Editors  
          Conduct Interviews with *Gettysburgian* Writers |
| March 2 | Write Research Paper  
          Meet with Prof. Rhett  
          Conduct Interviews with comparative newspaper Editors  
          Conduct Interviews with *Gettysburgian* Writers |
| March 9 | Write Research Paper  
          Conduct Interviews with comparative newspaper Editors / Writers  
          Conduct Interviews with *G-Burg Forum* Staff |
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>March 16</td>
<td>Write Research Paper</td>
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<td>Meet with Prof. Rhett</td>
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<td>Conduct Interviews with <em>G-Burg Forum</em> Staff</td>
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<td>March 30</td>
<td>Write Research Paper</td>
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<td>Meet with Prof. Rhett</td>
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<td>April 6</td>
<td>Turn in Research Paper to Profs. for Review</td>
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<td>April 13</td>
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<td>April 20</td>
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<td>April 27</td>
<td>Edit Research Paper</td>
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<td>May 4</td>
<td>Completed Research Paper Due</td>
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Authority and Balance in College Student Newspapers
Annotated Bibliography


Articles in this text discuss the role of advertising in corrupting and influencing what is printed in newspapers, as well as other influences that affect the content of journalism.


Interviews provided give a real perspective into the lives and work responsibilities of successful journalists. This will be useful in conducting my own interviews with college level journalists.


Statistics and interviews done for this journal article represent some of the core ideas associated with this research paper, including press freedom on college campuses and administrator censorship of college-owned newspapers.


This book shows a wide variety of different ways to criticize journalism, which allows for a better understanding of what editors and writers face when they print in a newspaper.


This text provides an immense amount of insight into the power struggles within newspapers, as well as the ethics of all journalism and the future of print journalism.


This book explores the reality of newspapers in the internet age, which is one of the main contributing factors to authority given and taken away from editors and writers of student newspapers.

A strong source for ethics in journalism, this text provides the ins and outs to motivations behind what gets printed and what is left out, as well as explores the codes and guidelines that journalists live by (or choose not to).


This text provides a number of important articles by various artists that explore the complex problems faced by editors and writers in the journalism field while also exploring the fate of print journalism as a whole.


Though older, this journal article offers a strong insight into the views of college editors, taking on a perspective few other sources are willing to tackle. This article also examines the backgrounds and social statuses of editors surveyed.


Supplying an academic and intellectual approach, this book studies journalism from a learning perspective, analyzing what is printed/reported and why. This will be necessary in allowing for valid reasoning behind my findings.