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A New Role for Student Media: College Newspapers and the Crisis in Journalism

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Abstract

At its core, the goal of journalism is to provide the necessary information to its public to promote democratic participation. Within this sphere, the work of college newspapers is to provide this public service to a university audience. However, as professional newspapers struggle to survive rapidly changing conditions in the industry, college newspapers are assuming responsibility for news that was once fell strictly under the jurisdiction of commercial news organizations. As these mutually-influencing transformations occur, academics and media scholars alike are questioning whether college newspapers are structurally capable of handling the responsibilities of a professional newspaper and if so, how existing limitations may be overcome. This research examines the ways that college newspapers have been impacted by the changes in the journalism industry, whether these publications are able to adequately support a weakened commercial press, and how these shifts are apparent at the local and hyperlocal levels.

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Introduction

At its core, the goal of journalism is to provide the necessary information to its public to promote democratic participation. Within this sphere, the work of college newspapers is to provide this public service to a university audience. However, as professional newspapers struggle to survive rapidly changing conditions in the industry, college newspapers are assuming responsibility for news that was once fell strictly under the jurisdiction of commercial news organizations. As these mutually-influencing transformations occur, academics and media scholars alike are questioning whether college newspapers are structurally capable of handling the responsibilities of a professional newspaper and if so, how existing limitations may be overcome. This research examines the ways that college newspapers have been impacted by the changes in the journalism industry, whether these publications are able to adequately support a weakened commercial press, and how these shifts are apparent at the local and hyperlocal levels.

As editor-in-chief and a long-time staff member of The Grizzly, I have a vested interest in the future of college journalism. I have had the opportunity to experience journalism from both an academic and application perspective. In addition, I interned at the Norristown Times Herald, a local commercial newspaper. This position afforded me the opportunity to understand the challenges that legacy media faces as the financial viability of these publications becomes increasingly challenged. The dual vantage points from which I have observed the changes in the journalism industry piqued my interest in learning more about the ways that these two types of publications have shifted in response to the digital revolution and the barriers to success that it poses. Further, I became interested in the ways that these newspapers each influence the ways that the other adapts.

This research seeks to identify some of the specific ways that college newspapers have responded to the changes in the journalism field. Through varied research methods that reflect the nature of each topic explored, I focused on three subsets of the monumental developments in modern journalism. In the first chapter, I address the responsibilities of all news platforms to provide information to the public, as well as how shifts in information access have occurred in correlation with the media landscape. Incorporating academic literature on the subject as well as the legal precedents set in federal courts, I examine what these changes mean for both college and local newspapers and what standards these publications must meet in order to accomplish their journalistic mission. Further, I discuss the role of college newspapers in facilitating democratic participation, and whether they are capable of achieving this journalistic ideal given their financial constraints, the naturally limited experience of their staff, and their association with an institution. I address the legal and censorship issues that are potentially threatening to the success of college newspapers.

The second chapter of my project employs a hybrid academic-interview methodology to explore the ways that college newspapers in the local area have adapted to digital shifts in the industry. Specifically, I focused on these publications' integration of social media into their news routines. To this end, I interviewed the editors of a small, diverse sample of college newspapers. This enabled me to gain insight into the ways that some colleges are employing new technologies and bring these perspectives into conversation with the literature. The interviews, in conjunction with academic findings about college newspapers and their relationships with social media, elucidates the highly varied responses that college newspapers have had to the changes in the industry and reflects the extent to which they are capable of assuming a greater democratic role.

In the concluding chapter, I examine Ursinus College's newspaper, *The Grizzly*, from an internal perspective. I apply the detailed insight into this specific college newspaper to identify trends and correlations with the college newspaper community at large. I integrate the academic and interview-based research I conducted to provide context for my observations. Specifically, I studied how the Grizzly's practices reflect the changes in the collegiate journalism field in terms of digital developments and independence as commercial newspapers struggle to survive. Finally, I assess *The Grizzly's* ability to fill a larger civic role in the capacity outlined in the first chapter. Based on the observations I made in the first two chapters, I make suggestions for future editors of *The Grizzly*. I highlight ways that the newspaper can take advantage of new technologies and maximize its services to the Ursinus community.

The intention of my research is to better understand the role of college newspapers both within the campus setting, as well as in their respective broader communities. By questioning the capacity for college newspapers to facilitate a new era of journalism, it becomes clear that the impact of the shifts in the industry extend far beyond commercial news organizations. While there are significant structural restrictions that limit these publications' ability to fully fill the role of commercial newspapers, my research suggests that their contributions to the future of journalism should not be undervalued

Chapter 1: The viability of an adapting student press
Part 1: College newspapers in a greater civic role

The role of journalism in American democracy was confirmed with the founding of the nation. By protecting freedom of the press, the First Amendment to the Constitution emphasized the central role of journalism in providing citizens with the information needed to be active participants in the nation's governance. Journalists enable citizens to make informed democratic decisions and gain a more holistic perspective of the issues that impact their lives. However, the rapidly evolving landscape of the journalism industry has fostered conditions that make it difficult for the value of commercial media to withstand its audience's access and attraction to the free content available online. Circulation has dwindled, spurring a diversion of advertiser interest to the digital market, newspapers' primary source of revenue. This has forced newsrooms to cut their payrolls by 30% since 2000, weakening their ability to report information that is not also available online, free of charge ("Overview: State of the Media" 2014). This snowball effect of losses has crippled the commercial journalism industry, leaving it "undermanned and unprepared to uncover stories, dig deep into emerging ones or to question information put into its hands" (Mitchell, 2014)

Local newspapers were hit the hardest in these times of economic uncertainty. The scope of local publications is inherently narrow, making their content less widely desirable and more easily attainable online. An article in *The Independent* explains that, "The problem is that the internet can do most of what local newspapers have been doing for decades, such as telling people what is on at the cinema or giving them a medium through which to buy or sell a car," ("Leading Article: Decline and Fall of the Local Press" 2012). Further, the cost of news gathering at a local paper often exceeds profits garnered from publishing it (Farhi 2014).

Hyperlocal news sites, such as the Patch Media, EveryBlock, and Placeblogger, have proven to have sustainable business models by cutting the print out of local news coverage and crowdsourcing information, shouldering local print publications closer to extinction while still relying on them for much of their content. "Local news and information is a key area of interest to the American public, but how that news is supported remains a question," said Amy Mitchell, Pew's director of journalism research, in an interview (Mitchell 2014)

While the industry has not been able to establish how to sustain commercial journalism, the reason why it is critical to do so has become abundantly clear. The role of journalism in promoting a successful democracy has been continuously reaffirmed since commercial news began to flounder with the rise of the digital age in the early 2000s. The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Community in a Democracy, the first major commission on media since the Kerner and Carnegie commissions of the 1960s, is dedicated to assessing how communities access information and whether the channels of accessing information are functioning to the extent that is necessary to foster democratic participation ("Executive Summary: Knight Commission" 2013). The Knight Commission calls for "informed communities," or elevating every American's access to information to a standard that enables them to meet their personal and civic needs ("Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age: KnightComm" 2013). According to the Knight Commission, "this means people have the news and information they need to take advantage of life's opportunities for themselves and their families. They need information to participate fully in our system of self-government, to stand up and be heard" ("Executive Summary: KnightComm" 2013).

Journalism is the facilitator of the connection between citizens and the relevant and credible information they need to be active democratic participants. As the depth of local

newspaper's coverage shrinks, a primary concern of the Knight Commission is that information regarding local governance, which likely does not receive attention from larger media outlets, will not become disconnected from the public that it is intended to serve ("Executive Summary | KnightComm" 2014). Further, the media industry has been forced into passivity by a lack of resources. Since new outlets lack the staff and resources to accomplish the same caliber of investigative journalism that they were capable of in their prime, politicians have been able to use the media as a "megaphone;" with "direct relaying of assertions made by the campaigns and less reporting by journalists to interpret and contextualize them" (Mitchell 2014). The ease with which political and corporate organizations can breach the pages of local newspapers with their messaging prevents the paper's readership from discerning hand-crafted, strategic communication from a balanced perspective of the political landscape, since both are being presented in a forum that theoretically prioritizes the democratic interests of the reader.

A loss of local journalism poses the risk of citizens living in an "information vacuum," therefore reinforcing inequalities for people who do not have the resources to participate in democracy as access to technology is becoming increasingly critical ("Information Stories Tell of Personal Stakes in Healthy Info Communities: KnightComm" 2014). Citizens who cannot readily access online content are becoming disconnected from the information necessary to make informed democratic decisions. Many critics point out that without universal access to broadband, information will remain inaccessible to many citizens, regardless of their civic intentions ("Thinking about the Future of Informed Communities and Journalism" 2011).

The journalism industry has been struggling to come up with solutions to the information void that is plaguing both their profits and the well-being of informed communities, but some courses of action have been debated. A shift to non-profit journalism has been proposed as a

solution to the commercial industry's seemingly irreversible loss of financial momentum. David Swensen and Michael Schmidt wrote an opinion piece for the New York Times that echoes the perspectives of those watching the journalism industry struggle, suggesting that newspapers might be better off if they adopted a business model dependent on endowments, similar to universities and institutions. Swensen and Schmidt propose that, "endowments would enhance newspapers' autonomy while shielding them from the economic forces that are now tearing them down" (Swensen and Schmidt 2009). If commercial newspapers were organized like non-profits, they would be free of the financial constraints that limit the scope and depth of their reporting, allowing resources to be allocated to quality of coverage, not just survival, of a newspaper.

To this end, college newspapers have been another suggested means of achieving the democratic ideals that the media was intended to accomplish. Similarly to non-profit organizations, the majority of college newspapers are not impacted by the same profit pressures as commercial publications. Campus newspapers often have the freedom to publish more content and fewer advertisements, allowing more room for informative copy. Further, since college newspapers are less dependent on profits, they have the freedom to produce more content that might not draw in the most readership, but is critical information to disseminate (Downie and Schudson 2009).

Some commercial newspapers, such as the *The Miami Herald* and the *Sun Sentinel*, enlisted student journalists to fill the gaps in their staffs. Newspapers have taken advantage of this mutually-beneficial situation, since student reporters are often looking for professionally-published bylines and commercial papers are struggling to maintain the full staffs that they supported in the past. Extending from this trend, campus and commercial newspapers have coordinated their coverage to enable the two publications to share content. By maximizing the

resources of each reporter, student and professional, some local papers have been able to expand the scope of their coverage without increasing their production costs (Downie and Schudson 2009). This system has allowed student journalists to gain value experience in a professional setting, while also enabling local newspapers to maintain the depth of coverage necessary to succeed financially and democratically.

Another model that has been proposed to support the struggling local news industry is a hybrid between university and local publications, maximizing both organizations' resources to best serve their community. The Columbia *Missourian* is a local daily newspaper that is staffed by a team of professional editors and student reporters. Students have covered local news, while the editors ensure that the copy is up to the standards of a professional publication. This hybrid structure has also been employed at the Columbia School of Journalism in New York, where students are responsible for beat coverage for professional newspapers. The content is often shared between the campus publication and various local news outlets ("Toni Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism" 2014).

The usefulness of college newspapers filling an expanding civic role is particularly apparent as campus publications take on the in-depth, investigative reporting that local papers no longer have the resources to cover. Investigative reporting is critical to local journalism's ability to function as democratic forums; these publications must question the information they gather in order to uncover stories that the public would not otherwise be aware of (Street et al. 2014). This is another situation where student journalists, who are often more able are to expend the time and effort necessary to write a successful investigative article. This structure is exemplified at the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, a nonprofit organization on the University of Wisconsin's campus that is dedicated to "increasing the quality and quantity" of investigative

reporting in the area ("WisconsinWatch.org - Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism" 2014). The Wisconsin Center combines the efforts of students, interns, and some professional journalists to provide the coverage that once fell under the jurisdiction of local newspapers. Other similar collaborations, such as the New England Center for Investigative Journalism based out of Boston University, employ a similar model and content-share between the local commercial papers (The *Globe*) and the college newspaper.

In Ann Arbor, Michigan, the college newspaper of the University of Michigan has fluidly taken over much of the coverage that the local paper, *The Ann Arbor News*, was responsible for. When *The Ann Arbor News* converted to a web-first model with a twice-weekly print publication schedule, *The Michigan Daily* picked up the slack in a big way. The *Daily* has broken hard-hitting stories, including the cover-up of a Michigan football player's violation of the campus' sexual misconduct policy, reporting that once would have been conducted by the(Conlin 2014) professional news organization (Conlin 2014). Another similar example is the University of Arizona newscast, which is broadcast on the Arizona PBS channels, reaching 1.5 million homes (Conlin 2014). College newspapers, particularly the larger, independently- run organizations, have shown that they are prepared to take over where local newspapers are leaving off. However, the question of whether campus publications are structurally capable of handling this role in a way that is conducive to being a true democratic forum remains unclear.

Part 2: Digital student media and democracy

There is little debate that commercial journalism is critical to the function of democracy, connecting people with the information that they need to make active and informed decisions in their personal lives and in the fulfillment of their civic responsibilities. The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities assessed the state of widely-accessible information outlets and outlined recommendations for improving their success in the future. Essentially, the report suggested that an effective media state is characterized by an invigorated private media that is supported by non-profit and commercial media; a balance between the profit-motivated and endowed media would bolster the industry's ability to both serve the public and remain economically feasible ("Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age | KnightComm" 2013). Commercial media is openly struggling, and its prospects for long-term sustainability are appearing increasingly bleak. The Knight Commission proposes a "new ecology of journalism in which reporters and their publics intermix in new ways" ("Part II: A | KnightComm" 2013).

One means of achieving this new journalistic structure that has been proposed is a more serious reliance on college publications and students journalists to fill in where commercial media resources are lacking. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) expanded upon the Knight Commission's research to identify specific media outlets that could be tapped to support the commercial media in meeting the information needs of communities. A substantial subsection of the FCC's conclusions is focused on the evolving role of journalism schools and their affiliated publications. The report contextualizes the conversation about the structure of campus newspapers and what this means about the nature of the partnerships that are forming between journalists in the academic and professional settings. It refers to college journalism as

"teaching hospitals," comparable to the mutually beneficial partnership between medical students and the teaching hospital staffs they serve (Waldman 2011). In some respects, it seems that this structure is very conducive to maintaining a media environment that fosters democratic success. The primary difference between this structure and the traditional, commercial media-dependent one is that students are motivated by drive to get the competitive edge through real-world experience instead of salary. For example, the FCC cites the example of the partnership between *The New York Times* and the University of California- Berkeley's graduate publication as an example of a structure that benefits both parties. The Berkeley students are responsible for providing two pages of copy for the *Times'* San Francisco edition, while the Berkeley students get bylines in an internationally-acclaimed newspaper (Waldman 2011).

However, there is some debate as to whether the primary goal of college publications should be to directly contribute to democratic participation. While the "teaching hospital" model proposed by Waldman supports that college newspapers can fill both a civic and educational role, there are some advantages of focusing solely on the educational role of these publications. By emphasizing the "lab" qualities of student newspapers, these publications are facilitating the education in the next generation of professional journalists. As Downie and Schudson's "Reconstruction of American Journalism" report suggests, the best use of student newspapers' resources is not necessarily to expand the civic role of college newspapers, but train journalists so that they can make an impact as professionals (Downie and Schudson 2009). The report proposes that it is more civically practical to invest in the education of student journalists rather than speeding through the foundations of the practice in order to prematurely pursue a democratic role.

College newspapers come equipped with a staff that is there because, in general, they are genuinely interested in participating and doing so actively to enhance their chances of future success. However, unlike at professional publications, these students' livelihood is not immediately dependent on their success. College papers have the potential to succeed as democratic forums because the profit motive that has wreaked havoc on commercial papers is typically not present and if it is, is significantly less consequential. As newspaper staffs have shrunk by nearly 20 percent in the past decade, from 52,550 to 43, 630 total journalists employed in the field, 216,269 students were enrolled in U.S., degree-seeking journalism and mass communication programs in 2009 alone (Pew 2014), (Waldman 2011). School newspapers offer a stable supply of journalists that are educated in the most recent industry practices, supporting the perspective college newspapers can offer the staff that professional papers desperately need to create the content that brings citizens the information they need, not just the information that newspapers need to turn a profit.

While student journalists seem to be available in a limitless supply, there is some disagreement regarding their usefulness in practice. As the FCC stated in their report, "these programs can only work if they maintain high quality"(Waldman 2011). Included in that 216,269 figure are freshmen, and at best, students with four years of writing experience intermixed with their regular academic curriculum. Even the best student journalists simply have not put in the time to be seasoned, well-rounded professionals; that expertise can only come from time spent working in the field. For example, George Stanley, the managing editor the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, said that he will not print the work of University of Wisconsin students because he has had to run corrections for some of their articles, and that the professional-academic partnerships are, "much more of a service to students than they are to the professional media" (Waldman

2011). Further, students are limited by their reliance on the academic calendar. Their contributions stop abruptly come May, and do not resume again until August or September. It is not particularly useful for a newspaper to have a rotating staff of inexperienced students, and only have them for nine months of the year before they switch and have to be re-trained.

While the transitory editorial leadership of school newspapers is a possible limitation in these publications' ability to serve in the role of commercial papers, their general lack of a profit motive allows for other types of structural flexibility. Since revenue is not the primary motivation for college newspapers to publish, they have more freedom to explore and test out new models of journalism that may be more conducive to the information needs of modern communities. This is particularly evident as commercial news continues its attempts at making the digital transition. When a commercial news outlet tries out a new online model or reallocates its resources to its digital edition, the stakes are high; if the readership does not approve, already scarce profits will take a hit. However, college newspapers have more flexibility in terms of "newsonomics," a term coined by media analyst and author Ken Doctor. Newonomics refers to redirected channels of resources within media companies as the prioritization shifts from print to digital platforms (Doctor 2014). When commercial newspapers evaluate their newsonomics, it is difficult for them to make changes to the fundamental structure of their product because of cost and potential financial risk that is involved, even if drastic changes need to be made to potentially reverse the trend of falling profits (Doctor 2014). However, college newspapers have the flexibility to make innovative decisions that, based on their newsonomic assessment, meet both the audiences' information needs and the business needs of the organization; they do not need to consider financial risk when they develop new communication strategies in the sense that their newspaper is unlikely to fail if a particular strategy fails.

Without the same tethers to profits, college newspapers have better been able to make the transition from print publication to multi-faceted media group. The student newspaper at the University of Oregon, *The Daily Emerald,* exemplifies the success of this transition in the collegiate setting. In 2012, the *Daily Emerald* made the switch to a twice-weekly print publication, emphasizing their online content. Their reports show that their transitional strategies were successful, even in the first quarter after the change. The paper's publisher said that the paper has "no debt and a solid reserve fund," which is quite unusual for any current publication ("How Student Newspapers Can Survive (and Thrive) in the 21st Century: Mediashift : PBS" 2014). The state of the *Daily Emerald* reflects a general ability of college papers to be more nimble in their adaptation to the digital world. The FCC proposed the critical need for the media to efficiently disseminate information through digital channels, and for those channels to be widely accessible (Waldman 2011). The FCC's report on the information needs of communities explains that the internet brought universality and decentralization to information access, making it crucial that news outlets consolidate and distribute information efficiently. College newspapers, such as the *Daily Emerald*, have been able to harness the positive communication values offered by the internet, such as the ability to have depth, context, immediacy, and diversity of news choices to offer a product that enables heightened access to information. By straddling both the online and print media industries, college newspapers are showing that they may be equipped to foster democracy across all of the platforms that it is demanded.

The capacity for quick strategic reevaluation has been repeatedly cited as college newspaper's distinct advantage over commercial publications. Beyond the general switch to digital prioritization, campus papers have shown that they are capable of successfully implementing other new journalism models that the commercial industry is hesitant about

testing. According to the Pew Research Center, the campus papers at the University of Syracuse, UC Berkeley, and the University of Minnesota, among others, dropped one publication day from their daily print schedule. The unconventional business strategy allowed them to redirect those resources to where they could be better used, whether it be in digital improvement or depth of content (Pew 2014). Further, the Pew study on college paper innovation proposes that strategies for improvement have extended beyond its existing publications; campus papers have explored new sources of revenue that are not possible at commercial papers. For example, the student body at the University of Oregon voted to pay a small fee to subsidize the *Daily Emerald* (Pew 2014). It is this ingenuity that suggests that college papers might have the flexibility and the fresh creativity that refreshes with every new class of editors that will enable these publications to succeed in ways that commercial newspapers appear unable to. Some campus newspapers have become experiments for the commercial industry, where the pros see how it goes on the collegiate level before they make a commitment to their paper; it does give college newspapers a lab-like quality, but they are succeeding in ways that the professionals do not seem to be able to adapt to their models on their own.

College newspapers, however, have shown that they are not immune to the challenges that face their commercial counterparts, and in some ways, are more susceptible to be influenced by these inhibiting factors. Most of the large student newspapers in the country do operate under budgets that limit their ability to adapt. They are still responsible for generating revenue, usually through advertising. When advertisers start to pull out, college newspapers have very few other places to turn to maintain their profits. Commercial papers can focus on distribution, whereas college newspapers rarely charge a subscription fee (Preston 2013). Out of lack of options, it is more likely for a college paper to start cutting editions or online content simply because there are

no other options, limiting the information they can report. The newspapers at the University of Georgia and the University of Virginia were forced into this course of action.

The structure of college newspapers is flexible to carry the weight of the shifting journalism industry; in some ways, it may be more capable of maneuvering this burden than commercial organizations. College newspapers are staffed by people who are in touch with the digital transition because they were raised in it, and are therefore more acutely aware of how to adapt new technologies to the newsroom to promote the goals of both the publication and of newspapers as democratic forums. Campus publications are not as tightly constrained by profits, since their revenue is not generally supporting individuals, but rather the newspaper itself. However, in some fundamental ways, college newspapers are not organized to foster democracy in the same ways as commercial papers. Staffers are not consistent, and are generally varying degrees of young and inexperienced. The nature of a college paper is just that: a product of college students who inherently do not have real-world industry experience. This can make editorial choices more questionable since they are made by people with minimal prior experience to draw from. Further, college papers are often treated as labs. They do not necessarily reflect what is possible outside of the academic world, since they exist in the safe bubble of their universities. Universities themselves can play a critical role in whether a particular publication can be considered a suitable substitution for a local, commercial paper. Multi-level censorship, or simply the nature of a paper's affiliation with a college, can have a significant impact on its ability to function as a democratic forum.

Part 3: Censorship and the college press

Censorship is consistently noted as the most significant barrier to the success of college newspapers in filling a greater civic role. College papers are inherently linked to an institution in some capacity. These publications are in the unique position where their primary source of funding generally comes from the institution of which they are responsible for being critical. For this reason, media critics have been skeptical about the true autonomy of college newspapers. They have also questioned what a lack of autonomy means for these publications to function successfully as facilitators of democracy. Legal precedents have established the bounds of institutional control of college newspapers, but these laws have proven difficult to enforce and define in application. Numerous examples of censorship, at the individual, organizational, and societal levels, have proven that the content of student newspapers is particularly vulnerable to biased influences. The fundamental association between college newspapers and academic institutions has made it difficult to discern where institutional authority ends and journalistic integrity reigns. The ways that this affiliation impacts reporting has varied widely, but the issue exists to some extent at every college publication.

In an article for *The Atlantic,* media lawyers Jonathan Peters and Frank Lomonte posit that student journalists are being "asked to fulfill community needs for professional-caliber news without the assurances that keep professionals safe when fearless journalism provokes a backlash" (Peters and Lomonte, 2013). First Amendment rights, the constitutional guarantees that protect journalists from government control or censorship, are critical to the function of commercial news. First Amendment rights allow journalists to publish information without jeopardizing their careers or the organizations they represent. Without these rights, newspapers could be subjected to governmental censorship that would impede their ability to communicate

information to the public they serve. Professional journalists are assured that they can perform their job and maintain their commitment to accurately reporting the truth without interference from the government. However, First Amendment rights do not protect newspapers from institutional pressures. Realistically, most news sources are influenced by their sources of revenue, particularly their readership and advertisers. While the responsibility of the professional journalist is ideally to the truth, they often encounter pressure to cater to outside interests ("The Public & The Press" 2014)

However, the protections that safeguard the work of student journalists are significantly more ambiguous, particularly at private colleges. The legal precedents that have been set regarding protections of student journalists largely pertain to public schools; college newspapers at private schools are not protected from institutional censorship by First Amendment laws ("Know Your Rights: First Amendment and Censorship" 2014). However, some individual states and institutions have established their own regulations regarding censorship at college newspapers. California's "Leonard Law" applies the First Amendment to both public and private institutions, but it is the only state to do so. Individual institutions, including Princeton University and Notre Dame University, have opted to extend First Amendment rights to their students, even though state or federal law does not obligate them to ("California Leonard Law (private Colleges)" 2014).

The foundational legal decision that established how First Amendment rights apply to a public academic setting was the Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* of 1969. Three students at a Des Moines public school were suspended for wearing black armbands to class in protest of the U.S. government's involvement in Vietnam. The court ruled that students' First Amendment rights are protected in an academic

setting, so long as their expression does not have "substantial interference with the conduct of school activities" (*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School Dist.* 1969). Further, the court decided that First Amendment rights extend to students and teachers, "subject to application in light of the special characteristics of the school environment" (*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District,* 1969*).* This ruling provides substantial protection against censorship for student journalists. *Tinker* permits public college newspapers to print controversial articles without fear of censorship simply because of the nature of the article or criticism of its affiliated institution. While this case allows for significant liberties to be taken with the interpretation of "interference," this law limits administrations' ability to censor without "compelling evidence" that it will interfere with the operations of the institution in a substantial way (Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School Dist. 1969). Subsequently, courts have rarely found such substantial enough evidence to justify censorship ("Guide to Student Press Freedom at Public Colleges" 2014).

The *Hazelwood vs. Kulhmeier* case of 1987 is the primary Supreme Court case that is invoked in situations where censorship of academic publications is in question because it narrows the freedoms established by *Tinker*. This Supreme Court case specifically addresses the editorial jurisdiction of high school administrators over their school newspapers; it is often cited as evidence of the limitations of institution-affiliated publications to serve in the role of a community paper. The plaintiffs, three former students of Hazelwood East High School, contended that Hazelwood School District in St. Louis County, Missouri violated their First Amendment rights by deleting pages from their school newspaper, the *Spectrum*, in 1983 (Hazelwood vs. Kulhmeier). The court ruled that, "First Amendment rights of students in the public schools 'are not automatically coextensive with the rights of adults in other settings,'" and

that school publications do not qualify as true public forums in the way that professional papers

do" (*Hazelwood School Dist. v. Kuhlmeier* 1988). This case marked a definitive separation

between the First Amendment protections allotted to journalists outside of the academic setting

and those within it, a delineation that was not made clear by *Tinker*. In 2000, *Hosty vs. Carter*

established that the *Hazelwood* decision could be applied to the college publications. The dean of

the Governor's State University in Georgia demanded that the college's newspaper be reviewed

by administration prior to its publication. The student editors initially lost the case in federal

district court, but the ruling was reversed in a court of appeals. However, whether *Hazelwood*

can be applied to college publications has remained ambiguous since the initial *Hosty* decision.

Further, the *Hazelwood vs. Kuhlmeier* decision yields some editorial authority to

"educators," allowing them to control content if the "educators" believe that "their actions are

reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns" (*Hazelwood vs. Kulhmeier* 1988). This

ruling allows significant room for interpretation as to who is an "educator" and what defines a

"legitimate pedagogical concern." While a footnote in the case indicates specifically that the

court had not decided whether the decision extended to college newspapers, it has been applied

as legal grounds for censorship in the collegiate setting (Peters and Lomonte 2013). In 2012, an

Eastern Michigan student pressed charges against her graduate school after she was released

from the program for expressing religious opposition to homosexuality (*Ward vs. Polite* 2012).

Ward was enrolled in graduate psychology course and as a part of a practicum, was required to

counsel a randomly-assigned student. Upon learning that her student assignment was gay, she

requested a new placement. The college responded by expelling Ward from the program on the

grounds that her request was discriminatory. Eastern Michigan's decision to expel Ward was

upheld by the court; this reestablished the legal precedent that maintained the autonomy of

college publications and confirmed the extension of *Hazelwood vs. Kulhmeier* to the collegiate level. *Ward vs. Polite* poses a serious threat to the ability of college newspapers to serve as democratic forums. The case explains that curriculum requirements, such as Ward's practicum requirement, are designed to meet "legitimate educational ends" and had violated parts of the American Counseling Association's code of ethics (*Ward vs Polite* 2012). This case ruled that Ward was impeding on the education process to an extent that permitted *Hazelwood's* "educator" control clause to apply. Further, the case stated that, "Foremost among a school's speech is its selection and implementation of a curriculum—the lessons students need to understand and the best way to impart those lessons—and public schools have broad discretion in making these choices" (*Ward vs. Polite* 2012). As clarified by *Ward vs. Polite*, the only legal barrier between student expression and institutional censorship is the administrations judgment as to whether the expression presents "legitimate pedagogical concern." Thus, college newspapers are forced to consider an influence other than the pursuit of the truth in their reporting, diminishing their democratic value in disseminating information to the public. A true democratic forum cannot be regulated by the best interest of an institution or its pedagogical concerns.

Despite the legal protections that guard the content of public college newspapers and the general precedents that guide the relationships between college newspapers and administration, private universities have censored their student publications significantly or halted their presses altogether. Private institutions' publications are subject to any form of censorship, with no legal protection to prevent it. The controversy at Young Harris College has tested the liberties of college newspapers in a way that elucidates the insurmountable issue of censorship that prevents these private publications from assuming a greater democratic role. A culture of abusive, Greek life-affiliated hazing was loosely hidden and largely ignored at Young Harris until a student

dropped out of pledging a sorority and reported the abuses she suffered as a part of the pledging process to the administration (Baker 2013). The administration discouraged her from filing a police report and claimed that the student had the right to remove herself from the situation at any time, therefore the Greek system was not at fault. The editors of the school's newspaper, the *Enotah Echoes*, were working on an article discussing hazing issues at the school; the administration found out and demanded that the article be edited by the college's lawyer prior to publication. The newspaper's adviser disputed the decision, and the president of the college demanded that the paper not be printed at all. Within a few weeks, both the adviser and another faculty member who protested the censorship were fired. Publication of the school's paper was halted through the semester (Straumsheim 2013).

The most recent post on the *Enotach Echoes'* website is a 2012 description of the events the transpired the previous semester. Publication of the campus newspaper never resumed. This case is an exaggerated version of a problem that every private college newspaper faces: the threat of censorship by administrations that often have financial control over college publications. *Enotah Echoes* exemplifies the power that the administration ultimately wields over campus papers and the severe implications that even the knowledge of this power can have over content. If newspapers are even slightly intimidated by their associated institution, self-censorship is likely to occur. A 2000 Pew Research Center study defined self-censorship as purposefully avoiding newsworthy stories or "softening the tone of stories to benefit their news organizations" (Street et al. 2000). According to Pew's study, about one-quarter of professional journalists have admitted to self-censoring at some point during their careers. Self-censorship can be divided into three primary categories of avoidance: uncertainty of readership's reception, fear of damaging the news organization or advertisers, and fear of damaging the journalist's own career. Nearly

30% of professional journalists have "sometimes" avoided a story that would harm the reputation of their organization, and 23% self-censored because of the influence of advertisers (Street et al. 2000). A 2010 study applied Pew's research to the college setting and found that student journalists are more likely to self-censor that their commercial counterparts, but self-censorship is less likely to occur at public universities (Bickham and Shin 2010). This is largely due to more clear expectations about the roles and responsibilities of collegiate publications at public schools. Bickham and Shin (2010) concluded that "institutional involvement made the private institutions more susceptible to being held liable for content that appeared in the student newspaper." Therefore, student journalists at private institutions are often unsure about the content that they are "allowed" to publish, and therefore are more likely to avoid stories that have the potential to upset administration and threaten their autonomy altogether. Self-censorship is an issue at publications of all levels, but is particularly prevalent at private universities where legal protections are thin.

Administrative influence also contributes to self-censorship, regardless of the administration's intentions. Shaniece Bickham and Jae-Hwa Shin of the Southwest Education Council for Journalism and Mass Communication conducted a study examining whether organizational influences, such as newspaper advisers and college administrations, have an impact on the news content of college newspapers. The researchers surveyed student editors, faculty advisers, and academic affairs administrators of college newspapers regarding their perceptions of institutional influence on the content of the student publication at their university. The survey found that editors' perceptions of administrative opinions of their work made them more likely to self-censor. The results also indicated that student editors perceive censorship to have a much more significant impact on the content of the student newspaper than the faculty or

administration believed. Additionally, the surveys completed by student editors indicated that private institutions are more vulnerable to student self-censorship than public institutions ("Southwest Education Council for Journalism and Mass Communication: Organizational Influences on Student Newspapers: A Survey of Newspapers of ACEJMC Programs" 2014).

A similar study quantified self-censorship by gauging the tendency for college newspapers to resist controversy. The study surveyed college media advisers and editors across the country regarding their willingness to publish articles on a range of topics that could be perceived to be controversial, including sex, substance abuse, and criticism related to the educational institution. The results suggests that student editors are likely to self-censor with more severity than their advisers would recommend, refraining from printing some content because it could put the publication under scrutiny. The study proposes that perceptual bias theories "have long demonstrated that individuals exaggerate the way in which a nebulous group of others feels in regard to a controversial topic" (Filak 2012). The third-person effect, the phenomenon where individual consumers of mass media believe that they are less affected by media influence than other consumers, is cited as the primary reason why student journalists feel that their work will be scrutinized and as a result, self-censor. The study suggests that college students are more vulnerable to this bias, putting journalistic integrity at risk. This study contributes to the dialogue in the journalism industry surrounding the extent to which student newspaper staffs are limited by their dual roles as both students and editors, and whether this role limits their willingness to publish controversial yet potentially important content. If student newspapers are susceptible to self-censorship to a greater extent than commercial newspapers, then it is unlikely that college reporters will be able to match their professional counterparts in terms of depth and scope of news coverage.

Self-censorship is a significant barrier to the success of college newspapers in filling the civic role of commercial publications. The potential for concentrated pressure to self-censor is intensified by both the context of student newspapers in an academic setting and the college newspaper staff's inevitable lack of experience in dealing with such pressures. This self-censorship, while it may be inadvertent on the part of the student reporter, interferes with journalistic integrity and the ability for school newspapers to fill the role of professional papers that do not face the same structural influences. Further, student newspapers' credibility is impacted by their readership's perceptions of organizational censorship. A 2009 study compared the perceived credibility of community newspapers to that of the student newspaper at the University of Florida. While the results of the study show that, overall, the students did not perceive their local papers to be more credible than their student papers, the study suggested that these differences are largely due to advertisements in commercial papers, not the credibility of the content itself (Bodle 1996). As a whole, the study showed that student newspapers are perceived to be credible by student readers, but the community readers that college newspapers would potentially be including in their readership do not share that perception (Bodle 1996).

Direct institutional censorship as a result of vaguely defined First Amendment rights for college publications has proven to have severe consequences, compounding the influence of self-censorship on these publications' ability to maintain free presses. St. Louis University's student newspaper, the *University Press*, published articles that were critical of the university's administration, particularly Reverend Lawrence Biondi. In response to criticism of administrative decisions, Biondi threatened to cut funding to the campus newspaper. Ultimately, Biondi eliminated stipends to student editors and otherwise indirectly impeded the college newspaper's ability to publish. Kathy Carl, who wrote a 2007 article about censorship at the

University Press, notes that at private colleges, administrative discretion is essentially the only factor preventing the presses from stopping on any given day (Carl 2007). Ultimately, First Amendment laws carry no weight at private colleges. As proven at Young Harris College and St. Louis University, private college newspapers are not guaranteed the same rights as their public and commercial counterparts, heightening the challenge of these newspapers in filling the role of civic forums.

Laws protecting student journalists from censorship are vague and vulnerable to undemocratic interpretation. The challenge of maintaining a free press at the college level is enhanced by the fact that the administration is not necessarily in favor of protecting their student press, particularly when reporting conflicts with the interests of the institution. A study published in *Journalism Quarterly* measured the extent to which college newspaper advisers favored an autonomous paper, even when it jeopardized the school's image. Ultimately, it is in the adviser's best interest as a professional to keep the institution's best interest in mind, as that adviser is an employee of that institution. The results of the study reflected this bias, but still ensured that college journalism professors understand what is at stake when free press at any level is sacrificed (Ryan and Martinson 1986). The majority of college newspaper advisers did reject institutional censorship in favor of a free student press; 94% of respondents to the study's survey indicated that a campus newspaper should publish a story even if it might embarrass its affiliated institution, as long as the reporting is accurate (Ryan and Martinson 1986). However, 17% of college newspaper adviser respondents said that "it is more important for a college or university to be protected from potentially damaging articles than for a student publication to be control-free" (Ryan and Martinson 1986). Without the full support of either the law or the administration

organizing the newspaper, avoiding censorship to the extent that is necessary to serve as democratic forums is extremely challenging for college publications.

Censorship, on the institutional and individual levels, is a serious concern for college newspapers that interferes with their ability to assume some of the responsibility for news coverage that once fell strictly under the jurisdiction of commercial media organizations. Student newspapers are inherently vulnerable to censorship in a way that commercial papers are not simply because they belong to an institution with priorities that have the potential to conflict with the goals of good journalism. Most institutions are motivated by profits, and maintaining a positive image is a significant contributing factor in bringing in students, and therefore revenue. In the way that any organization naturally works to avoid bad press, universities operate with this same goal. This difference in institutional affiliation between commercial newspapers and those affiliated with a university makes a significant difference when it comes to censorship. Without the legal protections afforded to commercial newspapers, it has proven difficult for college publications to fend off censorship while still printing a paper at all, as in the case of Young Harris College. Further, the awareness of institutional influence and the tendency to have at least some degree of loyalty to the institution that a college newspaper is intended to be critical of leads to self-censorship that impedes the creation of a true democratic forum. Unless college newspapers can overcome these censorship barriers, they will remain structurally incapable of filling the role of commercial newspapers in a democratically productive way.

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Chapter 2: Local student media and the digital transition dialogue

Digital practices in the journalism industry have shifted dramatically in response to the demands of a readership that accesses an increasing amount of information online and instantaneously. To accommodate the needs of the modern news consumer, the industry has turned to social media. Commercial newspapers are taking advantage of social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook platforms, to direct users to advertising-supported or paywall-backed content (Franklin 2014). However, college newspapers have integrated social media into their practices in vastly different capacities, employing a variety of strategies to reach their audiences. Without the profit motivation that drives the decisions made by commercial publications, college newspapers have adapted to social media to different ends. The shift to social media has permanently altered the journalism landscape in a way that has led many media scholars to be both critical of and deeply concerned for the future of journalistic integrity. College newspapers represent these changes in ways that have been largely unevaluated, yet they are likely to have significant implications on how the journalism industry continues to adjust to the digital revolution.

The varying approaches to social media integration at college newspapers emphasize the distinct functions that these platforms can assume. Social media has proven to be an invaluable site of information exchange, where journalists can both research and report breaking news, direct readers to their publications' website, and crowdsource information from their network of followers (Harner 2011). However, as college newspapers are not generally motivated by profits in the same ways as their commercial counterparts, they have the flexibility to use social media in different ways that reflect the social media activity of their readership.

The nature of the technology has proven to have an impact on how social media is used. One of the dominant differences between social and traditional media is the perceived credibility content, which has been shown to have an influence on the type of information that is published on social media. According to Seth C. Lewis' study, "Where Young Adults Intend to Get News in Five Years," college students believe that social media is an entertainment-oriented platform and while they are largely fluent in its usage, the college student demographic finds print journalism to be more a more credible source of information (Lewis 2008). Further, Edson C. Tandoc's study "The Roles of the Game: The Influence of News Consumption Patterns on the Role Conceptions of Journalism Students," indicates that students value print newspapers for their analysis and interpretative roles (Tandoc 2014). This research examines the ways that journalism students perceive the role of news outlets and how these perceptions are reflected in their patterns of news consumption. The results of a survey of more than 350 college students indicate that journalism students identified the function of news outlets as interpreters of current events as their most important role. However, both studies suggest that the brevity of social media messages limits their ability to analyze news in a significant way, therefore limiting college students' interest in taking the medium seriously as a news platform (Tandoc 2014).

This sentiment is heightened by the fact that college students are known to be some of the most active social media users. In general, the perceived credibility of traditional news media has been in decline since the early 1990s (Jurkowitz 2013). While it seems like this tendency might encourage students to be engaged in social media in all capacities, research has suggested that this is not the case. According to two WHYY media critics, college students are successful in using social media, but still rely on traditional media as the authority on accurate reporting (Harner and Capeloto 2011). They suggest that students do not put full faith in the credibility of

online news, even if it is accessed through a credible source, just because it is not in print. Because of this distinction, college students are not learning to use their social media skills to distribute and access news; rather, they use the medium primarily for its entertainment value.

As with commercial newspapers, social media has impacted the role of college newspapers in their communities. The ways in which college communities engage with their student newspaper has been affected by two-way media that allow consumers to interact with news. Student participation in social media as a news platform can be particularly beneficial in an educational setting. Social media skills are becoming increasingly marketable for college students as these platforms have come to dominate communication in most industries. College newspapers afford students the opportunity to enhance their familiarity with social media in a formal capacity, beyond the entertainment purposes that many users are accustomed (Selsberg 2011).

However, there is some tension between the value of teaching social and traditional media in the classroom. Some critics believe that more emphasis should be placed on traditional journalism instruction, to establish a foundation of journalistic principles before the more modern approach is introduced (Randall 2014). According to Randall, a web editor by trade and the former editor of *The Yale Daily News,* the college newsroom often reflects this prioritization. "Young editors are too busy learning the basics of newspaper journalism to overthrow the status quo," Randall, said. "Handed the reins to an entire publication, they tend to closely follow the advice of those who came just before them." This tendency to shy away from the demanding job of using social media could be enhanced in the college setting, largely because fewer concrete rules have been established in the field. This makes it more difficult for college students to navigate the social media sphere while also learning the foundational rules of journalism.

Further, the results of the Tandoc's study indicated that "social media platforms are more efficient in reaching young people the soonest, because this demographic is always connected to social media," and that for this reason, it is critical to understand how to best communicate information in an effective, consolidated manner (Tandoc 2014). This puts a great deal of pressure on college students to strike the delicate balance between efficient social media use, which demands quick, compact reporting, with their role as interpreters of news. This challenge is faced by all journalists to some extent, but is a particular concern for college newspapers since their readership is comprised largely of a demographic that maintains those expectations (Tandoc 2014). This heightens the challenge that college students face, and makes it more difficult to fulfill their roles as communicators and analysts of news.

The barriers to success in the digital age faced by college publications reflect their unique structure and organization. The rapid turnover of student editors means that students have to learn about journalism, the responsibilities of their particular paper, and gain experience in the course of four years maximum. Further, the advantages of social media as a news platform are not necessarily conducive to the college journalists' lifestyle. Social media offers immediacy of information communication. This is advantageous for professional journalists whose professional lives are dedicated to news; however, student journalists must balance the demands of their other obligations. For this reason, social media can be pushed to the backburner as students focus on producing a daily or weekly product, without the additional hassle of integrating deadline-free social media practices. College publications are also struggling to capture the attention of their audiences among the innumerable other outlets on social media; it is hard for news outlets to compete with the sexier, more entertaining posts on social media. While college newspapers are integrating social media into the structure of their publications, they face a number of unique

challenges that prevent these platforms from working to their advantage to the extent that may be possible in the future. The structure and news routines of many college newspapers make it difficult for these publications to shift to an online-oriented organization, but their varied approaches to adapting to social media elucidate the progress of college newspapers in correlation with the digital revolution. Interviews with editors of local college newspapers suggest that these publications are integrating social media in ways that are indicative of the advantages and limitations of college media in general.

Approach to interviews

Without the same structure and organization as commercial news publications, the editorial staffs of college newspapers are left to decide how to make social media usage fit in their news routines and serve their broader goals as a news source. There is substantial variety in the type and application of social media-based journalism among college newspapers. From the platforms used to the specific students who are responsible for generating content, schools have taken a variety of approaches to social media integration. In order to identify trends in social media usage among college newspapers, I interviewed college newspaper editors from a diverse sample of colleges and universities in Pennsylvania. The goal was to gather anecdotal evidence about the ways that college newspapers are using social media, how social media is integrated into the reporting process, and the challenges that these publications face in engaging their readership with content on these platforms. These interviews were by no means exhaustive or a representative sample of all college newspapers. However, the methods employed in this research intend to focus on a few publications and editors that are tightly connected to social media and provide insight into how engagement with social media is unfolding on a micro level.

Among the topics discussed during the interviews were general social media practices, the content production process, and the social media news routine. These questions have allowed me to establish the college newspaper's approach to social media in terms of specific platform use and prioritization. To get a better sense of how college newspaper's social media activity has evolved, I also asked about historical knowledge of social media use. Editors were often able to consult advisers and newspaper archives to provide me with information regarding when social media usage was integrated into the news process and how it has changed over the course of the past decade. I also asked about interactivity with readership on social media platforms to better understand the extent to which audiences are engaging with social media messaging. These questions generally focused on how editors respond, or chose not to respond, to comments and questions posted to their social media websites. Further, I asked editors about issues of censorship; particularly I wanted to know if commenting features on these sites were monitored and if so, how and when the decision is made to remove comments. In addition, I asked about systems of collecting data about social media usage. I was looking to understand whether college newspapers gather these metrics and if so, how they implement their findings in their general social media strategy.

I concluded the interviews by asking broad, forward-thinking questions about the role of social media at college newspapers. For example, I asked for insight regarding the discussions taking place about how to better engage readership with social media and the editor's assessment of their newspaper's success in connecting to their readers. Further, I asked about the newspaper's plans for the future of its social media sites and how the editor thought these sites could be used more effectively to accomplish their specific news goals.

Interviews with representatives from college publications served as valuable complements to my academic research about the changes at college newspapers. The academic sources offered a foundational understanding of general shifts in the journalism industry and the trends in how college newspapers have responded to them, but the interviews provided insight into how these theories play out in actual college newsrooms. By combining these two methods of research, it is possible to maximize the application value of college newspaper research. A better understanding of how college publications are adapting to social media contextualizes the themes proposed by academic research, and elucidates the ways that these connections can be mutually beneficial to their improvement; the research has the capacity to inform the newsroom, while insight into the newsroom can confirm the practical application of the research.

To this end, I contacted editors-in-chief from more than a dozen universities in Pennsylvania. Seven editors-in-chief responded to the interview request, and three followed through with the scheduling and interviewing process. I interviewed primarily editors-in-chief, but was also directed to advisers, marketing editors, and web editors as the strongest sources of information regarding social media use at a particular university. Prior to interviewing the editors, I visited their web and social media pages. I noted the general nature of the content (i.e. links to stories published online or in the newspaper, pictures, original content, polls, questions posed to readers, etc.). In particular, I identified content that directed viewers to websites other than the publication's own. Further, I observed the frequency and nature of readership engagement, which consisted of retweeting, commenting, reposting, or "favoriting," depending on the platform, to get a sense of the extent to which that newspaper's audience was interacting with social media content. To the extent possible for each publication, I researched the history of their online presence and noted how it has evolved in the past decade.

During 30-45 minute interviews, I offered editors an overview of my research and the ways that interviews with editors would contribute to the goal of exploring how college newspapers have adapted to social media in a rapidly evolving media landscape. I provided some context for this particular subset of my research; specifically, I gave the interviewee a brief overview of how my previous research has shown that college newspapers have adapted to the changes in the journalism industry more broadly. I then asked about the editor's specific role at their college newspaper and what their social media-related responsibilities consisted of in a general sense, as well as the specific practices and policies implements at their particular publication. These interviews allowed me to gain insight into the ways that a variety of school newspapers function and what the similarities and differences between them indicate about how these publications are adapting to the rapidly shifting journalism environment.

Advantages of prioritizing digital

The extent to which this sample of college newspapers prioritizes digital journalism is reflected in their social media and online news routines. All of the editors interviewed emphasized the value of web content in enabling them to achieve their common goal of providing their readerships with the most current, updated news available. Similar to the pursuit of "informed communities" proposed by the Knight Commission for the Information Needs of Community in Democracy, these publications each directed their newsrooms in a way that puts the web first ("Informing Communities"2014). Each publication included in the interviews managed at least one Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram account; one publication had a LinkedIn account in addition. The editors communicated that these accounts were critical in their news process because they are the most effective tools in directing their readership to their website, which they mutually agreed is their primary goal. The social media accounts of Franklin &

Marshall College epitomize this importance. According to editor of Franklin & Marshall's independent student newspaper Abby Quint, the publication went online-only in the fall of 2014. Quint explained that Twitter activity in particular reminds readers to check the publication's website, despite the fact that there is no print edition to physically pick up. "We have a deal with the school where the newspaper goes out to every person at the school, but people tend to ignore emails. When the paper was physically circulated, they had much more of a chance to pick it up and talk about it," Quint explained. "Social media helps us drive more readers to our content."

The editor of Temple University's *The Temple News* Avery Maerher also identified the primary function of social media to be its usefulness in encouraging readers to visit the newspaper's website. Maerher said that around half of the publication's website traffic comes from social media. The editor of Shippensburg University's *The Slate*, Ana Guenther, agreed. "We don't know exactly how much traffic we get from social media specifically, but much of it is. We're trying to promote our online presence more by ramping up our social media," Guenther said. This aligns with recent research that indicates that college students are among the most active social media users. According to the study, 89% of college-aged students had at least one personal social media account (Street et al. 2014). College publications appear to be recognizing the needs of their demographic and employing it to connect their readers with content.

This prioritization is an indication that college newspapers may be up for the challenge of adapting to the age of digital journalism in ways that are conducive to meeting the information needs of communities, which the Knight Commission defines as "places where the information ecology meets people's personal and civic information needs" ("Information Stories Tell of Personal Stakes in Healthy Info Communities 2013). The interviewees offered examples of innovative uses of social media in their efforts to ameliorate their connectivity with their

readership and their ability to accurately report news. For example, *The Temple News* uses social

media to live tweet events. Maerher said:

> We will see a lot of retweets and interactions when we have reporters live tweeting. For
>
> example, if you're the only reporter at a game, they'll follow that reporter. There was an
>
> event last year where a student barricaded himself in his house and I believe that the
>
> entire block was closed off but our news editor was tweeting it throughout the day and we
>
> gained so many followers from that, like at least 200 within the day. A few other news
>
> organizations like the *Inquirer* were tweeting about it, but inaccurately. They had to take
>
> their tweets back. People really started going to us to get that news. It's definitely about
>
> interacting with our readership.

Further, the editors expressed that they value social media for its ability to easily keep

readers updated as news breaks or a story needs to be updated. Quint said that *The College*

Reporter's Instagram account, for example, is used to post pictures of news and events

happening around campus more spontaneously than is possible with traditional media. This

allows them to post new content before a formal story can be written. *The Temple News* employs

a similar strategy with their Twitter account. Maerher explained that the relationship between

Twitter followers and the publication is enhanced when the readers feel that they can rely on the

newspaper for breaking news. For example, when the Bill Cosby scandal broke in the fall of

2013, *The Temple News* tweeted updates as they came in. This allowed them to connect their

readers with information, but ensure that the editors had sufficient time to verify details before

publishing an entire story. *The Slate* also prioritizes developing reader relations via social media.

Guenther explained that the newspaper, "tries to tweet and post on Facebook in a way similar to

the way that a professional news organization would. We post funny pictures of us on production

night when we're going crazy; we try to keep it light and relatable." *The College Reporter* uses their Twitter account to retweet major, relevant stories from larger news organizations in order to provide readers with stories that might interest them but are outside of the scope of the publication's coverage. These social media strategies simulate the characteristics of successful reader-publication relations at commercial newspapers. In "The Reconstruction of American Journalism," Leonard Downie and Michael Schudson characterize this success as news outlets and news consumers "sharing personal observations, activities, and views in words, photographs, and videos… They feed off each other's information and commentary, and they fact-check each other. They share audiences, and they mimic each other through evolving digital journalistic innovation" (Downie and Schudson 2009). This relationship, which is evident in many commercial newsrooms, can serve as a metric against which the success of college media can be compared.

Another constant among the college newspaper editors interviewed was their general approach to directing traffic to their respective websites. Each newspaper relied on tweet-scheduling applications, such as Hoot Suite and Tweet Deck, to publicize stories from the current week's print edition. Quint explained that at *The College Reporter,* tweets are scheduled for the week as soon as the headlines for stories are written. The tweets contain the stories' headlines and occasionally, the decks. This way the content is already copy edited and approved by the rest of the editorial board before it is posted on social media. This social media posting process was nearly identical at the other publications represented, as well. Guenther explained that this strategy is effective because it ensures that the newspaper's social media accounts are active each day, maintaining their online presence. In addition, at both *The College Reporter* and *The Slate,*

each member of the editorial staff has access to the social media accounts. Hence, they can post spontaneously when they see something on campus that should be reported on.

Each of the publications represented defined themselves as "editorially independent." However, there was some variety in the form that their independence takes. The variations in independence are critical, as they are an indication of the extent to which these college publications are susceptible to institutional or self-censorship. In general, the bounds of college newspapers' independence are vaguely defined. This ambiguity is most apparent at *The Slate*. The newspaper is undergoing a campaign to more clearly define its role within the university community. The newspaper, in conjunction with the other media groups on campus, formed a media advisory board. While Guenther said that *The Slate* is Shippensburg's "recognized, editorially independent newspaper," it is considered a club by the university's student senate and received its funds based on this status. The newspaper is also supported by a faculty adviser, who is a tenured professor in the journalism department. Similarly, *The Temple News* defines itself as editorially independent, but is also advised by a member of Temple University's faculty and receives its funding from the school. Quint said that *The College Reporter* is advised by a staff member of the college, as well. However, the newspaper is not financially supported by the school, and therefore "has been forced to become online-only," Quint said.

The question of true editorial independence of college newspapers that are affiliated and financially supported by universities has been contested in literature (Bickham and Shin 2010). As Shippensburg University is a publically funded institution, its student newspaper is legally protected by the First Amendment. The publication should have legal protection from censorship and therefore, should not need to consider the university's interests when making decisions about the editorial direction of the newspaper. However, it is unlikely that editors at *The Slate* can truly

discern their interests from the influence of the university. While the university cannot directly

censor the student press, it is ultimately controlling the amount of funding that they receive,

therefore the extent to which they can expand and experiment. According to a study conducted

by Shaniece Bickham and Jae-Hwa Shin (2010), student media is inevitably vulnerable to

institutional influence. Regardless of the administration's intentions, students are aware that the

administration's perception of their news organization has some bearing on its success

("Organizational Influences on Student Newspapers: A Survey of Newspapers of ACEJMC

Programs" 2014). The same principle applies to social media practices at all universities. While

each institution represented in the interviews communicated that their publications are

independent from the school, they are each advised by a faculty or staff member who invariably

has a stake in whether the college perceives the publication's online presence favorably.

Along the same lines, Quint explained that *The College Reporter* is editorially

independent from the school. However, the production team "uses campus Wi-Fi, a free office

on campus and an adviser from the media relations team." Similarly, *The Temple News* has a

faculty adviser, who is an adjunct professor and student media director employed by the

university. "Our adviser doesn't really have too much to do with social media unless he sees

something that might be incorrect or he thinks might need work," Maerher explained. "For

example, we had a business meeting and he told us that he wanted to see more people using the

Instagram account. He'll chime in with details like that." The advisers to these newspapers may

not be directly, or even intentionally, representing the interests of the affiliated university.

However, it is in their best interest to, at the very least, consider what would be best for the

college that employs them. A 2000 Pew Research study indicated that nearly 30% of

professional journalists have "sometimes" avoided a story that would harm the reputation of their

organization, and 23% self-censored because of the influence of advertisers (Street et al. 2000).

A 2010 study applied Pew's research to the college setting and found that student journalists are

more likely to self-censor that their commercial counterparts, but self-censorship is less likely to

occur at public universities (Bickham and Shin 2010). The presence of advisers and the power of

institutions to withhold the necessary funds to succeed and grow suggest that these publications

may not have the complete editorial independence that they believe they do.

Despite the varying extents to which institutions and advisers influence each of the

publications represented, the editors conveyed that they have complete control over the social

media news production process. Quint said that her adviser has, "no real role in social media."

Maerher also said that their adviser did not have a direct role in social media, and was

responsible only for general editorial suggestions. The faculty adviser at *The Slate* is not directly

involved in social media, according to Guenther, but is fairly heavily involved in the production

process in general. "Our faculty adviser is a tenured professor in the journalism department,"

Guenther said. "He puts in just as many hours as we do. Sometimes, he is there until 2 a.m. on

production night with us. He really helps us out a lot. He takes a hands-off approach but

monitors it and hopes that we make the right decision." While Shippensburg should

hypothetically be the most editorially independent because of its public school status, it seems to

have the most adviser involvement and the most difficulty securing consistent funding.

The student editors each confirmed that they have control over their social media policies

and take advantage of social media's interactive capabilities to promote their news organizations.

Each of the editors said that the commenting features on their social media accounts are

activated, promoting interaction between readers and editors. However, Quint explained that

while the commenting feature is enabled on the newspaper's social media accounts, it is disabled

on its website. Quint said that at *The College Reporter*, "We've never had a major problem with inappropriate comments. Comments are disabled on the website because of spam comments, but not because of students or alumni." *The Temple News* enables readers to comment and engage with the publication's social media platforms. Maerher said that, "There's a lot of re-tweeting and there's a lot of people leaving comments, whether they like something or they don't. A lot of the strong reactions come when we're posting our opinion pieces because obviously if someone disagrees with the opinion being stated, they'll go off." At *The Slate*, Guenther said that reader interaction is encouraged, but a weak point in their social media practices. "I really think it fluctuates depending on what we're writing about," Guenther said. "Tuition is a hot topic. When people write about that, it gets a lot of attention. Sometimes it's good, other times its bad but I would definitely say that there's room for improvement."

These patterns of promoting reader engagement enhance these publications' ability to foster the type of relationship with their readership that is necessary for their civic success. According to the Knight Commission, local newspaper must be aware of the type of information that their readership needs and how they access that information ("Executive Summary: Knight Commission" 2013). Social media is an effective means of connecting a readership that is comprised primarily by college students to the information that they need to have in order to make informed decisions. *The Temple News* exemplifies the success of reader engagement through social media:

> Something I've been noticing in terms of people interacting with us lately is that a lot of
> times, increasingly so, we'll see some of our followers tag us in posts. They'll be
> tweeting about something happening on campus or something else, and we see it and do a

story on it. They often tag us with the hope that we'll do something on it, which is a

really beneficial aspect of social media that we don't always think about.

The Knight Commission posits that reader-editor interactions like these are critical in the success

of news organizations as facilitators of democracy. According to the Knight Commission's

mission statement, "this means people have the news and information they need to take

advantage of life's opportunities for themselves and their families. They need information to

participate fully in our system of self-government, to stand up and be heard" ("Executive

Summary: KnightComm" 2013). Successful reader engagement is when readers feel that they

can get the information they need to inform their decisions; *The Temple News* has exemplified

that they are willing to meet their readers halfway in connecting them to valuable, informative

news and information.

The co-construction of news reporting by readers and college newspaper, facilitated by

social media, suggests that these platforms may be changing the democratic function of news

organizations on a larger scale. In addition to connecting readers to information that helps to

inform their decisions, social media curates dialogue between citizens by providing a forum in

which information on current events can be presented and discussed. In their study "Social

Media Use for News and Individuals' Social Capital, Civic Engagement and Political

Participation," Zuniga, Jung, and Valenzuela conclude that social media activism enhances

citizens' ability to participate in democracy and through the exchanges of information that

happen on these sites, heighten their civic and democratic participatory behaviors (Zúñiga, Jung,

and Valenzuela 2012). As student journalists begin to facilitate these conversations, as Maerher

describes at *The Temple News*, it suggests that college publications may be able to transition to a

greater, newly-defined civic role as commercial publications work to do the same.

While it is clear that college journalists have social media strategy on their radar, it is debatable whether these publications are maximizing the potential benefits of these platforms to promote their content and connect readers with information quickly and efficiently. Boston Magazine journalist and media critic Eric Randall speculates that, "…despite being produced and read by young, smart students living at the cutting edge of technological trends, [college newspapers] have long been surprisingly conservative institutions" and that "young editors are too busy learning the basics of newspaper journalism to overthrow the status quo" when it comes to new media practices (Randall 2014).

The editors interviewed confirmed this perspective to some extent, particularly when it comes to taking advantage of analytic metrics tools offered by most social media platforms. Twitter, Facebook, and Wordpress, among many others, offer users free tools that enable them to track website activity, ranging from clicks per day to an estimate of the number of people reached by a specific post. The editors interviewed were aware of these tools, but were generally unfamiliar with their function and how their information can be employed. For example, in regards to metrics, Quint said that, "We talk about it a lot, but we haven't necessarily figured out the best way to use it yet." Maerher from *The Temple News* expressed a similar sentiment: he is aware that the tools to track how many people a post have reached are available, but they, "don't really keep track of too actively, but will take a look every once in a while." Of *The Slate*, Guenther said:

> We do use metrics, but to be honest, we don't utilize them as much as we could. We're
> going to have to sit down and figure out how we can promote ourselves better to the
> campus and to the public and we definitely could look at them and see if we have more

shares or less views to help us out. I don't think that we use them to their full potential right now.

Metrics are a simple way of assessing the performance of a news organization's social media activity. These are basic resources employed by most commercial news and professional organizations to gauge social media success and the lack of attention from college editors is an indication that social media is not the priority at their publications. Quint confirmed this attitude at *The College Reporter:*

> We found that social media actually doesn't advance our cause very well. We've had more success when real people, like accounts that belong to individuals and not the paper, posts an article saying, 'look this is my event' or 'this is my play' that seems to get a lot of traction. I wish that social media had more of an impact on our organization but as of now, it really doesn't. It just becomes noise after a while.

In their explanation of student journalists' hesitation to embrace social media platforms as legitimate sources of information, Columbia University journalists and professors Alexa Capeloto and Devin Harner (2011) recalled:

> When our recent crop of digital journalism students were asked to create their own journalistic blogs and market their content through social media, they were uncomfortable. Although they habitually post to Facebook, the thought of actually reporting on a topic and putting their work into the public domain as journalism, versus a personal narrative of candid pictures and random Friday night ephemera, was scary.

While Capeloto and Harner stress the importance of social media education for journalism students, the interviews indicate that there is a nearly complete lack of this type of

training available to college newspaper staffs. There is a need for social media education that is not being met, while the demand for journalistic social media skills in both the job market and among readers is steadily increasing. In conjunction with their uncertainty as to how to implement the tools of professional social media usage, such as metrics, the editors conveyed that there is minimal social media-specific training available at their academic institutions. Maerher explained that at *The Temple News*, there is, "no particular training. We go over social media during orientation and we have a section for it in our staff handbook, but we didn't have a workshop or anything specific. Our marketing manager will send us emails telling us to do certain things, but that's about it in terms of any sort of instruction." *The Slate*'s social media training is similarly structured, and based primarily on the student's online intuition: "The only real guidance we have is our adviser stressing that when you post something about *The Slate* on your personal social media site or on the paper's, you're representing the newspaper as a whole. There are no classes on social media specifically but it's definitely reiterated that when editors post, that affects us all in some way potentially. That's really it for training." Quint and *The College Reporter* are in a unique situation. Franklin & Marshall College does not offer any communications major at all; any training must be organized by the editors.

Further, none of the editors interviewed had specific visions for social media at their publications in the future. They each emphasized that they wanted their social media presence to "improve" or "expand," but were generally vague on the details in accomplishing this goal. For example, Quint said that *The College Reporter* "does not have any social media plans in particular." The one plan she did mention was to hire a social media manager to the publication's editorial staff. However, Quint said that, "we get a lot of interest but to be honest, we haven't followed through with choosing one and it falls to the bottom of the priority list." Guenther

communicated a similar message about the future of social media at *The Slate*. "The only real

plan is to use social media more," Guenther said. "As of right now, it's mainly just for our PR

and that's what we need. Right now, we're just looking at ways to implement it better I would

say." Maerher had a slightly more specific goal for *The Temple News'* social media platforms:

"We have no particular plans. Whoever is editor in chief next year might. I think, like I said,

continuing to push a lot of tweeting, making our Twitter account visible to everyone is a good

general goal," Maerher explained. "I would like to see us gain more followers on Instagram and

Facebook. I would like to push the next editor in chief to really boost our presence on Facebook

so that we really have more followers than we currently do and are more in line with where we

are on Twitter."

While it is worthwhile to pursue "better" social media strategies, the lack of a specific

plan reflects the general hesitancy in college media to embrace social media as a platform to

communicate real, hard-hitting news and information. As Bob Franklin explains in his

introductory essay, "The Future of Journalism," the ways that digital media and the future of the

journalism will evolve together are uncertain. However, Franklin posits that it is critical for the

industry to adapt to the shift toward an online news emphasis. This is the structure taken on by

an increasing number of commercial newspapers (Franklin 2014). If student journalists are to be

adequately prepared for careers in professional journalism, these students and their professors

must, "prepare our students to be media producers and consumers in the 21st century," according

to Capeloto and Harner (2011). The general lack of energy expended on social media strategy at

these publications may represent an under emphasis on these platforms as legitimate sources for

the development of applicable journalism skills. Social media is often pushed to the back burner,

likely because it is not prioritized in traditional journalism education that seems to be outlasting the medium itself.

Conclusions

While the sample of college newspapers included in this research is by no means representative of the entire population of college publications, their diversity in terms of the size of their affiliated institutions, sources of funding, and organization offers valuable insight into the status and function of college newspapers. Their approaches to social media and the digital revolution reflect the varying states of college media and the ways that these publications are preparing themselves for a digitally-drive future. Despite the myriad of divergent perspectives regarding how to best handle social media and online practices, the editors interviewed were all in agreement about the general importance of college newspapers to a student journalist's college experience. "I think that at the college level, students need a forum to talk about issues that matter. That's something really special that college newspapers do," Quint said. "Whether it's something that happened on campus or issues that come out of the administration, it's important to provide people with the opportunity to have a voice and to get the information they need."

Each editor communicated in their interviews that the primary impediment to the success of their social media is reflective of a phenomenon that is also apparent in the literature: a lack of student social media engagement when it comes to content beyond the purely social. Maerher said that one of the biggest challenges he faces in terms of his publication's social media is getting others on board. "We spend a lot of time trying to get people to share more stories because a lot of times when readers or members of the staff share stories on their own personal social media accounts, we've found that there's a lot of potential for stories to really take off and

the view counts increase dramatically." Quint mirrored this sentiment, saying that, "There's this attitude at F & M that emails don't really matter. We find that people get a lot of emails and just ignore them so email. Even our social media aren't really connecting readers the way that we want them to. We need to find a new way of getting new media on the forefront."

Their frustrations in convincing students to integrate news consumption into their social media habits are recognized by journalism scholars. In a study of over 300 college students, Corey Armstrong and Steve Collins (2009) examine the perceived credibility of college and community newspapers by their readerships. The results of the study suggest that there is a correlation between perceived credibility of college newspapers and the media through which news is accessed; print sources are consistently viewed as being more credible They conclude that print journalism is less relied upon by college students and social media is more frequently accessed, yet perceived as less credible (Armstrong & Collins 2009). Directing college students to social media platforms is not the issue; the problem is encouraging them to engage with news content and take it seriously.

The future of digital media at college newspapers is uncertain. In some cases, its progression has mirrored that of commercial newspapers. In other ways, it has either lagged behind or sped ahead of its commercial counterparts. Despite these inconsistencies, college newspapers have proven to be successful sites for experimentation in journalism. Students are taking advantage of the opportunity to try new methods of channeling information to readers. Their long-term success is likely dependent on students' ability to both acquire the foundational journalism skills they need, as well as look ahead to the progressive future of the industry.

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Chapter 3: Applications for *The Grizzly*

Introduction

As is the case with most newspapers, some of the content published in *The Grizzly* is not always well-received. Occasionally, there is pushback from sources or readers disputing the angle of a story or the implications of a quote. On a production night midway through the spring semester of 2015, the news editor was finishing the layout of her section when she received an email from the campus safety office whom a student reporter had interviewed for the cover story about a theft on campus. The email bluntly stated that *The Grizzly* did not have permission to publish the officer's quotes and demanded that the story not run until he reviewed it. The staff gathered around the email, stumped. Based on everything we learned in our communications classes, we had every right to publish the article. The reporter had his notes from the interview, the source was aware that he was participating in an interview, and all the facts were checked. While we ultimately decided to run the article, the incident sparked questions about the role of *The Grizzly* on campus and its goals as a student publication. Were we obligated to concede to the source's requests because he was in a position of power at the college? Would there be future consequences if we ignored his demands? What did either of these decisions mean about *The Grizzly's* ability to maintain editorial independence and report news in a fair and balanced manner?

This academic year, much of my time has been devoted to the study and practice of college journalism. In addition to serving as the editor-in-chief of *The Grizzly*, my independent research has focused on the ways that college newspapers have responded to the changes in the journalism industry. From this perspective, I have studied the scholarly research pertaining to my subject and identified ways that it applies to college journalism in practice. Further, I analyzed

the ways that college journalism is prepared for a digitally-driven future. By highlighting the parallels between college and commercial journalism, I was able to note potential barriers to the success of college publications as they face the possibility of assuming the role of their commercial counterparts. To better understand college newspapers' capacity to adapt to the digital revolution, I interviewed a sample of college newspaper editors from across the region. These in-depth interviews allowed me to gain an acute understanding of how debates in academic research in the field play out in actual college news organizations and provided me with invaluable insight into the different ways that college newspapers have adapted to the push for an increased social media presence.

In conjunction with my academic pursuits, I have served as editor-in-chief of my own college newspaper, *The Grizzly*, since August 2014. This experience adds another dimension to my research: my role as editor-in-chief allows me to identify connections between the interviews I conducted with other editors of college newspapers, academia, and my personal experience and apply these resources to my own practices in college journalism. As editor-in-chief, I have a thorough understanding of the function of my own college newspaper, a perspective which has proven to be critical in my ability to assess the state of college journalism at large. The insight I have gained while serving as editor-in-chief has guided my research, and helped me to pinpoint the areas of the field that could contribute most significantly to my research.

I will use this chapter as an opportunity to bring all three of these perspectives, the academic, the interviews with other editors, and my own experience as the editor of a college newspaper, into dialogue in order to maximize the value of my own research experience and offer suggestions specifically to *The Grizzly* that could apply to any college newspaper struggling to adapt to the digital shifts in the journalism industry. My research thus far can help

clarify ways that *The Grizzly* could be improving its transition to an online and social media-focused structure. As evidenced in both my interviews with college newspaper editors and the academic research, engagement with social media is a general weakness among college publications; this is certainly the case with *The Grizzly*. Applying these findings to *The Grizzly* will help future editors of this publication to take advantage of other newspaper's best practices and implement them to improve the quality of the newspaper's online presence.

The Grizzly

The Grizzly is the student newspaper of Ursinus College. While it has been confirmed by the college's administration that the publication is independent of institutional control, *The Grizzly* is funded by the Media and Communication Studies department of the college. *The Grizzly* does not sell advertisements, thus the newspaper's entire budget is supplied by the college. *The Grizzly* is a weekly publication that serves the Ursinus College and Collegeville communities. The newspaper is delivered across campus each Thursday and is supported by an online edition that goes live when the print edition arrives on campus.

The Grizzly is led by a student editor-in-chief and a faculty adviser. The staff consists of news, features, sports, copy, online, photography and social media editors. Each editor is responsible for assigning stories to staff reporters, who are either volunteers or students enrolled in a one-credit journalism practicum course. Reporters have one week to complete interviews and a draft of their assigned article. Articles are published in the weekly print edition, as well as posted online. The social media editor is notified of the stories for the coming issue and posts on Facebook and Twitter with copy and photos linking to upcoming stories and to stories in the current issue. The social media editor, adviser, and editor-in-chief are the only editors with

access to *The Grizzly's* social media accounts. While The Grizzly has been shielded from the financial crisis in journalism due to the nature of its funding, it is still affected by many of the other shifts in the industry.

The Grizzly *and the crisis in journalism*

As commercial journalism is continually weakened by financial barriers, some media scholars have suggested college newspapers as an alternative to help achieve the democratic goals of professional publications. As the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities posits, one of the primary functions of commercial news outlets is to facilitate the communication of information that is necessary for citizens to make decisions in their everyday lives ("Informing Communities" 2014). One of the primary concerns is that local news, such as information about area elections and other municipal changes, will not reach citizens if local newspapers continue to fail (Mitchell 2014). In Chapter 1, I examined the possibilities and limitations to how well college newspapers are capable of filling this democratic role as commercial newspapers are seeking ways of remaining financially viable. In this section, I will look at the extent to which *The Grizzly* is capable of handling the responsibility of serving a greater civic role, as reflected by its adaptation to the digital changes in journalism that have marked the industry's progress.

A loss of local journalism poses the risk of citizens living in an "information vacuum," leaving readerships without access to the reporting that provides them with localized information to inform their decisions ("Information Stories Tell of Personal Stakes in Healthy Info Communities," KnightComm 2014). Collegeville, where Ursinus College is located, does not have its own news outlet that covers the area specifically and is dependent on the coverage of

surrounding areas for information. *The Grizzly* is distributed solely on Ursinus' campus; even if

the scope of its news coverage does extend to event occurring off campus, the reporting is likely

not reaching the community outside of the college. To reach this broader audience, it would be

necessary for *The Grizzly* to print more copies of the newspaper to distribute throughout the local

area, or more widely publicize its online edition. This would require a moderate budget increase

from the department to accommodate the increased printing cost, but structurally *The Grizzly*

could easily make this aspect of the transition to serving as a local publication. The newspaper

regularly publishes stories that are relevant to readers outside of Ursinus; regardless, the

college's news is often relevant to outside readers due to the dominant role that the college plays

in the community.

Many college newspapers operate completely independently from their affiliated

universities, therefore are responsible for generating their own revenue. While *The Grizzly* has

been promised by the administration that it will maintain editorial independence from the

college, the fact that it is funded by the institution has raised questions regarding the

publications' true autonomy. However, because it is funded by Ursinus, *The Grizzly* takes the

form of a non-profit publication, a model that has been supported by some media scholars. As

David Swensen and Michael Schmidt wrote in their *New York Times* piece supporting non-profit

journalism, this structure is useful in helping publications by "shielding them from the economic

forces that are now tearing them down" (Swensen and Schmidt 2009). *The Grizzly* has the

economic freedom to experiment with its content and form in order to determine the specific

model that will work best for its readership, without risking its ability to publish. The focus of

The Grizzly can be directed toward content development and progress, and unlike many other

college publications, not just survival (Downie and Schudson 2009).

Another method of sustaining local news that has been tested in other communities is the establishment of formal liaisons between the staff and content of college newspapers and commercial newspapers. Both parties have benefited from the ability to share content and reporters, maximizing the resources being used to cover the same news (Downie and Schudson 2009). This model would benefit *The Grizzly* immensely. There are a number of local commercial publications that currently offer year-round internship positions to Ursinus students. If these publications were able to assign student reporters to stories that could be published in both *The Grizzly* and the local newspaper, it would enrich the content of both publications without increasing the cost of creating the content. Further, this system would allow student journalists to gain value experience in a professional setting, while also enabling local newspapers to maintain the depth of coverage necessary to succeed financially and democratically. In this way, *The Grizzly* and local newspapers could work cooperatively to ensure that both are serving their roles as democratic forums to the greatest possible extent.

In order for *The Grizzly* to successfully fill a greater civic role, it would need to expand the scope of its investigative reporting. Investigative reporting is critical to local journalism's ability to function as a democratic forum; these publications must question the information they gather in order to uncover stories that the public would not otherwise be aware of (Street et al. 2014). This year, the newspaper made its initial foray into this genre with a three-part series on tuition increases at Ursinus. However, with the size and skill of the current staff, it appears to be a challenging precedent to maintain. At college newspapers where long-form investigative journalism has proven successful, such as at the University of Wisconsin and the University of Oregon, investigative reporting centers have been established to foster this type of reporting. Given *The Grizzly's* resources and those of surrounding publications, this seems unlikely. *The*

Grizzly would require a much larger staff in order to regularly assign one reporter to a piece that requires more extensive research. However, if a partnership is established between *The Grizzly* and at least one local publication, it may be possible to take advantage of the commercial publication's resources and connections to maintain more significant, investigative reporting at Ursinus. The additional experience that reporters would gain by working with a professional publication would expand *The Grizzly's* capacity to produce more investigative content, as well as improve the content of the newspaper holistically.

One of the major barriers to the success of *The Grizzly* in serving a greater civic role is a lack of real journalism training available at Ursinus. According to a report from the FCC, journalism "programs can only work if they maintain high quality"(Waldman 2007). While the Media and Communications Studies department has a "journalism track" within the umbrella of the major, there are only three courses that offer training in skills that are directly applicable to journalistic writing. Staff writers often join *The Grizzly* with minimum to zero journalism experience. While this is not inherently a problem, there are few people from which the newcomers can learn, since no one has taken more than three classes-worth of training. As a result, copy is often weak and given the limited resources of editors, there is only so much the staff can do before the story must be put on the page. *The Grizzly* does have a "lab" structure; students are encouraged to join with no experience and learn on the job. However, it is difficult for writers to improve when there is no real impetus to do so. It will be difficult for *The Grizzly* to improve before the journalism department does; there is only so much the editorial staff can teach new reporters on their own. Even if the quality of reporting improved, no college newspaper could necessarily fill the role of a commercial newspaper successfully. The best

student journalists simply have not put in the time to be seasoned, well-rounded professionals; that expertise can only come from time spent working in the journalism field.

The college newspapers that have been most successful in serving the democratic role of commercial newspapers have also made the fluid transition to an online-focused news routine. While this model has proven to be more versatile in the modern journalism landscape, it is not an easy switch for college newspapers to make. *The Grizzly* has been struggling to make this transition. This can be attributed largely to an uncertainty as to what this transition should look like and a lack of a specific goal that the newspaper is striving for. Since *The Grizzly* is not profit-motivated, there is no financial impetus for cutting the print edition. However, developing a more sophisticated and up-to-date web version is critical to its attempts to serve the greater Collegeville community. This effort would also require more reporters, given that the biggest barrier to the success of the newspaper is shortage of content to fill the pages at all, let alone create enough content to keep a website updated on a daily basis. The newspapers that are successful in these efforts, such as the University of Oregon's *Daily Emerald*, are able to access a wide audience because their readers do not need to wait and actively pick up a print edition; their readers can use the platform every day to access new content, therefore remain engaged.

College newspapers, particularly those that are not responsible for generating their own revenue, have the potential to maximize their function as journalism "labs" and experiment with new and progressive trends in journalism. *The Grizzly* has the potential to take advantage of this low-risk editorial flexibility to experiment with new models of journalism. To this point, experimenting with journalistic form has not been a priority of the newspaper; this can largely be attributed to the need to train the staff in standard, traditional journalism practices, which can take most of the time in college to complete. However, if the editorial staff focused on

innovation, *The Grizzly* could serve as a model for small, commercial newspapers seeking alternative methods of practice. For example, it could benefit *The Grizzly* to pursue an alternative balance between the focus on online and print content. This is a balance that both commercial and college publications have been attempting to strike since digital journalism emerged, but commercial newspapers cannot make major adjustments to their practice without taking serious financial risks. *The Grizzly* has the security to make publication changes, like staggering reporters' deadlines so that new content is posted online every day. This model would enable the print and online editions of the newspaper to thrive. Additionally, *The Grizzly* could assign more story packages, emphasizing multimedia and requiring journalists to submit stories that integrate more than one media form. This would also support efforts to allocate more resources to an online version of the newspaper and potentially increase website traffic since content would be available online that is not available in print. Substantive changes to the structure and organization of *The Grizzly* are possible because they pose minimum to no financial risk; thus, local newspapers could learn from *The Grizzly's* trials and errors to see what models have the potential to succeed outside of the college setting.

Legal barriers to the progress of **The Grizzly** *as a democratic forum*

While all college newspapers face legal restrictions to varying extents, the freedom of *The Grizzly's* press is particularly vulnerable, as well as ambiguous. The newspaper is funded entirely by the Media and Communication Studies department of Ursinus, which is a private institution. Based on the ways that *The Grizzly* has functioned throughout its recent history, the college has made no attempts at interfering with the newspaper in any capacity. However, the lack of formal legal protection leaves *The Grizzly* subject to any change in the administration's decision as to what the future of the newspaper will look like.

Media critics have been skeptical of the true autonomy of any college newspaper, let alone a publication affiliated with a private institution. Since *The Grizzly* is funded by the college, the newspaper holds no legal protections over its content; the administration is reserved the right to censor. This fact alone renders it difficult to make a case for *The Grizzly's* ability to serve a greater civic role. One of the most vital functions of the press is its ability to objectively evaluate the authorities. While *The Grizzly* has been fortunate that Ursinus has not made attempts to censor content that does not necessarily portray the college in a positive light, the risk exists nonetheless. For example, if the next president of the college decided that it would be prudent to cut all negative pieces about the college from an issue of the newspaper on a week when a high number of prospective students are on campus, he or she would have that right. For this reason, *The Grizzly* is vulnerable to self-censorship. While this self-censorship may not be a conscious action, the staff is well aware that the opinion of the administration does have a significant impact on the future of the newspaper. Field research has suggested that "student editors were more likely to self-censor content when primary control was perceived to belong to individuals acting at the organizational level, such as faculty advisers and academic affairs administrators" (Bickham and Shin 2009). Therefore, when editorial decisions are made at *The Grizzly,* they cannot be made with complete confidence that the administration's opinion does not carry weight.

As it currently stands, *The Grizzly* is not consistently capable of "fearless journalism," journalism that unapologetically strives to connect readers to unbiased information, that media lawyers Jonathan Peters and Frank LoMonte call for in their article for The Atlantic (LoMonte and Peters 2014). It is unclear where journalistic integrity ends and Ursinus' authority begins, therefore it is impossible for *The Grizzly* to act as independent newspapers would under their

First Amendment protections. While public college newspapers do have some legal protections as established in court cases beginning with *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* of 1969, private newspapers are considered to be an extension of the college and therefore have no legal protections. Despite any progress *The Grizzly* might make in its ability to serve as a model for commercial newspapers, it cannot fully assume a greater civic role as long as it is funded by the college.

While filling a more serious democratic purpose is a noble pursuit for all journalists and their publications, it does not make sense for *The Grizzly* to attempt financial independence. Other comparably sized newspapers have accomplished this goal through advertising and other sources of revenue, but it would be very difficult for *The Grizzly* as it exists now to accomplish this goal without making serious sacrifices to content. The newspaper has difficulty maintaining a sufficient staff to generate sufficient content to fill the pages. Unless significant recruiting efforts were made, it is not an efficient use of *The Grizzly's* limited staff resources to devote time and energy to developing an advertising strategy that could sustain the newspaper on its own. This is largely the result of the size of the college. Relative to the size of its readership and staff, *The Grizzly* is successful in employing its resources to publish a newspaper that thoroughly covers campus news. The staff has made earnest efforts over many years to expand the size of its staff with limited success. Since expanding the staff is a necessary step to freeing up the resources to generate income, it would be difficult. In addition to the difficulty, it is ambiguous whether *The Grizzly* would be given independence by the college if the publication wanted to attempt to support itself. A dedicated team of students would be capable of spearheading this initiative, but it may entail starting an entirely new publication that is distinct from *The Grizzly*.

While it would be challenging to generate the revenue necessary for *The Grizzly* to achieve the financial independence that would be accompanied by complete editorial independence, it is not impossible. *The Grizzly* email account receives requests for advertising on a weekly basis. These requests to advertise in the newspaper vary significantly in their relevance to the publication's readership, but without any outreach on the part of *The Grizzly*, an interest base already exists. With some research into how college newspapers charge for advertising space, a business model could be developed to determine whether advertising could be a consistent flow of revenue for *The Grizzly* to the extent needed to continue publishing as a weekly newspaper. To compensate for a deficiency in staffing, *The Grizzly* could reach out to the Applied Economics and Media and Communications departments. While Ursinus does not offer advertising courses specifically, both majors market themselves as channels to careers in this field but offer few opportunities for practical application. If *The Grizzly* did decide to begin running advertisements, the staff could draw from students who would not ordinarily be involved with the student newspaper, but have an interest working with advertisements. These students could field advertising inquiries and focus on the business side of running a newspaper. This would be valuable to both the students and *The Grizzly*, as the newspaper does not currently focus on the business side of the journalism. Further, these students would be responsible for managing the newspaper's budget, allowing the editorial staff to continue their focus on content and editorial direction. In addition to allowing *The Grizzly* to be financially independent, this structure would allow students to gain experience in journalism more holistically than is currently possible at Ursinus; it would also enable students with a broad variety of journalistic interests to participate in *The Grizzly*. If a wider subsection of the student population is involved in the newspaper, the reach of the newspaper's content will expand as well.

The layout of *The Grizzly* as it currently exists does not allow for much expansion in terms of space and content. This would make it difficult for advertising to be worked into the current layout and newspaper length. In order for *The Grizzly* to accommodate advertising, it would likely have to expand the size of the publication. In turn, this would require generating more advertising revenue to cover the additional cost. This may be financially feasible, depending on the demand for advertising space and the going rate of ads, but is unlikely to support the newspaper without sacrificing some of its content. However, it is worth considering offering advertisers the option of publishing advertisements on *The Grizzly's* website. If traffic to the website continues to increase, then it would be possible to market that space as well as space in the print edition. Since online space is significantly more available than in print, this could be a solution to the financial viability of *The Grizzly* supporting itself using advertising as its primary source of revenue.

Regardless of whether *The Grizzly* wishes to pursue editorial, and therefore financial, independence in the future, the potential for selling advertisements remains a possibility for the newspaper. The first step in this process would be to have a conversation with members of the Media and Communications department, as well as relevant members of the administration. Ursinus' policy on allowing department-sponsored organizations raise money is vague; it would need to be more concrete before this option could be pursued further. Previous dialogues on the subject have been positive, and there is good potential for the idea to have administrative backing. It likely would not be necessary for *The Grizzly* to need to expand if it were not running advertisements to support itself, therefore there would be minimal pressure in testing out the inclusion of advertisements. These advertisements would serve as a means of integrating the local community into *The Grizzly's* scope of coverage, which is beneficial for the paper for a

variety of reasons. As detailed above, this strategy would also allow *The Grizzly* to be more inclusive within the Ursinus community, and encourage students from departments outside of English and Media and Communications to participate.

While a transition to advertising has the potential to alleviate institutional pressure on *The Grizzly's* editorial direction, the publication's hypothetical dependence on advertisements could have the same effect on content. According to Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model of the media, journalists cannot truly liberate themselves from bias toward the firms who purchase the advertising space that finances enables their news organizations to exist; the interests of their financial supporters are invariably an influence on content (Chomsky and Herman 1988). Similarly, McChesney proposes that the political economy of media, the permeation of corporate interests into news production, derives from news organizations' ultimate dependence on corporate interests to maintain their ability to print a newspaper at all (McChesney 2008). By replacing advertising revenue with school funding, *The Grizzly* would not necessarily be avoiding the issue of self-censorship; it would just be vulnerable to the influence of the interests of the advertisers that support the newspaper rather than those of the college.

Multimedia as a means to future success

As it currently exists, *The Grizzly* is much stronger in its print edition than it is online. The focus of the production process heavily favors the print edition, and the work of every editor with the exceptions of the social media and online editors aligns with the goals of the print publication. While this has allowed the staff to improve the quality of the content significantly over the past two semesters, this narrow print focus does not reflect the general shift in the

journalism industry toward online reporting (Jurkowitz 2014). Online reporting has a number of

distinct advantages that are outlined in the previous two chapters, but the primary benefits that

would improve *The Grizzly* involve accessibility and updateability of content. Modern news

consumers are accustomed to accessing accurate information instantaneously, whether on a news

organization's website or through social media. *The Grizzly's* weekly publication schedule is not

conducive to the habits of the modern news consumer. Minimal changes to the copy are made

between when reporters submit articles to their editors on Saturday nights to the day the

newspaper is submitted on Tuesday mornings. This is problematic because at the rapid pace that

news and information can change, there is the potential for information reported in the

newspaper when it appears in print on Thursday, nearly a week after articles are submitted, to be

inaccurate.

A more structured and intensive online and social media strategy could both improve *The*

Grizzly's relationship with its readership by offering content on their preferred media and boost

the newspaper's credibility by minimizing factual inaccuracies due to the timing of its news

cycle. Firstly, *The Grizzly* would need to re-conceptualize its news timeline. It would be to the

newspaper's benefit if the staff did treat online news as an afterthought; rather, posting news

online should be the priority. Deadlines for articles should be set according to when the assigning

editor judges that article could be most complete, based on the nature of the event covered.

Therefore, the flow of news to the website would be continuous. Writers would be responsible

for doing follow-up reporting to update articles throughout the week, until the either the topic

warrants a new article or it there is no more relevant reporting to be done. The Monday

production night would remain a part of the production process. However, instead of placing

stories on the page that were submitted on Saturday, the print publication could feature the most

updated versions of stories that have run online throughout the week. In addition, the print edition could include more in-depth, investigative reporting. This would prevent the print edition from just being a compilation of online stories; these longer-form journalistic pieces would run in the print edition first.

The shift in focus to online reporting should be accompanied by a coordinated effort to improve *The Grizzly's* social media strategy. In addition to posting links to content that is already published on the website, social media can be employed to break news or promote articles that will appear in the upcoming print edition. By conceptualizing social media as one of the primary modes of communicating news instead of as supplemental to the print edition, *The Grizzly* is encouraging readers to turn to its social media accounts for information that they cannot find other places. Oftentimes, by the time stories are printed in the weekly print edition, much of the news is well-known around campus and *The Grizzly* is just filling in the details. However, by establishing a more active social media presence, the newspaper can be critical in breaking news and becoming a source of information that students turn to when they are looking for information about the Ursinus community. *The Grizzly* currently runs Twitter and Facebook accounts. These platforms are hugely important in the way that the modern news consumers accesses information. To reach a wide audience and produce more exclusive and appealing content, *The Grizzly* must integrate social media into its news process to a much more significant extent.

One of the ways that *The Grizzly* can approach this social media shift is by allowing all of the editorial staff to post on its social media platforms. If each editor had permission to post on Facebook and Twitter, a wider variety of news would be published. Currently, the impetus to post on social media lies entirely on the social media editor. It is unrealistic to think that one editor can keep up with the news across Ursinus, especially without more connectedness to the

other editors. Editors should be permitted to post pictures of events on campus that they are attending, as well as news that they observe on campus. This casts a wider net and thus, more events will be covered via social media where visual content is highly valued and shared. This practice would also establish a bigger selection of photos that could be used in the upcoming print edition. The social media editor's responsibilities could be largely to schedule tweets and to coordinate the breaking news team.

The breaking news team, which was initiated in the spring semester of 2015, established protocol for breaking news team members to follow when events happens throughout the week. This system is intended to ensure that news that occurs between meetings at which stories are assigned is covered by *The Grizzly*. In addition, a breaking news strategy was formalized. The breaking news protocol outlines the ways that the editor-in-chief, adviser, breaking news editor, photography editor, and breaking news reporters are well-informed about what their responsibilities are when news breaks. In the future, the social media editor should also function as the breaking news editor. With the other staff editors taking on more social media responsibility, this frees up time for the social media editor to coordinate the breaking news team. Since the breaking news process should immediately involve posting on social media, it would be convenient if the social media and breaking news editor were the same person.

In addition, *The Grizzly* should be more strategic about what it is tweeting and when. The current social media use does not maximize reader engagement, which should be the primary goal of a news organization's social media usage (Kress 2009). *The Grizzly* should consider integrating more incentives for readers to respond to the content, especially since the commenting feature on the newspaper's website is disabled. In the past, polls related to content posted online have generated attention and increased visits to *The Grizzly's* website. Since it is a

college newspaper and it does have the freedom to experiment with different social media strategies, *The Grizzly* should take advantage of the analytics available on both its social media platforms and its WordPress website to inform its social media strategy.

Conclusions and suggestions

Despite the restrictions imposed by the fact that *The Grizzly* is affiliated with a private institution, the publication has the potential to assume a much greater role in the Ursinus and Collegeville communities. While *The Grizzly* is not legally protected in the same ways as public college newspapers, the support of the administration is a positive step toward ensuring that the newspaper can publish the stories that best meet its journalistic goals without fear of censorship. *The Grizzly* has made improvements to its content and strategy in the past year, but there is room for significant improvements that would enable the newspaper to best serve its readership and fill its civic purpose to a greater extent. These suggestions are explained in full above, but below is a condensed list of potential improvements:

- The focus of *The Grizzly* can be directed toward content development and progress since it is currently financially dependent on the college. The newspaper should direct its resources toward catering its content to its specific readership. It is not necessary for *The Grizzly* to practice solely tried-and-true journalism tactics; in fact, given the uniqueness of the newspaper's size and context, these strategies may not fit with its goal whatsoever. The staff should try to conceptualize the newspaper and its goals based on its readership.
- *The Grizzly* should work to establish formal liaisons between the staff and content of college newspapers and the area's local news organizations. Both parties would benefit

from the ability to share content and reporters, maximizing the resources being used to cover the same news. The Norristown Times Herald would be a good start, since it is one of the last remaining local dailies and is always looking for help. If these publications were able to assign student reporters to stories that could be published in both *The Grizzly* and the local newspaper, it would enrich the content of both publications without increasing the cost of creating the content. Further, this system would allow student journalists to gain value experience in a professional setting, while also enabling local newspapers to maintain the depth of coverage necessary to succeed financial.

- *The Grizzly* should expand its investigative journalism efforts. At least two writers at any given time should be assigned to investigative stories that require more than one week to complete. This will add depth to the scope of *The Grizzly's* reporting, and ensure that the content the newspaper is offering has more depth than the readership could obtain on their own (i.e. not repeating information in emails, campus publications, etc.)

- In order to improve the quality of *The Grizzly's* content in general, more specifically its online presence, the staff should undergo more intensive reporter recruiting. This would help to compensate for weak copy; there could be a more even match-up between writers' skill levels and the stories they are assigned to. It would also allow for more than one reporter to be assigned to a story; more experienced reporters could be matched with those who have not written as much. Reaching out to the English and Media and Communications departments is the best start for recruiting. Asking professors for the names of specific people in their classes who they think would be a good fit for *The Grizzly* has proven successful in the past.

- *The Grizzly* could assign more story packages, emphasizing multimedia and requiring journalists to submit stories that integrate more than one media form. This would also support efforts to allocate more resources to an online version of the newspaper and potentially increase website traffic since content would be available online that is not available in print.

- With some research into how college newspapers charge for advertising space, a business model could be developed to determine whether advertising could be a consistent flow of revenue for *The Grizzly*. To compensate for a deficiency in the staffing required to field advertising requests, *The Grizzly* could reach out to the Applied Economics and Media and Communications departments. There are students looking to pursue careers in advertising, and this would offer hands-on experience that is not available elsewhere on campus. This would be valuable to both the students *and The Grizzly*, as the newspaper does not currently focus on the business side of the journalism

- A more structured and intensive online and social media strategy could both improve *The Grizzly's* relationship with its readership by offering content on their preferred media and boost the newspaper's credibility by minimizing factual inaccuracies due to its news cycle. Deadlines should be staggered so that new content can be published online more than once per week, and integrate a more concrete social media plan for further publicizing the week's content. Deadlines for articles should be set according to when the assigning editor judges that article could be most complete, based on the event that is covered. Therefore, the flow of news to the website would be continuous. Writers would be responsible for doing follow-up reporting to update articles throughout the week or until the either the topic warrants a new article or it there is no more relevant reporting to

be done. In addition, the print edition could include more in-depth, investigative reporting. This would prevent the print edition from just being a compilation of online stories; these longer-form journalistic pieces would run in the print edition first.

- The shift in focus to online reporting should be accompanied by a coordinated effort to improve *The Grizzly's* social media strategy. In addition to posting links to content that is already published on the website, social media can be employed to break news or promote articles that will appear in the upcoming print edition. By using social media as one of the primary modes of communicating news instead of an afterthought, *The Grizzly* is encouraging readers to turn to its social media accounts for information that they cannot find other places. One of the ways that *The Grizzly* can approach this social media shift is by allowing all of the editorial staff to post. If each editor had permission to post on Facebook and Twitter, a broader spectrum of news would be published.

- In addition, *The Grizzly* should be more strategic about what it is tweeting and when. The current social media use does not maximize reader engagement, which should be the primary goal of a news organization's social media usage. *The Grizzly* should consider integrating more incentives for readers to respond to the content, especially since the commenting feature on the newspaper's website is disabled. In the past, polls related to content posted online have generated attention and increased visits to *The Grizzly's* website.

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