



The Newsroom

The official newsletter of the Georgia College Press Association

Why we continue to write



By Ashley McIntyre
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I love being a journalism major. I get to review CD's for homework, analyze advertisements, have my name in print once a week in the school paper, explore popular culture and write all the time.

As much fun as I have in my classes, I'm as scared as anyone who hopes to get a job in the field. In an age when print products are becoming a cultural dinosaur and journalists are being treated more like pack-mules with a basic command of the English language, I still know what I want to be when I grow up. I want to write; I love to write.

I've (almost) gotten over the fact that I will go through much of my professional career with little respect, appreciation or pay. At my current yearly salary with my campus newspaper, my income would be well below the poverty line. Sometimes I wonder if the professional world holds better things. Why am I busting my rear to create a product that maybe half of the student body will read?

I still fear the day when someone twenty years younger asks me what a book is, and could it kill that spider over there?

I don't think the United States of America can survive without a functioning press that maintains objectivity and asks the tough questions. Some say that the media functions as a fourth, unofficial branch of the

government to help maintain the system of checks and balances that we all hold so dear. I agree. Good journalism keeps the government in check.

Journalists are like home security systems. You hate having to bother with that code, those annoying beeps or leaping over motion sensors every time you come home. It's similar to the way politicians hate answering the tough questions. But if someone breaks into your house, you're glad there's a system in place to alert the masses of the problem. Watergate, anyone?

I think of words as a puzzle. There's a word for every situation; it's just a matter of finding it and putting it the right place. Nothing feels as good as solving the puzzle. I write for my peers, who read a column of mine and chuckle. I write for faculty members who email me the day the newspaper comes out, thanking me for shedding light on an issue. I write for students I've never met who approach me and compliment my work. I write for those who tell me how wrong my opinion is, so I can encourage a rebuttal. I write for reactions. I write to encourage involvement. I write for those who still care.

I believe that those who keep themselves informed are going to progress furthest in life. I consider myself a mild antagonist. I take a twisted pleasure from people's reactions; positive or negative. It's cliché but it's true: if I can reach one person through my writing, I've done my job.

As long as people know how to read, I will continue to write.

Internships provide knowledge that will last a lifetime



By Nick Godfrey
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Last summer, I was able to take the chance of a lifetime. I was able to land an internship with the local newspaper in my community called the Rome News-Tribune.

There's nothing more exhilarating than stepping into a newsroom for the first time and seeing and hearing the busy staff pecking away on keyboards, the two or three police scanners blaring aloud from all corners, the editors' loud voices, either angry or proud, and the constantly alternating news channels on the television mounted on the wall.

If there's one thing I've learned more than anything, it's that news never stops and the paper lives and breathes through its staff and the surrounding community. Walking into the newsroom

is like walking into the Mississippi River, once you get in, you're moving. No one in the newsroom is wasted space. Everyone is constantly active, working on two or three stories at a time, trying to finish before deadline.

As stressful as the job can be sometimes, it really is one of the most interesting and fun jobs a person can do. I have seen and done things during my internship I never would have done otherwise, such as visit a Jewish Synagogue for a night of Hanukkah, report on a major house fire and be there as the fireman try to put the blaze out, talk and interview with many higher ups in the city about important issues or topics and sit side-by-side with extremely good editors as they showed me how to improve my writing skills and articles.

The newsroom has a full cast of the most diverse and intriguing people you could ever meet. I made friends and met people that I will never forget, whether

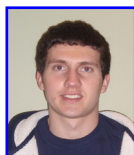
it is their kindness in helping me along, their office singing abilities or just their overall character.

This internship was a great opportunity and I would recommend it to any writer or journalist with any interest in the field of journalism.

Since the internship, they offered me a part-time reporting job on the week-ends. I have been and still am the breaking news reporter for the Rome News-Tribune every Friday and Saturday. I have reported on wrecks, both minor and major, fires, murders, deaths and so forth.

The pay isn't great, but the experience will last a lifetime. The newspaper business may be changing. It may be feeling the economic clench, but I always think of a quote I made up while being in the business for the little time that I have: "Journalism is a sinking ship; don't jump in unless you're going to change it into a submarine."

Sports Features: A mix of statistics and human nature



By Matthew Stokes
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In my three plus years of writing I have covered a variety of topics, but mainly sports.

As a younger writer I was infatuated with sports statistics. A friend would name a baseball player and I would in short time be able to recite his homers, runs batted in and batting average from the most recent season.

This "talent" drew a mix of awestruck grins and startled looks from sports fans whom spoke with me.

Being the naïve teenager that I was, I thought to myself that I would be able to smoothly incorporate this vast (not exaggerating here) knowledge of sports statistics, past and present, into my journalistic writing.

Being a high school journalist I predictably never got concrete feedback from my audience, consisting of my teachers and peers. Not a single person came forward to me and said, "All these statistics are nice, but..."

Maybe it was unrealistic to expect upfront dialogue from such people.

As is the case often in life, figuring out my own faulty logic required some self-examination. Reflecting on my dai-

ly conversations about sports, I began to understand a simple fact: it is not the statistics alone that make sports so important to many people, but rather the human element surrounding them.

One of the first sports features stories that I ever wrote dealt with a high school senior who had signed to play baseball at Rice University in Houston, Texas. For a majority of the article I harped on giving the audience as much information about the athlete's career as possible, including statistics.

After the article had been submitted, edited and published I passed by the player and he shook my hand as if to say, "Thanks for this well-written article about me." It would take me several months for me to give myself more accurate feedback on this article.

Later that spring I was assigned another features piece, and this time it was on an athlete of whom I did not particularly think highly of. Still, I went about the article, researching like a maniac for information and statistics. As I did more and more interviews it became clear to me that this would be a great story, but not because of the stats.

In my opinion a great sports story, particularly a feature piece, should include some statistics, but more importantly involve the human element. What I mean by this are the trials, successes and lessons the particular athlete learned through his or her sport.

For this article, it meant the athlete learned the value of education trumping over that of sports. In his case this player was unable to participate in his sophomore year of high school soccer due to poor grades. He failed an art class.

Yes. You read that correctly: an art class.

That makes a reader see this guy as the stereotypical jock who puts his books below his cleats on his list of priorities. I sure thought so myself...until I went through all the interviews.

Joe was really struggling to come to grips with being in the school environment again after four years of being home-schooled. Then there were great expectations of him as a soccer player. It was easy for him to overlook school.

Instead of giving up after becoming the laughing stock of his school, Joe got his grades straight and later won a state championship. A year after that he signed his National Letter of Intent to play Div. I soccer.

The point here is that the stats were minimally important to the story. Sure this player led the state of Georgia in goals during his junior year, but he recovered from failing an art class. That, my friends, is a story which is fun to write and leaves you as a writer viewing that athlete from a completely different angle. You gain respect for that person. Is that not what a good sports feature story will do to you?

Editors: All journalists have them. Few love them.



By Claudia Hogan
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Even though editors come in many sizes, shapes and colors, they all have one common goal: publishing correct and accurate material. Some may have harsh methods while others may be pushovers; but in the end they are the ones responsible for what an audience sees. Because of this, editors strive to publish quality material. They can unconsciously shape a writer into the journalist that they are meant to be.

My experience as a journalist is limited compared to others; I am the oddball in our humble newsroom. I am the one who came to the newspaper staff with hardly any idea of how things were done. You see, I was the oddity because not only did I lack experience, but because I was majoring in science. Now, I preface what I am about to say by stating that in no way am I trying to offend or belittle scientists of any type,

but they are not known for their writing skills. This is especially true at the college I attend.

As you can probably imagine I was thrown to the sharks, otherwise known as editors. When my first article was returned to me for revision, it resembled a child's coloring book with all its scribbles ranging in color from green to blue to the traditional red. It was truly discouraging and shocking. I wondered how I could ever be a decent writer. After several frustrating hours and numerous revisions, my article found its way into the back pages of the newspaper; I was elated until the weekly review of our newspaper came around; there was nothing said about my piece, which reminded me of the phrase, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all."

Writing is a very personal and intimate process, which makes it hard to hear criticism. I had to constantly remind myself that my editors were just doing their job; they were trying to uphold the reputation of our newspaper. Not only that, but I like to think that

they were trying to help develop my writing style and ability. Regardless, I was able to learn from my mistakes and improve. It became a game to me, one in which I would try and "beat" the editors at finding my mistakes. By doing this, I not only advanced my writing skills, but I discovered how to be an editor.

I end this little fable by saying that there are several items to remember when dealing with an editor. The first of which is to keep in mind the editor is yours to utilize. Often times an editor is only as good to you as you let them be. Secondly, even though editors may be harsh in their criticism, their intentions are normally good. With few exceptions, editors do not have personal vendettas against their writers. Lastly, everyone should remember that no one is perfect. Editors and writers alike make mistakes.

Next time you submit an article for editing just remember that your editor was once like you. They may even still have their articles returned resembling a coloring book with red, green and blue ink all over the page. I know I do.

The future of journalism lies in convergence reporting



By Meredith McDermott
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It is no surprise that the world of journalism is going through many growing pains. Discussions in many of my journalism classes have struggled with the question of how do print journalists use the Internet to best serve their audience?

Today, studies show that readers have lost interest in traditional newspapers and are looking for more. I believe what they are looking for is multimedia reporting. Multimedia has the ability to add depth to reporting that only words cannot express.

It is crucial to determine early how best to approach a subject so all of the necessary materials can be gathered while reporting in the field. For students with busy schedules, proper planning can make all the difference in coverage of an event on campus. Talk with

the editors ahead of time about logistics and equipment that will be required to report well.

Audiences are demanding more than just the facts. They want to see photos of the people involved, especially around event based coverage, charts and graphs to show the influence of the topic being reported on. A simple article no longer meets expectations with unlimited space and the technology of the Internet. People want a summary article and many more multimedia features so they feel involved in the story. This further draws readers in and keeps them clicking on the site; which is the goal anyway. All of these elements combine together to make a well-rounded multimedia package that is not possible in the print newspaper world anymore.

How can this be implemented practically?

More journalists need to be willing to cross the line between writing and more visual forms of communication like photos, graphics, and video. Some-

one who is used to taking photos should not be afraid to write a story and vice versa. Many have already done so, and others should be encouraged to test the waters. Covering our colleges offers so many opportunities to experiment in all different areas of the newspaper world. Students should take advantage of this time to learn a variety of skills now and be more marketable in the future. There is no time like the present and there are still challenges and needs to be met in all of the college newsrooms around the state.

With the decline in the economy, employers are looking for young journalists with diversified skill sets. Employers want to hire less people to do the same amount of work and that is where current student journalists have an edge. Writing is no longer the only requirement for journalism. Experience in visual media such as photography, video and graphics coupled with solid writing are what will get a young journalist noticed in today's job market.

What defines journalists of the 21st century?



By: James Swift
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The definition of “journalism” is a fairly concrete one: the business of disseminating and dissecting definite knowledge. That being said, what exactly is a journalist’s “job”?

It should be a relatively simple question to answer. In reality, however, the multifaceted nature of the occupation makes a single, unified definition somewhat tricky to pinpoint.

Typically, when one asks another person what a journalist “is”, he or she responds by either mentioning a newspaper writer or a television anchorperson. For a majority of the American population, the “image” of the journalist is a man holding a microphone somewhere in the Middle East, or a 1930s-era muckraker with a press card sticking out of his hat.

These generalizations, obviously, aren’t exactly representative of the modern incarnation of journalism. Through the dual advancements of technology and globalization, journalism has evolved into a multimedia field that encompasses a vast array of vocations.

Essentially, anyone that is involved in the field of distributing information to the general public is, in some way, in the field of journalism. However, what makes someone a “journalist”?

Some would argue that a “journalist” is simply a person that takes intangible, raw data and transforms into a tangible form of media. While this is somewhat fitting, take into account the staggering number of bloggers, lobbyists, and corporate spokespeople that do precisely that. Assuredly, no one would label those people as legiti-

mate “journalists”, would they?

Therefore, for someone to be “journalist”, there must be some pre-existing ethical template that he or she abides by in order to be a reputable distributor of information. For that reason, a journalist’s “duties” can be summarized in four key functions:

To inform: it is a journalist’s obligation to shed light on occurrences and events that the general public would be unaware of otherwise. Fundamentally, this is the crux of “journalism”, and the base intent of the mass media.

To educate: while there are many things the general public may be aware of, a majority of the population knows very little about how things are orchestrated, or why certain transpirations came to be. In addition to supplying viewers and readers with concrete information, it also the journalist’s duty to explain and clarify news events so that the audience has a firmer grasp of the subject.

To entertain: of course, this is a controversial element of the profession, and one that leads to sundry discussions about its “proper” role in journalism. That being said, it is a pivotal aspect of the field, and a key component in regards to how certain information is channeled and distributed.

To enlighten: the final function of journalism is yet another controversial aspect of the field, and one that has become the most criticized element of the form. Whereas a journalist’s “duty” to entertain has oft led to sensationalism (and in some instances, flat-out fabrications), the function of enlightening the reader or viewer can often be manipulated to either suppress news stories or selectively interpret them in order to fulfill a secondary goal on behalf of the publisher or distributor. While in extreme cases this leads to demagoguery, in its professional form, it helps

the reader or viewer understand the manner in which certain news stories are interconnected, and how seemingly unrelated events are, in actuality, correlated.

Ultimately, a journalist’s “job description” can be viewed as a person in the field of knowledge distribution, whose obligations are to inform, educate, entertain and enlighten his or her audience via creation of tangible media. In that, the picture of a modern “journalist” is in fact a very abstract one. Whereas most professions are dictated by the tools, location and physical activities of the individual, “journalism” is one that is instead founded upon distribution of a principled product.

In the 21st century, a majority of the industry’s woes are rooted in a stubborn ethos which refuses to take the four principles of the profession seriously. If a selected form of media excels in one aspect, it may falter in another, and ultimately, the plight of journalism at the current is in its inability to form a holistically satisfying product. Even if a publication outlet does satisfy the four principles of journalism, it may not have the ability to fuse them into a singular package, a problem that can be just as hampering as avoiding the base principles altogether.

At this juncture, in the form’s most trying hour, I believe the “salvation” of the industry lie not in mass-convergence or technological-integration, but rather, a return to the key “functions” of the profession, in creating a unified product that amalgamates the four principles of the craft.

In the age of instantaneous, interconnected information, one may note the peculiarity of the industry at the current; for journalism to thrive in the future, it must return to its former nature. Ever the atypical field, for the form to evolve, it must literally regress.

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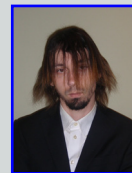
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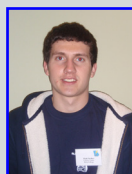
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