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WHAT DO OUR READERS REALLY WANT?
Results from ASNE's Credibility Report

We promised you plenty of "food for thought" in the Link so here's our first offering. Please let us know what you think.

This is the first in a series of articles we will share with you. We want to keep you informed of what is going on in the industry and give you advice from the experts on how we can better prepare ourselves.

To give you some background:
In December 1998, ASNE (American Society of Newspaper Editors) released results of a study conducted to improve the credibility of newspapers and journalism. The $1 million project identified several areas where newspapers will review their practices and policies with the goal of building public trust in journalism, according to ASNE President, Edward L. Seaton, editor-in-chief of The Manhattan (Kan.) Mercury.

The study was based on telephone interviews with 3,000 Americans last April and May, followed up with 16 focus groups. The research was designed, conducted and analyzed by Urban & Associates, Inc. of Sharon, Mass., under the direction of its president, Christine Urban.

"Throughout the survey, the public expresses constant and consistent appeals for fairness and even-handedness in news coverage," Urban said. "They see the editorial page as the only home for opinion or suggestion. The public believes that the reporter's job is to report the facts — completely, insightfully and without spin, and clean of any intent to sway or convince."

Among the findings that may surprise journalists are:
- The degree to which readers notice factual, grammatical and spelling errors, and the extent to which this undermines perceptions of journalism credibility.
- The public's weariness over what it sees as sensational stories being overplayed.

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**FACULTY & STUDENT NEWS**

- Dr. Augustine Ihator, associate professor of public relations, will present his recent research work titled, "The Evolution and Challenges of News Services in the Developing World — The Case of the Pan African News Agency," at the 21st Annual University of Tennessee College of Communications Research Symposium, Knoxville, April 16 to 17, 1999. The study will be published in the 1999 Symposium Proceedings of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

The study investigated the origins and struggles of news agencies in Africa and the journalistic and organizational paradigms adopted. It provides some insights into the consequences of any government's participation in the collection, editing, and distribution of news, and the impact of culture and social and political history on news value. "To Western journalists, news has always been seen as another product driven by the open market system. Emerging out of colonialism, with limited resources, developing countries saw news as a tool for national development and enhanced cultural, social, and political awareness," Dr. Ihator pointed out.

Dr. Ihator also presented his paper titled, "Emerging Symbiotic Relationship Between Ecclesiastical and Corporate PR Practices," at the American Association of Behavioral & Social Sciences (AABSS) Conference held in Las Vegas, February 24, 1999. In his presentation, he pointed out that the demarcation between the church and the corporate cultures is becoming blurred due to the overwhelming influence of the popular culture on ecclesiology.

At the AABSS conference, Dr. Ihator chaired a session on international issues where there were discussions on Islamic versus Western conceptions of education; globalization behavior of Korean manufacturing industries; medical care spending and income in Europe and the U.S.; and the organizational health of secondary schools in Turkey. "The across-the-disciplines approach makes the conference very rewarding," Dr. Ihator said.

- Lydia Carrico is one of 16 students nationwide selected for an intensive six-week fellowship in newswriting and reporting at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, St. Petersburg, Florida. The all-expenses-paid program involves production of a weekly newspaper and at the end of the program, recruiters from newspapers across the country will interview participants for jobs.

Contact Brandon Goodin, Link Editor for submissions.

**Where Are They Now? Graduate News**

Have you got news from graduates?
E-mail us at goodib@wku.edu

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**Herald Wins Kentucky Press Association Awards**

The College Heights Herald gave a strong showing at the statewide college newspaper competition sponsored by the Kentucky Intercollegiate Press Association Feb. 26-28.

Charlie Lanter, a Lexington junior, was elected president for 1999-2000. He also won the deadline editing contest. Matt Batchelder, a Ballardston junior, was second vice president. He placed third in the deadline writing contest.

Jerry Brewer, a Paducah junior, won three of the four sports categories and placed second in the other one. He won sports game story, sports news story and story feature story and was runner-up in sports column.

George Robinson, a Louisville senior, won sports column and received honorable mention in sports news story.

Travis Mayo, a Lexington junior, was second in sports news story and honorable mention in sports game story, sports feature and sports column.

The Herald's coverage of the Kappa Alpha fire was named the best news story. Molly Harper, a Paducah junior and Batchelder tied for third. Harper's story reported Western's Internet link with a pornographic site and Batchelder reported on the April hailstorm on campus. Harper was chosen in investigating reporting.

The staff won second and third in news analyses and special reports, and second in best special section and overall layout.

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**Four Tires and a Funeral**

Submitted by Ricky Stewart

At Georgia Tech there were four sophomores taking Organic Chemistry. They did so well on all the quizzes, the mid-terms and labs, etc. that each had an "A" so far for the semester. These four friends were so confident that the weekend before the finals, they decided to go up to the University of Virginia and party with some friends up there. They had a great time; however, after all the partying, they slept all day Saturday and didn't make it back to GA Tech until Monday morning.

Rather than take the final then, they decided to find their professor after the final and explain to him why they missed the exam. They explained that they had gone to UVA for the weekend with the plan to come back that evening to study, but unfortunately they had a flat tire on the way back, didn't have a spare and couldn't get help for a long time. As a result, they missed the final. The professor thought it over and then agreed they could make up the final the following day.

The guys were elated and relieved. They studied that night and went in the next day at the time the professor had told them. He placed them in separate rooms and handed each of them a test booklet, and told them to begin. They looked at the first problem, worth 5 points, something simple like free radical formation.

"Cool", they thought at the same time, each one in his separate room, "this is going to be easy."

Each finished the problem and then turned the page. On the second page was written: (For 95 points) Which tire?

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**Freedom of Speech**

Tell us what's on your mind
Western's broadcasting students have proven themselves time and again; 1998 is no exception. This past year, they won 13 of the 22 awards presented by the Associated Press.

In television, Western took seven of the 10 awards, including first place for Best Newscast. Sophomore Lisa Hughes also won a $1,000 Kentucky Broadcasters Association Scholarship.

Kim Olson placed second for Campus Security. Vicki Logdon and Adrienne Noble each received honorable mentions. Vicki for Student Deaths and Adrienne for Snow Storm.

In the Feature/Human Interest category, Kristi Runyon placed first, Brian Goode and Heather Myrick tied for second, and Reanna Smith earned an honorable mention.

The Associated Press gave out 12 awards in radio. Of those 12 awards, Western took home six. In the News Report category, second place went to Jay Howell, while Vicki Logdon received an honorable mention. There was a second place tie between Kim Olson and Meoshie Chuntel for the Feature/Human Interest category. Receiving honorable mentions were Kristi Runyon and Shanda Lue. Western’s radio/tv news students also fared very well in the 1997-98 Society of Professional Journalists regional competition. Of the 18 awards presented to students in the Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois region, Western won more awards (five) than any other school.

While Northwestern University took three first place awards, Western won in more categories. Here is the breakdown of awards presented to Western at the CPI regional seminar in Louisville in March of 1998:

**Radio:**
- 1st place Radio News: Kim Olson
- 2nd place Radio In-depth Reporting: Kristi Runyon

**Television:**
- 2nd place Television In-depth Reporting: Kristi Runyon
- 2nd place Television Spot News Reporting: Ashleigh Campbell
- 3rd place Television Feature: Reanna Smith

1998 is not the only year that Western has made strong showings. In 1997, they won Best Radio Newscast in the Society of Professional Journalists regional competition. The regional consists of schools in Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky. The student winners were Suzanne Vass, Kristi Runyon and Kim Olson. Four students were recognized for state excellence in radio news/feature sports awards sponsored by the Associated Press. Meoshie Chuntel placed first, Kim Olson received second and third place went to Alex Moore for radio news. Jeremy Brewer received an honorable mention for sports.

1997 also saw Western students take home many scholarships including Kim Olson winning a prestigious 1997 RTNDF $1,000 scholarship. RTNDF’s foundation only offers nine annual scholarships nation wide. Vicki Logdon won one of two coveted $1,000 scholarships offered by the Kentucky Broadcasters Association.

The two out of 13 awards Western won in the 1998 Associated Press.<ref>Link</ref>
Where Are They Now?

Graduate News

Heather Rogers, a 1998 graduate in Public Relations, currently is working as a Public Relations Coordinator for the Public Relations Student Society of America, New York, NY.

Heather has dropped 10 years, as evident by her picture in the April 1999 edition of PR Tactics. Working in New York must be the true "Fountain of Youth."

Jay Loe, also a 1998 PR graduate from Norway, is plugging away on a catalog, using Photoshop and PageMaker while looking out over a scenic winter wonderland. Jay says that it's cold enough there to make him harder to move back to the states. "The catalog is almost finished and I'll have to find something else to do. I have planned to come back on June 1 and will search for a job in Nashville, Louisville in the summer. Do you have any advise on how, where, why not I could apply for jobs in these cities?" If anyone has any answers or news for Jay you can reach him via e-mail at: jarle@hotmail.com

Some of the old timers here may remember Jerry Daniels, a print Journalism graduate. Well, Jerry is currently working at McGraw-Hill, in Washington D.C. If anyone would like to drop him a line via e-mail, you can contact him at: jerry.daniels@mcgraw-hill.com.

Seth Alexander, a recent graduate in Public Relations, currently is working as an associate for McNeely-Pigott & Fox Public Relations, LLC, in Nashville, TN. Seth has also recently become engaged to some lucky young lady. Way to go Seth!

Have you got news from other graduates?

E-mail us at goodib@wk.edu

Don't forget to register ...on time!

Delaying registration could keep you from getting the classes that you need!!!

Society for News Design
Foundation
CALL FOR ENTRIES
Student Awards for Excellence in Newspaper Graphics and Design

The Society for News Design Foundation this year will again issue $100 cash awards to the top newspaper design students at qualifying colleges and universities throughout the world.

A college or university qualifies to participate in SNDF Student Awards program by offering a three or more credit-hour course devoted to newspaper design and/or graphics reporting. Certain advanced editing courses also may qualify if newspaper design or graphics reporting are the main subjects of instruction.

This awards program was created to emphasize the teaching of newspaper design and graphics reporting in schools of journalism and mass communication so that graduates will be more fully capable of performing the broad range of tasks required by newspapers today.

The SNDF Student Awards program is administered by the Education Committee of the Society for News Design.

For details and entry form contact: Brandon Goodin, Link editor.
E-mail: goodin@iuka.edu

Continued from page 1

What our readers and viewers really think

The public's feeling that journalists are biased in one way or another.

The degree to which the public feels the press can be manipulated by powerful people or advertisers.

Closeness to the news process generates more negative, rather than more positive, views of press credibility.

Admitting errors and running corrections helps, not hurts, credibility.

The amount of skepticism the public harbors about unnamed sources.

The findings:

- Inaccuracy: More than a third of adults said they see spelling or grammar mistakes in their newspaper more than once a week, and 21 percent said they see them almost daily. "It seems like the paper's gotten sloppier in the last 10 years," said one focus group participant.

- Sensationalism: More than 80 percent of Americans believe that sensational stories get lots of news coverage simply because they're exciting, not because they're important. The motivation is to sell newspapers and attract news audiences, a similar number of Americans believe.

- Bias: While 78 percent of U.S. adults believe there's bias in the news media, but there is no consensus definition of what "bias" means. Almost one-third (30 percent) see bias as "not being open-minded and neutral about the facts"; almost another third (29 percent) believe bias is "having an agenda and shaping the news to report it"; another third (29 percent) define bias as "favoritism in a particular social or political group." Eight percent said that the public also is split on liberal vs. conservative, with 47 percent saying their local paper tends to be more politically liberal than themselves, and 34 percent saying it tends to be more politically conservative than they are.

- Manipulation of the press: 78 percent of the public believes that powerful people or organizations can influence a newspaper to "spike or spin" a story. The most frequently cited groups the public thinks influence news decisions are politicians or government officials, big business and wealthy individuals. Half (50 percent) believe that advertisers influence news decisions. A big criticism (felt by 59 percent of the public) is that newspapers are concerned mainly with making profits, rather than serving the public interest.

- Correction: When they see errors,

Professional Advice

If there's a mistake, admit it.

"If there's a mistake, admit it," said a focus group participant. "People are more likely to believe you. Don't hide it in small print. Let them know you want them to know your mistakes."

At the very least, newspapers should explain why they use unnamed sources when they feel they have to, focus group participants said.

Unnamed sources: More than three-quarters of U.S. adults expressed concern about the credibility of news stories that use anonymous sources, and 45 percent say the story shouldn't run at all if no one will go "on the record."

Continued on page 3

19 percent of readers say they "always" see a correction, and 40 percent say they "sometimes" see one. Some 63 percent say they "feel better" about the quality of the news coverage they get when they see corrections.

Television and newspapers: The study asked a number of questions about television and newspapers, in order to draw some comparisons. For example, when asked which is the worst offender in terms of bias, 42 percent said television, while 58 percent said newspapers.
What our readers and viewers really think

Urban lists the following as the six major conclusions of the study:

1. The public sees too many factual errors and spelling or grammar mistakes in newspapers.
2. The public perceives that newspapers don't consistently demonstrate respect for, and knowledge of, their readers and their communities.
3. The public suspects that the points of view and biases of journalists influence what stories are covered and how they are covered.
4. The public believes that newspapers chase and over-cover sensational stories because they're exciting and they sell papers. They don't believe these stories deserve the attention and play they get.
5. The public feels that newsroom values and practices are sometimes in conflict with their own priorities for their newspapers.
6. Members of the public that have had actual experience with the news process are the most critical of media credibility.

"ASNE has taken on this long-term challenge to better understand the scope, dimension and causes of the credibility challenge," Seaton said.

"For journalists, the fundamental question to ask themselves is: 'Are we living up to our ideals?'

As part of the Journalism Credibility Project, eight daily newspapers have agreed to serve as 'test sites.' Starting in the spring of 1999, each will introduce strategies and content innovations in four major areas: the research identifies areas where newspapers might build reader trust: accuracy, sensationalism, bias and connecting with readers.

The eight newspapers are: The Philadelphia Inquirer; The Oregonian, Portland; Austin (Texas) American-Statesman; San Jose (Calif) Mercury News; Sarasota (Fla.) Herald-Tribune; The Gazette, Colorado Springs, Colo.; Daily Press, Newport News, Va.; and Florida Today, Melbourne.

Copies of the report are available from the Society for $10.