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Norton, Will Jr. and Stricklin, Michael, "Editors and journalism schools" (1992). *Faculty Publications, College of Journalism & Mass Communications*. 2.

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Editors and journalism schools

By Will Norton and Michael Stricklin

There are distinct differences in how editors of community newspapers and editors of metropolitan newspapers view journalism preparation.

● Editors of newspapers with circulations of fewer than 10,000 place significantly more emphasis on journalism coursework, career planning, newspaper economics and knowledge of the local community than do editors of larger newspapers.

● Editors of newspapers with circulations greater than 10,000 place more emphasis on background in the liberal arts and previous newspaper experience than do editors of smaller newspapers.

These findings are the result of answers to a questionnaire mailed a few months ago to more than 1,600 daily newspaper editors throughout the nation. The 478 responses overwhelmingly demonstrated that community newspapers are big supporters of journalism programs.

Community newspapers are big supporters of journalism programs

It seems ironic to us that graduates tend to indicate that they don't want to work for smaller circulation newspapers, while editors of small newspapers have reported that a grounding in journalism coursework is important in the people they hire. More than 90 percent of editors from large circulation newspapers responded positively about the importance of journalism coursework, but a significantly higher percentage of community newspaper editors cited its importance.

Will Norton is dean of the College of Journalism at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. Michael Stricklin is a professor of journalism at Nebraska.

"More writing in college — hands-on reporting and writing. Tough editing! Rewrite. Rewrite. Rewrite. Get them in print!!" said an Illinois editor.

We believe community newspaper editors support journalism education because community newspapers have all the problems of the bigger newspapers and not nearly as great a resource base. As a result, community newspaper editors have to expect more from their employees from the very first day on the job. There can be no training period.

Community newspaper editors expect their editors and reporters to do more things, but they temper these expectations with the knowledge that they are preparing their employees for positions on bigger newspapers. They know that they are a wayside stop on a career path. Thus, journalism educators and community newspaper editors need to work together more closely. Both deal with the career development of young journalists.

"The vast majority of journalists coming out of college are not going to start their careers with a large metropolitan daily," said James Herman of the *Traverse City (Mich.) Record Eagle*. "That needs to be communicated to them with educational programs designed to help beginning journalists find their niche in the job market once they graduate."

As part of their cooperation with community newspaper editors, journalism educators need to look closely at two areas that our respondents indicated are especially important to them:

1. Newspaper economics.
2. Knowledge of the local community.

Most journalism educators do not deal with either of these topics in much detail. We may help students to understand how to cover government, but we don't teach them how to find out for themselves what holds a particular commu-

nity together — its history or its vision for the future. Moreover, newspaper economics is virtually not mentioned in most journalism curricula.

"In a small town such as ours," Tim Goodwin of the *Goodland (Kan.) Daily News* told us, "the relationship you develop with the community is of the utmost importance."

"Although reporters need to be well-rounded people, they also need to know how to write an obit as well as how to write an interesting feature or news story. Students need to realize what they may perceive as important or newsworthy may not be what their readers are most interested in, especially in a small market. Detailed wedding write-ups are probably more widely read here than a detailed account of county economics."

Charles Jacobs, publisher of the *Brookhaven (Miss.) Daily Leader*, elaborated on the needs of community newspapers by noting the importance of economic issues for his reporters:

"Often young reporters, not dry behind the ears, want to change the world. While their high ideals may be important, they sometimes don't realize that while they have no financial interest in their employer's business, they can push some cause that can greatly embarrass the management."

Editors of large newspapers expect more liberal arts in their employees' backgrounds as well as more experience

Along with these findings, responses to two questions revealed that editors of large newspapers expect more liberal arts

in their employees' backgrounds as well as more previous newspaper experience. G. Woodson Howe, vice president and editor of the *Omaha World Herald*, wrote, "Students need firm grounding in literature, the arts and the sciences. They have to understand how the world works because they have to explain it to others.

"Many students appear to have no idea how we as a civilization got to be where we are. Failing that test, they can't help readers see where we are going. The inability to think, analyze and solve problems cripples a journalist's ability to write clearly, concisely and logically."

In summary, journalism education has

some very strong support from community newspaper editors, but journalism educators may not be listening to these friends as well as they should be. Journalism students throughout the nation can benefit by your continued support of journalism education.

Keep talking. Don't give up on us. □

The heartbeat of America

By Will Norton and Michael Stricklin

At your desks in communities throughout our nation, you listen to the heartbeat of America.

Two or three decades ago, two or three of your staff members may have had courses in a journalism. But, that may not be so today because students' career goals have changed and some journalism programs have changed.

Students often identify with urban lifestyles and want to work for large media organizations.

At the same time, journalism programs have grown dramatically, particularly in advertising, broadcasting and public relations and not as much in news-editorial. As these numbers have changed, journalism administrators have broadened their views of journalism education and have often placed less emphasis on news-editorial.

You have, as community newspaper editors, had to look toward spouses of people who are tied to your towns. Some of the best writing we have seen in Nebraska community newspapers is done by the spouses of lawyers, doctors and/or other business and professional leaders. These reporters often have not had journalism training.

They are bright, articulate people who need a little bit of guidance, but

that is often difficult because you don't have the time to devote to teaching.

With these staff members in mind, we at the College of Journalism at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln have designed the "Wonderworkshop." It is jointly sponsored by the College of Journalism and the Nebraska Press Association, and has a writing/editing workshop, an advertising workshop and an interviewing workshop. We are planning a photo workshop. These workshops usually run for two-and-a-half days, ending on a Saturday night so the staff member can be away from the newsroom at a time when there are few deadline pressures.

About six or seven of our faculty teach the sessions, and Charlyne Berens, assistant to the dean and a former president of the Nebraska Press Association, coordinates the workshops. We've tried to run a mini-version of the American Press Institute and to do it inexpensively in order to make it affordable for community newspapers.

We charge \$150 for meals, housing and two-and-a-half days of instruction. Critiques of the Wonderworkshop by participants show good results.

The cost is kept down because our college uses an endowment for professional development provided by the Gilbert and

Martha Hitchcock Center at UNL.

Some of the staff members who attend our workshops are relatively new in their positions and have had no formal instruction in the basics of good journalistic practice. Others have newspaper experience but want to brush up.

The Wonderworkshop participants receive the same kind of intense, demanding but friendly instruction that our regular students receive.

Often these workshop participants will be writing well or taking good pictures, but are not sure of the quality of their work. Affirmation from workshop instructors gives them confidence. And, if they are not doing their work correctly, they learn how to improve. That also builds confidence.

By the end of the workshop the participants have developed a network of friends they can call for help and advice.

At UNL we believe continuing education is vital. With the university's satellite network we can offer interactive video to sites throughout Nebraska. We hope to be able to offer workshops to staffs via video on a regular basis.

We want to be in touch with folk who are attuned to the heartbeat of America. We need to serve and interact with community newspapers. □

Published in *Grassroots Editor: A Journal for Newspeople* 33:3 (Fall 1992), pp. 8–9.
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Grassroots Editor is published by the International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors.