



Journalism education for the 2st Century Roundtable Report

Topic: Publishing student journalism in the digital age: Opportunities and challenges

Hosts: Mount Royal University, WJEC and UNESCO.

Date: Nov. 18, 2021, 1-3pm (Eastern Time)

Host: Archie McLean, Mount Royal University

Roundtable participants:

Brian Daly, University of King's College

Terra Tailleir, University of King's College

Aneurin Bosley, Carleton University

Katherine Laidlaw, Carleton University and freelance journalist

Janice Paskey, Mount Royal University

Event recording:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AmLYc86E6FbQj5qpuZCP-bcoMiaCnFcy/view?usp=sharing>

Attendees:

The event was attended by roughly 30 people including journalism students, professors and university administrators from across Canada.

Introduction:

The practice of journalism is intimately tied to publication. The act of reporting, editing and publishing offers pedagogical benefits to student journalists and builds stronger relationships with sources and the community at large.

This panel came together because we have learned through our own experience and research that student publications have tremendous potential to fill growing local news gaps and cover stories and communities that are traditionally underrepresented in mainstream media. We also see great promise in partnerships, especially with professional news organizations and among journalism schools.

But the challenges are many, including overburdened faculty, a lack of funding and a persistent tension between teaching and publishing imperatives.

Summary of discussion

The discussion began with a question about who these publications are for? The answer is...“it’s complicated,” explained Terra Tailleir. The Signal in Halifax began as a simple portal to publish student work. But over time the site has become much more of a community news outlet, filling news gaps in Halifax left behind by the departure of mainstream outlets. People now consider The Signal a dependable local site.

Pedagogy vs. practice

The imperatives of running a “real” news site and running a university class are often in opposition. According to Aneurin Bosley, who helps run the Capital Current newsroom in Ottawa, that plays-out in a number of ways, including the fact that students are not employees, but actually busy people who are enrolled in other classes and can’t cover news as a professional reporter would. Those students are still learning and professors sometimes struggle to help students learn about institutions at the same time they’re covering events. Janice Paskey added that these tensions are ever present in this work, especially because students have varying levels of engagement with the process.

Katherine Laidlaw helped lead a project with MacLean’s to publish student obituaries of people who died from COVID-19 and in that role she handled thousands of words of student copy. Getting the stories ready for publication was a fulfilling but challenging job, as students had different skills and motivations regarding their stories. But overall, the project left her feeling heartened by the work of student journalists.

Another source of tension is the space that student news publications occupy within a university, which funds their operation. Paskey and Sally Haney’s recent study of student news advisors showed that at least two sites have struggled with administration when they have attempted to cover campus issues.

Tailleir said they want their students off campus, talking to people and going places mainstream media are less likely to go. It’s the same for both Capital Current and the Calgary Journal, where they encourage students to cover stories in the larger community and leave campus issues to the campus newspapers.

Funding

Funding remains a key challenge for student news websites. All of the sites represented are funded almost entirely by university funds. The Capital Current has secured federal funding for summer jobs in the past, though every year it's a question as to whether it will come-through. Even relatively successful projects like They Were Loved, were constrained by funding, which eventually dried-up. That project, Laidlaw explained, raised ethical questions about how students are compensated for their work and whether the proverbial "exposure" is enough.

The United States has a tradition of philanthropy to support student journalism but that has been less prominent here. A philanthropic foundation funded They Were Loved and there may be opportunities for student news organizations to make the case to funders that they are part of an important institution that's being eroded.

It's vital that we faculty and supporters are able to articulate to philanthropic agencies and university funders why student journalism is important. University fundraisers do well on behalf of medical schools and engineering schools, but don't always seem to make the case for supporting journalistic work. But that might be changing, especially if they're told there's a specific funding need.

Local news

Student news websites have an incredible opportunity to cover and break multimedia stories that mainstream outlets aren't reporting. Brian Daly's audio class in Halifax is producing original journalism every week, as are many other student journalists. Educators must play a dual-role of training students and also serving the community through the work that our students do. Daly believes we have an obligation to push our students to think of themselves as "real" journalists and do impactful work.

Because these programs have so many students, our outlets are some of the largest newsrooms in our respective cities and we have an opportunity to cover stories that mainstream outlets would have covered in the past such as municipal government and courts. In Ottawa, things might be a bit different because of the national press, but even there, students are plugged-in to subcultures and stories that other media tend to ignore.

Q&A

Panelists were asked about the practice of unpaid industry internships and whether that is a good way for students to build experience.

Laidlaw says she's not in favour of this and recommends students go to a smaller location to earn experience. But that said there is no single path for everyone and a prestigious internship even if unpaid, may be worthwhile for some.

The practice is also elitist because it limits who can apply to those who can afford to live free for a summer in a big city.

The possibility of collaborations with non-traditional partners also came up, which offers possibilities for deeper storytelling but potential ethical issues.

Many journalism students are interested in working in communications after graduation and the panelists were asked how best to prepare for work in that area. Journalistic skills are highly transferable to other fields and students who are interested in those areas should pursue their passions in those areas.

Conclusions and recommendations:

Student news publications are publishing original journalism in their communities, every day.

The faculty who help run them serve important dual roles as educators and editors, which is

The participants hope this discussion will be the start of an ongoing dialogue and perhaps even a more formal partnership. We believe there remains opportunities for collaboration in the areas of:

- Industry and other partnerships
- Fundraising and grant writing
- Diversity, equity and inclusion
- Advocacy for our work
- Pedagogical practice

Promotion and visibility of the event:

The event was promoted on the J-Schools Canada website and email, as well as

<https://twitter.com/MRUJournalism/status/1461371151083573253?s=20>

A second-year student wrote a recap of the event for the Calgary Journal:

<https://calgaryjournal.ca/2021/12/21/journalism-school-publications-can-help-fill-news-gaps-but-need-support-to-thrive/>

Here is the poster we used for event promotion:



JANICE PASKEY
Mount Royal University



KATHERINE LAIDLAW
Carleton University/Freelancer



BRIAN DALY
University of King's College



ARCHIE MCLEAN
Mount Royal University



TERRA TAILLEUX
University of King's College



ANEURIN BOSLEY
Carleton University

STUDENT JOURNALISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES



unesco

SIX CANADIAN J-SCHOOL FACULTY EDITORS
THURS, NOVEMBER 18, ONE O'CLOCK ET
JOIN THE ROUNDTABLE (ON ZOOM)

WORLD JOURNALISM EDUCATION COUNCIL