

Understanding newsmakers: Exploring themes of interest surrounding the development
and experiences of college student journalists

By

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Dedication

For Hope, who never knew why I was the way I was,
but who loved me just the same.

Abstract

College student journalists, researchers and educators have noted, contribute to a campus community through the stories they share, the perspectives they develop and the outlook they encourage on events, situations and ideas. However, little information is known about how these students develop in college and how they experience the same college that they report about. Scholarly research has explored how the college environment and experience influences specific student populations, from athletes to resident assistants and student leaders, as well as students who struggle with learning challenges or come from specific socioeconomic backgrounds. That research has unveiled ideas for specific responses used throughout student affairs and higher education to help in challenging and supporting these populations, partly based on how their college experiences shape the students themselves.

This study explores the experiences of 10 college student journalists from the Upper Midwest who work on independent college student newspapers. Their experiences reveal potential questions for future research surrounding this population that could help uncover potential needs and challenges this population faces, including struggles with identity formation, balancing career and academic planning and career development. This study, though, reveals the most clear question for future research: Does this population, through their unique roles on campus, experience college in the own ways that differ from other student populations that have already been researched?

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Deep study of specific student populations within higher education is common in student affairs. A variety of information is available on student athletes, including how the strains of being a student athlete can contribute to their personality (Reiter, Liput, & Nirmal, 2007) or how student athletes respond to substance abuse (Ford, 2007), as well as the value of internships for medical students (Clark, 2007) and the impact of study abroad experiences on cultural awareness and personal development of business students (Black & Duhon, 2006). Yet there is one student population that, despite often being visible on campus, has been grossly overlooked in our efforts to educate and develop – college student journalists, a population that, by one estimate, totals 20,000 college students (Associated Collegiate Press, 2008). The lack of scholarly research about who these students are and how they develop, leaves student affairs professionals and other educators without the necessary knowledge of a large student population. This lack of understanding also touches students who are not reaping the potential benefit that the knowledge would supply, including proper advising, career development resources and other assistance student affairs professionals provide.

Indeed, some student populations have been studied extensively, including resident assistants and LGBT student leaders. In his article, *Character Education Assistants: A Model for Developing Character on College Campuses*, Christopher Daryl Healea (2005) writes about the Character Education with Resident Assistants (CERA) movement, which is intended:

[T]o develop the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of character through monthly training sessions that help resident assistants to know the good, love the

good, and do the good. It is built upon the transforming literary power of biographical writings that depict exemplars who model virtue (p. 68).

Essentially, Healea (2005) writes that resident assistants can be – and are – trained to role model actions that provide others within the community – namely residents – with a sense of character in sexual values, drinking, and other forms of behavior and academics. In this scenario, we turn to one population of students to model for another group of students, placing upon the resident assistants a sense of responsibility to the communities – and to themselves. It is a similar type of responsibility, I argue, that student journalists perceive that they face with their sources, their readers, their own institutions of higher education and communities of peers and mentors. In the same light, the resident assistant becomes an almost separate group of students who are perceived differently among the student body.

As another example of study, the article titled “*LGBT Student Leaders and Queer Activists: Identities of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Identified College Student Leaders and Activists*” (Renn, 2007) illustrates how student affairs professionals are able to isolate specific populations and subcultures on college campuses in order to evaluate their development and influence on a college community. To not belabor the point, articles researching detailed development of student groups have a long history, including a 1982 article that researched “*Leadership and Cognitive Styles of College Student Leaders*” (Christiano & Robinson). As we see in the following literature review (and the examples highlighted here), a significant amount of student development theory evaluates the experience some populations of students have in college, from their

ability to connect to their faculty members and academics and their sense of political and moral development.

Yet, a recent review of current literature pertaining to the growth and development of college journalists involved in independent college student newspapers led to very little information about these students and how they experience college, including how they struggle with: their roles on college campuses as news givers (and newsmakers); decision making and responsibility issues; balancing professional and academic goals; growth in the areas of leadership; experiences and situations that push their personal comfort levels in areas similar to ideology, religion, politics and ethics. These listed areas (categorized in this study as *career development, social responsibility, personal and educational goals, enhanced self-esteem, clarified values, healthy behaviors*) are among those that student affairs professionals strive to understand and influence among various other student populations within a university or college organization and setting.

Though there is a significant amount of academic research on college student development and, separately, on professional newsroom culture, one can combine this information to form an understanding of the culture of the news industry, the possible effects of student involvement on campus and in student activities and how this environment impacts students journalists during their college experience. However, this effort still does not develop a true understanding of how the involvement of student journalists in the college community impacts their own development. It should be noted that the term “involvement” in this study will be defined as Astin (1999) did in his look at developmental theory for higher education, measured by the amount of energy and

resources a student spends on their college experience both in and outside of the classroom.

Still, despite large numbers of students who self-select into the category of being a student journalist (Associated Collegiate Press, 2008), little scholarly work has been done on this population compared to other demographics. For instance, Healea's (2005) study on resident assistants is one of 249 texts found in a single ERIC scholarly journal search for the term "resident assistant." Many, if not most, of these texts appear to discuss developmental aspects of resident assistants. Meanwhile, the term "student journalist" (which could be one of many to identify the population of students involved in college media) returned 132 texts. In this case, the great majority of these articles (ranging in date from 1999 to 1969) focused on the business of journalism, the professional standards of ethics in student journalism and the implementation of new media among student journalists at colleges across the nation. A small handful of the texts touched on the experience of student journalists. Even fewer of them were within the last decade and were limited in scope, focusing on free speech issues, ethics and the impact on student journalism since the September 2001 terrorist attacks, for example. Moreover, many of these texts discussed student journalists in high schools, not in college.

Research of student journalists' experiences, could unveil areas of interest that could – and should – be known or evaluated by student affairs professionals and educators and can be directly connected to respected student development theory. Astin's (1999) involvement theory suggests students achieve academically and socially when they are more involved with their campus community. Yet what is not known about this population that experiences college in such unique ways is how well the student

journalist population fits into our understanding of involvement's impact on one's academic and social development.

With a lack of scholarly research on these topics, one must look to mainstream media and journalism industry publications to examine how students experience college through their own eyes and lives as student journalists. The role of student journalism following the massacre at Virginia Tech in April of 2007 illustrates how this population is impacted through understanding and discussing an event in a community in which these students not only report the news, but live, study and work. Even for professional journalists, covering the Virginia Tech massacre was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, yet one student journalist from the Virginia Tech student newspaper illustrates the strong connection student reporters have with their institutions and the events that happen there (Steele, 2007). We see one student journalist – the editor of the Virginia Tech student newspaper – struggle in her comments:

So what happens when ... the worst mass shooting in modern history [happens] on the campus you walk across each day? What happens when it's the type of news that puts a lump in your throat and a pit in your stomach and it's in your own backyard? How do you deal with your own personal emotion and attachment to the story when you're supposed to remain neutral? (p. 11).

In her article, Steele touches, however lightly, on who her reporters were and what they were dealing with through this experience. Her focus for the article is not on how the students developed through the experience; instead, the focus is on giving an insider's look to the events of the day and how the staff rallied around to complete their task. But throughout the article, Steele touches on the human side of covering this event.

Moreover, she gives us a glimpse into the lives of student journalists. However dramatic this example of student journalism is, we see from Steele's own stories the elements of developmental struggles that may be seen in a range of newspaper stories on which students work. Reporting and writing these stories expose students to challenges, push their own ideals and their own understanding of the world. This exposure, then, connects this student population to the world and its stories in personal ways. For example, in another section of the article, Steele (2007) looks at how she might have met the pinnacle of her professional journalistic career while she was yet in college and shares more on the logistics of being a student and a reporter – in this case, a reporter who was reporting, literally, on news for the world. Steele writes:

How do you cover probably the biggest story of your journalistic career at the young age of 20? We are all college students; half of us can't legally drink alcohol [but yet cover stories about peers who do and issues surrounding that culture within the campus community]. We had small portfolios and an even smaller collection of decent clips. We covered stories such as Board of Visitor meetings and local brush fire bans. No one on our staff had covered a story even close to this magnitude – I'm not sure many people have – much less a story we were so attached to. How do you pull all of that behind you and still meet deadline? (p. 11).

The staff did not meet deadline that day – and many days following the Virginia Tech massacre, Steele tells us later in her article published in *"The Journalist,"* a publication of the Society of Professional Journalists. And, again, while the Virginia Tech shooting is an extreme example of how students experience college through

journalism, much of the same developmental challenges revealed through the stories like Steele's, emerged through my own research for this study, exposing an area that needs additional evaluation and understanding among those in student affairs, such as struggles with dealing with emotion, career decisions, responsibilities and reflection. Further, increasing scholarly research and understanding of this student population can lead student affairs professionals to understand this population as it does with other, more heavily researched student groups, such as student leaders, athletes, resident assistants and international students. From evaluating the development of those populations, for instance, we understand their needs and challenges and can respond with proper challenge, guidance and support. Yet when it comes to the student journalist population, we can only wonder who is guiding them.

Researcher background

More than anything, this researcher's personal experience as a journalist and my own research through this study suggests the college experience for this population includes a balancing act between being a student and a reporter. It is through my own experiences as a student journalist, educator and professional journalist that I view this student population and attempt to evaluate their challenges, concerns and areas of potential growth, including the struggle with roles that deeply influence how students experience college and the effects college can have on them. My own experiences, coupled with my student affairs study and this investigation of the student journalist population, shapes my interest in this population and can help define some of the issues they face.

I approached this topic with the perspective gained from a 12-year-background in journalism as a professional newspaper and magazine reporter, writing for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Newsday*, *the Chicago Tribune* and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and *Wisconsin State Journal*. I have also been influenced in my perception by experiences as an undergraduate journalism student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the editor of a student newspaper at the University of Wisconsin-Richland, as well as an educator of journalism in pre-college programs in the Upper Midwest at the University of Wisconsin-Richland, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the University of Iowa. Through this research and experience, I have found that student journalists have specific personal, social and cognitive skills to adequately understand the potentially many legal, ethical, social, personal, and racial issues in each story they produce. This includes stories that are often presented to peers on their campuses, the communities in which they live, and to faculty and university administrators through publications. There are very few roles on campus that students can play which provide the same kinds of public recognition and create situations where students are often acting as watchdogs over their superiors, such as administrators and professors.

From my perspective, I believe this student population is one of the most engaged populations on college campuses and that this engagement brings with it a number of interests about their development, which are highlighted in this study as “themes of interest.”

My personal passion for studying this population, admittedly, comes from my own experience of balancing my college studies with my early budding of professional journalism practice. Writing for the *Chicago Tribune*, while still having to answer to a

journalism professor who had not broken the ceiling of a smaller, Minnesota daily newspaper, created a sense of identity issues. “Who is the guy, telling me what to write and how to write it? Didn’t he see my story in today’s *Tribune*?” was often a thought I had. My dedication to coursework paled in comparison to my time spent as a writer. As I began to talk to more student journalists, I heard that they, too, had some of the same feelings. They admonished the professor or the administrator who tried to play hardball on a story where the reporter was right about an issue and knew it. Yet, this idea of identity and roles played out each day as my journalist peers and I were looking at the world not through the eyes of a student in class, but as journalists.

The dedication I showed to my journalism work versus my academics pushed me into a personal complex of who I was: A student? A reporter? Both? Interacting more and more with people who were more interested in my role as a reporter than my role as a student fed what I like to call the phenomenon of “Reporter Bob.” This phenomenon (one that several student and professional journalists have told me they recognize within themselves) is that which created a sense that I was only able to interact or understand people if I had on my reporter hat. How I dealt with people at parties, at social activities, in meetings and even in class was through the self-esteem I gained through being a reporter. Simply, I had an ego, and all of my experiences fed that. “Reporter Bob” is something that took me years to undo.

My development, specifically my main interest in reporting, kept me from my mother’s deathbed in 2001 when I was called to cover a murder in the same city where my mother, riddled with Diabetes since birth, was admitted to a hospital’s Intensive Care Unit. She died the day my story ran (Gutsche & Marcou, 2001). Despite the story’s

popularity, I worked for years to understand why I had left my mother to cover this story. It was a hard process, part of which I still return to as it opened me to the desire to understand the development of journalists, in general and, specifically, students who are involved in their communities and who, I believe, could be better understood by faculty and student affairs professionals. My hope is that as educators develop an understanding of this population, it will lead to those educators providing the students proper resources, and both challenge and support.

Yet, while my own experience is just that – unique to myself – each person has their own story to share about their paths along their journeys of life, education and reporting. At the level of higher education, however, it is crucial for student affairs professionals to understand that all student populations experience college somewhat differently and to research those populations in order to gain a clear understanding.

Statement of the problem

Student affairs professionals have studied a number of distinct student populations, such as athletes, resident assistants, those with developmental disabilities and medical students, but there is a lack of research to show an understanding of the development among college student journalists, how they grow and develop through their experiences and the challenges and struggles this student population faces on college campuses. This population of student journalists might require customized attention with career development and balancing their personal and educational goals, as well as creating clarified values, enhanced self-esteem and a sense of managing their responsibilities to themselves and to society.

Questions to be addressed by study

In this study, I have chosen to ask questions relevant to students' experiences as reporters and editors for college student newspapers. The questions revolve around their perceptions of which newspaper "experiences" have had an impact on them. Moreover, the questions surrounded what the students experienced and how they evaluated whether their experiences influenced their academics, their social world or their personal ideals and values. Much interpretation was left open to the students regarding how they interpreted the term "impact." The real question I attempted to answer through this study is whether or not student journalist are their "own" population that experiences college in unique ways that could be better understood and influenced through a deeper understanding.

Significance of the study

As discussed, there are many roles students can partake of in college. This researcher's personal experience and exposure as a former college journalist and as a professional journalist suggests that student journalists often are exposed, to some degree, to many areas of college life and society as they cover various forms of stories, from city council meetings to school demonstrations. Yet their experience at the student newspaper likely affords them the same kind of involvement experience that other students have who are involved in campus activities, and student journalists likely have the equal opportunity to become "peer allies," with "increased information on social justice issues" (Broido, 2000, p. 5). Yet, a key example of a question can be drawn from this study of student journalists: How does Broido's conclusion – and similar conclusions from other research – match with the experience of this large student population?

Further study of how student journalists experience college can help us discover potential needs of student journalists and help build a sense of understanding in the development they experience as student journalists who are still learning their craft while experiencing college through their roles as journalists. That understanding could help educators establish a sense of practicability in their methods to work with student journalists in a field where practical skills are often highly appreciated (Whalen & Barnes, 2001). Further, it is not enough to rely on the journalism education field to answer these developmental questions about student journalists, in part because journalism education, as a whole, does not focus on the developmental aspects when training journalism practitioners. To be clear, the journalism education aspect of this discussion is not a large aspect of this study, partly because journalism education itself suffers “from ambiguity of purpose, the students who graduate from these programs suffer a lack of status relative to the graduates of programs that have a coherent set of beliefs and values” (Hansen, 2005, p. 2).

Overview of the study

Ten students from five Upper Midwestern universities (one private) participated in this study. Hour interviews with each student over the course of a month provided common themes of their development that act as the data for this study. The participants were selected by their editors and other interested reporters who wished to be involved as interviewees. I began each interview with a list of 10 questions, which were often expanded upon as the conversations led to insights and discussion.

This study’s Chapter 2 reviews current literature related to this subject. While there was very little scholarly work about the development of college student journalists,

I evaluated literature surrounding journalism history and culture, professional and personal journalism development, college student development and involvement and the role of college newspapers, as avenues of research to how they can relate to college student journalists.

Chapter 3 discusses my methodology and approach to this study, including the selection process of interviewees, the questions asked, and my analysis of common themes found in the conversations. I also discuss how using my own experience and perceptions as a student affairs professional and journalist – not to mention my own college experience as a reporter – helps frame the common themes of interest from the conversations and articulates some of the elements of this study, specifically those surrounding the journalism culture and procedure, which might be unfamiliar to some.

In Chapter 4, I share the common themes of interest that resulted from the conversations with student journalist participants. Chapter 5 connects the themes with current student development theory, my own experiences and interpretations of the students' shared experiences, ultimately to create questions that may guide further research into this student population.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

To look at the development of student journalists, this literature review combines recent research surrounding several aspects that can be connected to student journalism to create a framework by which we can begin to examine this student group, including: journalism history and culture; professional and personal journalism development; college student development and involvement; and the role of college newspapers.

Very little specific academic research exists on the culture and experiences of college student journalists particularly as it relates to their social and personal development, but there is a significant wealth of information regarding professional journalist personal development and skills development. Combining an understanding of these areas listed above, we can set a foundation by which we can build a better understanding of what may be influencing the development of this college student population.

Journalism culture

This section will review literature about the culture and personalities of professional journalists, much of which is rooted in the history of journalism in the United States. This background will help outline the potential correlations between professional and college journalists, including the perceived roles, values and personality of journalists. Also, how their experiences shape their personalities and the culture will be summarized.

To understand college student journalists, and the types of people involved in journalism and the cultural shift that created and developed journalism into the media we

know today, it is helpful to look at the history of journalism in America. Most of this information is found in dozens of college textbooks and even more mass communication history books. For centuries after the initial entry of media in the newly formed United States, the newspaper and media industries grew, introducing first radio, and then television, making media a source for politicians, businesses and everyday people to express themselves. Of modern-day media, however, there seems to be a lack of academic research literature that discusses the social and personal effects of media on the journalists themselves. This researcher's professional and personal experience in journalism suggests that at least one other publication has been influential in evaluating the personality, social development and industry workings of modern-day journalists: *The Boys on the Bus: Riding with the Campaign Press Corps*, by Timothy Crouse (1975), published after the 1972 presidential election, delved deeper into the workings of the media. Crouse (1975) writes of greed among reporters over stories, the relationships between reporters and political operatives, and for one of the first times in modern journalism history, shows the drama within the lives of reporters – and their personalities. Glimpses from Crouse's journey with these reporters reveal the nature of the journalist in frank, graphic conversations, which represent an almost accepted atmosphere of the newsroom, which continues today.

Professional and personal journalist development

According to Plaisance and Skewes (2003), personal experience more than training and newsroom socialization influences a reporter's perspective and news judgment. From a pool of 600 newspaper journalists, including reporters and editors, the researchers suggest major personality types among them included those who considered

themselves as “interpretive,” “disseminator” and “adversarial” in function (p. 7). The two concluded that the reporters relied on their jobs and experiences to shape their professional roles and personality, whereas they would turn to family and religious or cultural environments for more general values. Moreover, a reporter’s autonomy at work, through the nature of the role, directly connects to their job satisfaction to their role as a journalist (Beam, 2006). Further, and perhaps most telling, is the perception that the media hold about itself and that society holds about reporters, which, my research and experience suggests, is very similar in the culture of college student journalism: That they are “commonly seen as gregarious, nosy, and thick-skinned;” and that the excitement surrounding being in the middle of major news events or always in-the-know contributes to a particular self-identity and personality among those in the media (Henningham, 1997, p. 616). Henningham concluded that journalists who reported feeling more stress on the job were “more likely to be neurotic” (p. 616).

How experiences and exposure shape a reporter. The experiences journalists encounter while on the job could frame their understanding and personality, current research suggests. Partly, this is because of the way journalists are prepared for practical experience, being placed in often-emotional situations with very little guidance from mentors or lessons in how to do the job. How journalists learn to deal with these issues, then, tends to come more from the field than from the classroom (Glasser, 2006). Reporters, Glasser (2006) argues, must rely on the “practical wisdom that comes from practice and experience, not books and lectures” (p. 148). Further, the process journalists use to determine facts and perspective for the general public – a process that contributes to a reporter’s experience and learning – has been “entrusted by the public to enlighten

them with the information they need to have quality debate for making wise decisions – from the most mundane to the most profoundly far-reaching” (Dates, 2006, p. 145).

Decision-making and ethics of a journalist range among various issues, but also include the ethical determinations that need to be made regarding racial and ethnic issues. Among other issues, journalists need to be aware of their own personal biases regarding race, which can have a “significant effect on ethical reasoning” (Coleman & Wilkins, 2004, p. 7), an idea also shared by former CBS news reporter Bernard Goldberg (2002), who left the corporation over his concern that suggests political and socioeconomic bias among those covering the news. Newsroom culture, the personality types and kinds of tasks assigned and completed in a journalism environment, affect behavior of journalists (Williams, 2005). After identifying profiles of newsrooms and the kinds of attitudes and personalities, Williams (2005) explains a key element of how environment and experience influences a journalist’s social and personal development:

There are those who counter talk about the negative impacts of a defensive [newsroom] culture with the romantic stereotype of journalists as rugged individualists. Aren’t our behaviors the necessary outcomes of our jobs? Plus, newspapers have long been profitable ventures. The mold has worked for a long time. Why break it? (p. 25-26)

College student development and involvement

The following section will review major theories on student involvement on college campuses, which contribute to personal and student development. The impact of involvement on college campuses, how experiences influence and development and the

role of journalism education in the development of this student population will be summarized.

Involvement. Student involvement in their studies and in on-campus activities is a “powerful means of enhancing almost all aspects of the undergraduate student’s cognitive and affective development” (Astin, A., 1999, p.1). From volunteerism and service-learning to diversity experiences, exposure to a variety of experiences where students are involved in the learning process adds to the connectivity of the social dimension and knowledge. Further, more colleges are seeking programs to involve students in social programs (Astin, H. & Antonio, 2000) that create a sense of out-of-classroom experiences. During these experiences, students can be involved in such ways that further their understandings of issues outside of what most-recent generations have expressed more interest than in the past. Today, Astin, H. and Antonio (2000) tell us, students are more interested in their own personal career goals and financial security than past generations who were concerned with humanitarian issues and politics.

Data collected by Astin, H. and Antonio (2000) from 167 students at the start of their freshman year and four years later suggests those students walked away from college with a better sense of character, largely because of their part in social programs that focused on racial and religious and ethnic diversity. The study included 32 students who were enrolled at schools that were involving students in social programs.

Also, Broido’s (2000) research suggests students in roles as allies – those who are of majority social groups and work to “end the system of oppression that gives them greater power based on their social-group membership” (p. 1) – are regularly involved in, if not leading, university-sponsored programming, student union activities or residence

hall programs. A longitudinal study of 10 colleges and universities from the time students entered their freshman year and completed their senior years from 1994 to 1998, suggests that students who held leadership roles in student activities developed significantly in three main areas: decision-making abilities; sense of personal ethics; and understanding of leadership theories (Cress, Astin, H., Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001).

Research by Astin, H. and Antonio (2000, p.2), also suggests that students immersed in a peer environment “where students generally had strong civic values, valued the goal of raising a family, or had strong religious orientation” would have a clearer sense of developed character. Simply, this indicates how, for these students at least, they became more independent. In addition, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005, p. 602) suggest many college social experiences “that maximize the impact of college depend to some extent on the characteristics of the students who engage in them.”

Experiences and development. Using the student newspaper experience as a learning opportunity can help students learn better in the classroom, too, especially if they can relate better to their professors from their experience as a student journalist (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). College seniors who had more frequent contact with faculty on issues regarding their specific coursework, including contact that was out-of-class, increased the students’ positive perception of the campus and its impact on them. Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005) also suggest from their research that “first-year students and seniors reported greater gains in personal social development, general education knowledge, and practical competencies” when faculty engaged students in “active and collaborative learning exercises” (p. 165). In one study, college experiences helped students determine post-college decisions and helped them recognize their decision-

making process was influenced by a perspective that was introduced from a college experience, the discovery of key interests from that experience, the ability after an experience to self-reflect and the challenge and applicability gained from the experience (Brown, 2004). This research indicates students then can become more clear in career choice goals, such as an understanding of how skills match one profession over another, for instance. Also, this research helps clarify an understanding of how students can set educational, personal and career goals for the future through their experiences in college.

Journalism education. There is an apparent lack of scholarly research on the role journalism education plays on college student development and the personality and personal development of student journalists. Indeed, education is a wavering requirement for journalists, and there is a lack of research that explores the true value professional journalists place on education for those student journalists who are also journalism students. (Being student journalists and journalism students are not mutually exclusive). Still, for those who are educated in the newsroom and the journalism classroom, simply put, “journalism education suffers from ambiguity of purpose, the students who graduate from these programs suffer a lack of status relative to the graduates of programs that have a coherent set of beliefs and values” (Hansen, 2005, p. 2).

When it comes to development in education and the role of student journalists, Huber-Humes (2007) delves into how journalism culture, practical exercises in student journalism and journalism education shapes the minds and personalities of student reporters. She reflects on one particular instance of cynicism in the student newsroom:

Such cynicism is often a necessary and painful adaptation to the pressures of an understaffed newsroom. But while I am heartened by journalism schools’ new

emphasis on subject-driven, in-depth reporting, I worry that the focus on advanced analysis encourages students to think they know everything. Yes, reporters must be able to wrestle with the complex subjects, but too often the role of expert that reporters tend to adopt results in patronizing news coverage that distances itself from and even disparages the events and people being reported on (p. 1).

Role of college newspapers

Newspaper staffs, in general, can have significant impacts on their campuses by working as a team and producing news packages on issues relevant to the community. Stephen Bloom (2006), a journalism professor, details in a 2006 *Nieman Reports* article about how Newspaper #4, tackled the rise of the casino industry in the state. This was a topic, Bloom (2006) argues, that professional newspapers wouldn't touch, because of concerns that the casinos would pull advertising dollars. However, Newspaper #4 published 21 stories on the casino concerns, in a 24-page newspaper supplement – with no advertisements (Bloom, 2006). Bloom worked on the project as a journalism professor. After personally talking with the student newspaper's publisher and others at the university about the project, it is clear that lessons students learned from the experience went far beyond writing and editing skills.

The kinds of experiences student journalists have throughout their tenure as student/reporter force them into specific roles on campus (moving from student to reporter or student to practitioner). This is evident when students move from student to professional, working with faculty members and university administrators who are usually the students' superior becoming an equal as the students conduct interviews for

public dissemination (Watts & Wernsman, 1997). According to Gibson (1991) from research conducted in 1991, “college daily newspapers rely on campus-orientated news, with 40 percent of their total coverage coming from administrative functions, faculty senate meetings,” and other forms of student and university-related government (p. 100).

Review of literature summary

Research in the areas of journalism culture, professional and personal journalism culture, college student development and involvement and the role of college newspapers can help student affairs professionals understand the immediate areas of how student journalists develop from working on student newspapers. However, there is notably a lack of information on this specific area, which requires further research. For example, there are significant limitations regarding the academic research on how college journalists view their daily experiences as contributing to self-efficacy, self-development and industry-development. Still, for the purpose of this study and to understand the journalism culture, even at the college-level, it is important to explore developmental theories surrounding college student development on campuses and of those students involved with campus activities, including student newspapers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study is based on the qualitative use of my own experiences and perceptions in understanding and connecting to the participants, fellow journalists. While my thesis is based in foundational student development theory and touches on other aspects of research in the areas of student development theory, journalism culture, history and education, I also rely on my own interpretations. The contact I have had with fellow student journalists as both a journalist, a student and an educator are valuable in broadening and deepening our understanding of this culture for the purpose of this study.

Participants

Five newspapers from five Midwestern universities (one of which is private) were selected for this project. The editors-in-chief of the college student newspapers were contacted to connect the researcher with interested student journalists who had worked on the newspaper as a reporter or editor for at least one year. Two students from each of the universities participated in interviews from which this study's findings are based.

To varying degrees, each of these newspapers is independent of the universities at which they publish. It is clear that none of these editorial staffs are directed by university administrators in what or how they publish news. The staffs are selected by other student journalists, though many staffs are directed by a board of directors, on which community members and some faculty members sit to provide guidance. Some newspapers are funded in part by students' segregated fees and may or may not lease office space from the universities. Other newspapers, such as Newspaper #3, for instance, is funded completely by advertising revenue and leases its own office space off of the university

campus. Newspaper #4, however, is run as a separate business with a newspaper publisher, board of directors and full-time staff and leases space inside the communications building at the university. Common to all of these newspapers is the freedom they have to publish content without university involvement or permission. The private institution, has, in the past, had a larger hand in what is published in the student newspaper. On one occasion, administrators removed the newspaper from stands throughout campus and paused publication because of controversial coverage.

Each editor-in-chief was contacted by phone and agreed to connect me with two student journalists who worked on the news sections of the paper and had worked there for at least one year. Each student was of at least sophomore standing. They were contacted by phone and email to discuss this project and to gauge their interest in participating. Of the 10 students initially contacted, all agreed to participate in the study. I visited each within a month of initial contact at their universities, either inside their respective campus unions or newspaper offices. At the beginning of each interview, students were provided with an informed consent form developed by myself and approved by Concordia University Wisconsin's Institutional Review Board. Students were asked to sign the form and hand it to me. They were also allowed to keep a copy of the form for themselves. Students were also informed at that time that they could stop the interview and remove themselves from the study at any time. This was also an opportunity to discuss with them that their names would be held in confidence with me. Students, then, would only be mentioned in the study by a fictitious name that we agreed upon (i.e. Mark). The school newspapers, to better protect the identities of each participant, are indicated by number (i.e. Newspaper #3). The private institution,

Newspaper #1, is often also referred to as “the private” university since it is the only such university; the remaining institutions are public.

Instrument

During the interviews, which I audio-recorded, students were asked at least 10 questions that I developed regarding the social development they might have perceived during their time on the student newspaper. These questions were created by myself and Thesis Advisor Kate A. Herrick at Concordia University Wisconsin. They were designed as open-ended questions to spark student response about how they measured the influence of their student journalism experience in their personal, student and professional lives.

Students were first asked their age, academic major, how long they had been on the student newspaper and their current and past roles on the newspaper. The specific questions that were asked in the interviews depended on the specific conversations, but included most of the following, which acted as a foundation to conducting a complete interview: Tell me why you are at this institution?; Why did you join the newspaper staff and why in this role?; What have been your favorite stories and why?; What assignments had the most impact?; How do you reflect on these experiences? Do you ever talk to anyone about them?; Do you think your experience in college is different than other students because of your journalism experience?; Do you think people care about your experiences as a student journalist?; How could the school help to understand you?; What have you learned about life, school, yourself, society from your role as a student journalist?; What else do people need to know about student journalists?

I also met with each newspaper's editor-in-chief in separate conversations that were not recorded and were meant only to help me gain a better understanding of the newspapers' organization and connection to the university and university resources, such as funding and professional or developmental advising. The questions for the editors included: Define how your newspaper is independent.; What is the role of the university in the newspaper?; Do you have an advisor or advisory board? Who makes the decisions?; To what extent do faculty or staff of the university influence the newspaper development?; What is the size of the staff?; What is the selection process for the staff and what are expectations?; Are student journalists paid?

Design and procedures

The research project was first granted approval by Concordia University Wisconsin's Institutional Review Board. Participants were selected in part by the editor-in-chiefs. The editors helped determine which staff journalists had been involved with the newspaper for at least one year, had at least sophomore standing and were interested in participating in the study. The editors were also instructed not to persuade students to participate in this study. Informed consent forms, designed by myself and approved by Concordia University Wisconsin and adapted to fit this project, were available to participants who signed them and were kept in my file. Participants were also given consent forms, which included information on how they could, at any time, opt-out of the project. Participants were also verbally informed of this option.

My advisor at Concordia University Wisconsin was helpful in developing the set of 10 questions participants were asked during interviews. The questions were designed to understand the student's interest in journalism and their respective school, as well as

their reasons for participating on campus as a student journalist. I first wanted to assess if students could connect their experiences on the student newspaper to any aspects of their own developments in life, with friends, in class or among their own ideas and skills. Finally, I wanted to understand how students believed they were perceived by peer groups and those in student affairs at their respective schools.

Once all student interviews were completed over the course of two months, I transcribed the interviews and collected and organized my own notes taken during and after the recorded interviews. Information from students was also collected in my own notes during the interviews. Editors-in-chief at each institution were also asked basic questions about their respective newspapers and the relationship to the institution, as well as specific aspects of the journalists.

Data analysis

The student interviews held valuable data on the perceived development of daily student journalists. Once I transcribed the information, I highlighted and reviewed the common trends and thoughts in the data. To connect these experiences, the trends expressed in the interviews, I used the 16 learning outcomes created by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) as a lens by which I could judge how the student journalists have developed, in part, through their experience on the newspapers. This study highlights seven of those outcomes, which I refer to as “themes of interest.”

The process of understanding the data was enhanced because I transcribed the interviews myself, without analysis technology, matching thoughts I had had in the interviews with the common themes and trends evident in the transcripts. This immersion

helped me connect further to the students' thoughts to gather an understanding. This analysis of narrative was designed to be a first-hand evaluation that would make me a more active learner and observing participant.

Study strengths and limitations

This study focused on the perceptions of students. Therefore, the findings inherently rely on their understanding of their own development and perceptions. This, perhaps, is the clearest limitation. While the study was based on current research and theory regarding journalism education and college student development, the interview questions created to gather the data for this research were created solely for this project and has not withstood scholarly rigor and scrutiny.

Another clear limitation of this project would be its ability to be generalized among college student journalists. The data is limited to a small number of student journalists at Midwestern universities. A broader study could reveal different findings and would add to the collective understanding of this social group. Broadening the geographical area of research may also increase the diversity of participants. All participants in this study were white, and all but one had lived their lives in the Midwest. When recruiting students for this project, I did not specify that students meet any demographics outside of: more than one year on the newspaper; a news focus; of at least sophomore status.

A third limitation would include a form of observer bias. It should be understood that this data could be interpreted differently by someone who does not share in the same amount of student and professional journalism experience. While my connection to this field is helpful in connecting to journalism students and understanding the culture, the

bias should be recognized. However, this insight has helped in connecting with students and encouraging them to discuss their experiences.

Moreover, providing students an opportunity to discuss this area of higher education, which is seemingly unstudied, is valuable. This opportunity for open and honest conversation, devoid of academic and theoretical influences, sheds light on this student group and allows the students – in their own words – to express their own perceptions and experiences in a college population that is often overlooked when it comes to understanding their developmental needs.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

My interviews with 10 student journalists at five Midwestern universities (one of which is private) who have worked on the independent student newspapers for at least one year resulted in themes of interest that were inherent in many, and sometimes all, interviews. This data was collected in November and December 2007. Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) learning outcomes are used to connect the themes to student development theory. The themes of interest include: *meaningful experiences, career choices, independence, social responsibility, personal and educational goals, enhanced self-esteem, clarified values, healthy behaviors.*

Meaningful experiences. Students have meaningful experiences as student journalists from which they learn and develop. These experiences come from interviewing sources, being involved in campus events, news and activities as observers rather than active participants and from analyzing issues for news coverage. To be clear, “meaningful experience” is not a CAS learning outcome; however, it is important to understand from the students themselves what kinds of experiences they have as student journalists. This section will give us a glimpse at what their experiences, in general, are like and what the students say they walk away from those experiences with. This will provide a basis for understanding how the other themes from this study fit together.

Career choices. Students experienced unique journeys to career choices by wanting to work as journalists while in college. This was indicated when they expressed that they see themselves as professionals on a “job” before they see themselves as students at college, influencing their career development. This role as a reporter creates

boundaries between themselves and other student populations, students said, which deeply influences how this population experiences college.

Independence. Students discussed aspects of being independent at their work as journalists, which allows students to develop journalistic and developmental abilities. However, this independence leaves them without mentorship or advice for their profession or development.

Social responsibility. Students shared a sense of social responsibility through their roles as journalists in college communities that presented aspects of conflict in their objectivity and responsibility, but this interest in responsibility creates different instances in decision-making and blurs their perception of their roles on campus and as student/journalist.

Personal and educational goals. Students described struggling to create and maintain personal and educational goals in college while they working as student journalists. Students said that they tended to be more focused on their professional and journalistic efforts than their academics.

Enhanced self-esteem. Students said they found self-esteem and confidence in their roles as journalists. One student said he based his success at college solely on his role as the editor-in-chief of a student publication. However, this dependence on their role as a journalist for identity development leaves students wanting in other aspects of their identity development; if they fail at the newspaper, what does that make them as individuals?

Clarified values. In an area CAS calls clarified values, students discussed that their journalism experiences shaped their own personal views on issues, ideology and religion, often challenging their own perceptions.

Healthy behaviors. In the final theme, students discussed how they initiate or participate in little to no reflection on their experiences and how interactions and thoughts connected to their journalism practice relates to their lives and college experience. In this chapter and the next, I explain how reflection can be connected to wellness, a component of the definition of healthy behavior used by CAS.

In a summary at the end of this chapter, I will show how many of the themes connect, as the stories shared by the journalists who described sometimes complex experiences, lending to instances of overlapping outcomes. Each theme of interest begins with a narrative created from the stories shared by the journalists, which act as the data for this study.

Theme 1: Meaningful experiences

Joe, a 22-year-old student at Newspaper #2, had been faced with issues of his religious beliefs several times before. Some of it happened in conversations with his parents, who, too, were dealing with their own faith issues. He had talked with his friends about it. He thought about it on his own. But the only time he was really faced with his own views on religion happened when he was acting as a student journalist during controversy, and it was an experience that impacted him greatly, to the point where he continues to deal with this issue today. Joe is agnostic. He says most of the city in which he attends college is mostly Christian. It can be seen easily on campus, especially at Easter, when a Christian student group posts a “What Would Jesus Do?” sign at the base

of the campus clock, at the college's center, he said. Each year, the sign had been contentious and people would post on the sign positive things that Jesus would do, such as love and create peace. Yet, some people some years would draw swastikas and derogatory messages.

One year, students had placed a cardboard sign with the word "Buddha" over the word "Jesus." This had created a firestorm on the campus, and Joe said he was immediately and directly impacted, dealing with his own views on religion during interviews with student organizers from a Christian group as he worked as a student reporter, covering the controversy. Some of the students were offensive. Joe had to maintain his objectivity and his own opinions during the interviews and in writing his story. "It was hard for me to just sit there and do my job without getting into a discussion without tying myself into the article, into the interview, instead of just listening to what he had to say," Joe said.

Through the experience and afterwards, Joe said he struggled with how he fit into a university that is "predominantly Christian," a group with which he was directly confronted during this contentious time. Yet, Joe still views this as an experience that grounded him in his own beliefs and helped him broaden his understanding of others despite the personal challenge that he said he still deals with today:

I just understood their side more after the article, and in the long term I can understand the opposing religious view and how deeply or even more so how deeply religion can influence people's choices.

As with many students and their involvement in college activities, all of the 10 student journalists interviewed expressed that their time on the newspaper gave them

experiences that had a lasting impact on their lives. Joe is just one example of that. In our conversation, he connected an experience he felt he would only have had from his reporting to his own personal beliefs. To some extent, all of the student journalists told me that their experiences in reporting presented them with struggles which lasted for weeks, if not months, and sometimes involved the need for a form of personal reflection.

Students interviewed expressed that their journalism experiences, such as interviews with victims of domestic violence or victims of rape or even just experiences of working as a student who reports on other students in a community, created immediate impressions on their roles in society or impacted their own personal abilities. Some stories shared were more expansive than others. Regardless, all students were able to connect their experiences to growth of some kind or a personal ideal or belief that was either challenged or changed because of their interaction with others as a student journalist, often when the issues had personal meaning.

Personal experiences. These students suggested that they were often found struggling with an issue or belief through an experience that they otherwise would not have sought-out had they not been reporters. Joe put simply how he felt about learning through the religious article he wrote during Easter:

As a newspaper journalist, I am forced to... you're still investigating those things that you wouldn't have known to investigate. It gave me a better understanding of the religious aspect. I never would have understood the religious aspect.

Also, Dave, at the private university, said he saw his journalism experience as a way to grow his perspectives and knowledge of the world around him:

I just think it (the newspaper) has been a great experience and I agree with what my journalism professor said this semester, as a journalist it's almost like this free stuff you are getting, you are able to learn so much just by doing these stories ... that comes as a byproduct as what you are doing for work. Yeah, I get a paid a salary for working on this story, but still I get personal enrichment from learning about all of this stuff – what's going on – so on whatever story you are working on, you learn something.

These experiences as reporters touched the students personally, they said, but also touched closer to home, as the experiences were happening on campuses where they attended as students or in their communities, making local and national issues more meaningful because of the students' physical closeness to the story. These student journalists, because of the proximity to the story in their communities and their roles as communicators, allowed them to be educators to other students and staff on campus, they said.

Marie, a reporter and editor at Newspaper #5, told me she was involved with organizations on campus and found stories to write that she thought would help students learn, which forced her to learn all that she could about an issue to adequately tell others about it. She said she often gained a personal education in the process:

I have been interested in other cultures and things like that and I have always been interested in learning... And I think that's what journalism is. You are always learning something new every time you write an article.

For Marie, this education was especially personal – and emotional. She told me she had an aunt and a good friend who were both victims of domestic violence and sought out a

speaker who was discussing why and how many victims may feel the way they do and how they felt after the abuse and why some chose to remain in violent relationships. Marie said going beyond listening to the speech to conducting individual research on domestic violence for background, talking with her loved ones about their experiences for perspective, and interviewing the speaker for the story, she made a personal connection to the issue. Marie said she became confused about the role of a journalist, whether she was an objective reporter or an advocate because of her closeness to the story and what it meant to her and her family. This is a struggle many student journalists I interviewed faced and will be discussed in the *social responsibility* theme. Still, Marie's understanding of domestic violence was improved by the exposure as a reporter, she said, where she had to synthesize and analyze information from a public speech she wrote about and she was able to inform the public – other students on campus – about this issue:

I was focused on getting the information out to people, because I wanted the women who were maybe being abused to see maybe this is why you were feeling this way, this is why you are thinking this way and you need to get out. In the back of my mind I was like, “Oh my gosh, this is like a person I know,” and it was important to me. But either way, it is really important to me to just inform people about the stuff that I learned.

Creating boundaries. The overall experience as a student journalist, with its demanding deadlines and time commitments, coupled with the challenges of coursework as a student, changed some student's views on their college experience as a whole. Bill, a 20-year-old student and editor for Newspaper #3 described how his role on campus and

his overall experience created personal struggles. The culture and experience of student journalism also forms a unique subgroup of the student body, he suggested:

Most people [students] are involved in something, but I doubt as many people spend as much time doing what we do in this kind of thing. The nights I am in charge and working, I am here from 4 p.m. to 3 in the morning – leave for dinner and that’s it. I don’t think there is another organization or another student population besides college newspapers who could say that. So it is different for us than it is for normal students. I shouldn’t say normal students, but it is said around here sometimes. But for other students, yeah, with such a time commitment and time spent here, my best friends work here now because we spend so much time together. I don’t think there is much doubt – it is much different working here at a student newspaper.

Bill had used the term “normal student” several other times in the interview, creating a sense that there are boundaries that divide student journalists who are intensely involved with the student newspaper and students involved in other activities or who do not actively associate with one student population or another. When I asked him what he meant by “normal student,” he explained:

I guess if I wouldn’t say readers are normal students and that we are superior to them. I guess the term normal student comes from the idea of being able to more enjoy other parts of college more. But this is what I enjoy. I enjoy spending time here.

At another point in the interview, Bill said shared more about how his role as a reporter clashes with his role as a student:

I guess you are never just a reporter, never just a student. In between classes I am checking for stories, calling reporters, sometimes calling sources, and that student role mindset sometimes I am here going over things and going through things with students, colleagues going over things for exams. And then I am here studying... You are never fully one or the other. Because they blend together, you can never get rid of one side or the other.

Several other students indicated in their interviews that the amount of time they spend at the campus newspaper reporting and writing influences their college experience and sets them apart from other students; one other student, besides Bill, used the term “normal students” to describe the divide. Even more, several other students said they, too, felt like they put in more hours and had a different lifestyle than many students on campus, including athletes, who tend to have highly structured and demanding schedules beyond coursework.

Mark, a political reporter at Newspaper #4 who said he works dozens of hours in the newsroom and struggles with finding the human aspect of political stories, perceived that the nature of his involvement on the student newspaper differs from that of other students who are involved in athletics or other campus activities and organizations, including campus jobs, and has become a struggle for him as he reflects on how and where he spends his time in college:

[Other students] have jobs. They go to it. It is done when it is over, and they can do homework and the stress doesn't carry over. But, like, say you work at a library, you put in your time and you are done. It is over. You do homework you

have fun. Whatever. I have to think about it. It still stresses me out and it bugs me [when he leaves the campus newsroom].

Meanwhile, some students interviewed suggested that they struggle with their roles as students and journalists on campus, ultimately influencing their overall college experience.

Roles. In some cases, student journalism experiences influenced how students viewed their role in college and impacted further campus experiences, interviews suggest. Katie, a senior metro editor at Newspaper #4, said her experience at the university was directly guided by her experience working on stories for her newspaper. When a student was detained and removed from the university for wearing a ski mask to class following the Virginia Tech shootings, Katie said she struggled with the contacts she had with university officials and in viewing the university administration because of their decisions and the treatment of the ski mask student and student journalists during that event. Katie, who is a part of the university student newspaper because of a newspaper scholarship that attracted her to the university from another state, also said that she views her campus community through the combination of experiences and perspectives as an editor and working with other reporters and reading feedback from readers. This input also impacts her views and personal reactions to issues on campus:

I think the things that you read about and things that are going on [and] you have a personal reaction to it, but as the editor of a newspaper, you not only have your own reaction to it, you have to deal with the reactions of what everyone else says.

Summary on meaningful experiences. That student journalists have meaningful experiences and make personal connections to their own lives and growth as individuals,

writers and students is clear from these interviews. It appears student journalists are exposed to local and global issues in a unique, more personal way than other populations on college campuses. Because of their role as reporters, these students conduct interviews with policy makers, victims of crime or are exposed to environments that students may otherwise not be introduced. They are then forced to face these issues at a personal level, which can influence their own lives, ideals and perspectives.

Joe, for instance, said he would not have faced his religious issues had he not have covered the “What Would Jesus Do” sign at the campus of Newspaper #2 as a reporter, but said it was an experience on which he was able to build his own views of journalism, controversy and his own beliefs.

... there was no way [that he would have known of the issue], but I would have heard shortly, “Hey, there was a protest. I mean there was a sign put up,” and I would have been like, “Oh, okay.” But as a newspaper journalist, I am forced to ... you’re still investigating those things that you wouldn’t have known to investigate.

Theme 2: Career choices

Dave’s experience visiting a inner-city homeless shelter – and meeting many of the residents there – as a student reporter from a privileged Chicago suburb was one that had a lasting impact, forcing him to experience privilege. The building was in a rough neighborhood. During his walk, he saw the often-pristine lawns of the private university turn into trampled, short yards. Concrete sidewalks soon outnumbered green space. Houses became darker. This is a section of the city that is often forgotten. It is one that Dave had never seen. After meeting with those at the shelter and getting back to campus,

writing his story about the city's only daytime shelter to help educate his peers, Dave called his mother to talk about the experience. He said he would not dream of telling his struggles to co-workers – it just would not be professional, he said:

I talked to my mom about it and said, “Hey, I covered this story about the homeless shelter and I was amazed how close this was to campus.” That was the thing, because I knew this thing existed, poverty exists everywhere across the country in some cities more than others and I think [this city] has its share of poverty...

Why would he not talk to journalism peers about any struggles he had from the experience? He answers:

I think what I am telling you is personal. It was an inner conversation with myself. This is what I am saying to myself. In terms of talking to an editor, the only personal conversation I had was with my mother. In the terms of an editor, no, I think we did the story and you know you put it down on paper and this is what the story was. I don't think there was much, even though you cover the story and you are affected by that, you keep that inside. And what I am telling you right now is something I wouldn't say to an editor or to many other people. If anything, I would have told my mom, “This was an experience and it was close to campus and I talked to these people and I heard their stories.”

Dave's ideas of not talking with editors was just one of many student shared with me. Many said they were afraid of how they would be viewed as professionals (because they see themselves as such) and the only option, they felt, was to keep it to themselves, or to not reflect at all. Also, because she sees herself as a professional while in college

and chooses not to share her concerns with others on staff or to reflect on some of her challenges, Katie told me just because she doesn't reflect on issues doesn't mean there aren't issues to deal with, especially as an editor who deals with community reactions through constant input from them on stories and issues:

I think the things that you read about and things that are going on you have a personal reaction to it, but as the editor of a newspaper you not only have your own reaction to it, you have to deal with the reactions of what everyone else says.

Mark, at the same newspaper, said whether or not he reflects or shares his concerns and struggles with others depends on the story and how much time is available and how he would be viewed as a professional journalist. Here is how he answers how he reflects, if he does at all, on any of the emotions he shared with me about his experience as a student journalist in general: "Usually just internally, and, hell, it depends on the day of the week."

Seeing selves differently. Clearly from the conversations students had with me, many in this population consider themselves professionals, and professional journalists are not negatively impacted by their stories, they told me. By telling me that they viewed themselves as professionals on a "job" as student journalists, they made clear distinctions (again, as they did by drawing boundaries between themselves and "normal student") between their role as a student journalist as a "job" and a student government representative who is involved in a student government organization, for example. All of the student journalists interviewed were paid for their contributions to the student newspapers by the newspaper itself, but said they saw themselves as professionals, because of the time and effort they put into their newspapers. Viewing themselves as

professionals, however, contributed to a level of stress and tension between them and their administrators at their respective schools, they said. Administrators and faculty at their campuses, for the most part did not see them as professionals and treated them simply as students, the students said. The CAS learning outcome, career choices, suggests students be able to document their vocational skills, interests and can understand a connection between what they learn in and outside of classrooms regarding their career choices. Interviews heavily suggest that this population is viewing themselves already in their career as they see themselves as professional journalists, perhaps sooner than other student populations.

Within their description of their job as a student reporter, those I interviewed talk to me in ways many speak of their vocation – the stress of the position, industry standards and philosophy, the decisions they have to make and the career objectives they have and how their current position will get them to their career goal. Simply: This student population sees itself already as professionals, and that influences what these students experience in college, how they respond to their experiences and how they relate to others in their communities. For instance, Joe said many of his college peers, many who have part-time jobs of their own, have difficulty understanding the nature of his work, the time commitment and scope of his job. Joe told me:

I think even some of my roommates and some of my good friends I have had for a long time really don't understand that I view this as a job, something as a future career, which is more important than going out on Friday nights.

Other students in our conversations also referred to their role as student journalists as a “job,” always adding more about how many hours they spend or what else in the

college experience they miss out on to work at the newspaper, as Joe mentioned. As Elizabeth said, “It’s not just Monday night meetings or editing over the weekend, it’s a 24-hour job, because reporters are always emailing us or asking, ‘What do you think about this?’” Ken at Newspaper #4 talked about how his role in the campus community, his job at an “operation” has a real impact, but brought with it a level of stress and responsibility possibly unknown to many other student populations:

Unlike other student organizations that can take a week off and a night off and no one notices, where if there wasn’t a newspaper on the stacks the next day that never happens and people will notice if it did. By that alone, it is clear how much daily stress and daily work this operation involves.

Steve, in our talk, suggested that he takes his “job” so seriously that he will not share any of his struggles (time management, emotional response to a story, etc.) with an editor in fear that it will impact his professionalism. “To show you were having trouble with anything, I think it is a sign you are not quite ready to have the job, and I still want the job so I didn’t share that information with anyone,” Steve said of struggles he had after covering a highly emotional rape court case. Regarding how students view themselves in a job, two other students expressed that their jobs were to report campus news and uphold a sense of a watchdog responsibility to students, the center of the reporter’s community.

Katie, at Newspaper #4, said she might talk with a writing coach there about a story she was working on, but did not reflect on any issues she was facing because:

... after a story is published there's not a lot of time to reflect, because you have to move along to do a lot of other things. So I don't think we work through all of the issues we work through. I don't know, it sort of just moves on.

Because these students may view themselves as being reporters before being students, it is not surprising that nine out of ten students used the word "job," not "activity" or "organization," to describe their role as a student journalist on campus. Even though the students I talked with were paid, on average \$6 a story, they seemed to value their "job" more than a position they could have had in the service industry or on campus, where they might even be paid a higher rate of pay. According to Dave:

I don't know that most people outside the newspaper understand how much work goes into it. And if you were to speak on a salary basis, if you are specifically talking about who would be in charge of it . . . If you are talking about salary employment and how much they pay you, what we get paid is nothing... We work far more hours than they put us down for. I often see people working the desk jobs and they get paid minimum wage and we get paid above minimum wage, I don't even know what we get paid, but we get paid above minimum wage, but based on the hours, you can't even put down a set number of hours a student journalist works.

When one combines the amount of mental energy students have expressed they put into their work and their kinds of roles they uphold on campus, it is understandable to see that they might see their roles as "jobs." Students also mention the history of journalism, creating a free speech amendment in the Constitution, provided all citizens the opportunity to act as journalists. Students were clear that journalism is a craft, not a

profession that is based on certification. Indeed, one must not even have a college degree of any type (or even be endorsed by a news organization) to act as a journalist. Of course, because these students are paid, they very well define their roles as reporters as jobs, but in speaking with all of the students, their animated and detailed conversations of what they do and how they do it, lead me to believe that there was more to their definition of “job” than the fact that they just get paid.

Even though there seems to be a sense of urgency among nearly all of the students I spoke with to make the public aware they are professional journalists, producing professional work, Joe wanted to make clear the connection between his roles of a reporter and student. While other students wanted to distinguish between the two, he stressed that he wants to be viewed as a “real reporter.” Those in higher education “should understand I am a real journalist a little more, especially as a student journalist,” he said. “We haven’t even talked about classes. I am handling the normal course load,” he told me, “at least 17 credits this semester.”

What it means to be a professional. During the summer of her junior year, Sarah worked at a professional, weekly newspaper. There, she, along with other staff writers, would shoot photographs, write stories and edit copy. It was a different world for her. At Newspaper #1, for instance, the paper had several copy editors and photographers. Writers just wrote. Of course, the professional newspaper couldn’t pay for all of those staff members, and Newspaper #1, like all of the student newspapers I visited for my interviews, paid about \$6 for each story a reporter filed. Still, Sarah said, even though the Newspaper #1 seemed more “professional” to her because of the amount of staff and streamlined management, she was more likely to get a phone call returned at the

professional newspaper than at the student one. Sarah said this lack of attention as a professional entity on her campus was frustrating, because the student newspaper has more influence among the campus community than professional publications, such as the (local) *Business Journal*:

... our stories are just as important as a professional newspaper. They are even more so for the students here than the *Business Journal*. Who reads that? Like the ... community. That's frustrating that I feel like you are taken much more seriously at a professional newspaper and I noticed that this summer they will actually call back. You don't have to call five times to get an answer.

Eight of the student journalists I spoke with said they viewed themselves as professionals, with several stressing frustration over a perception that faculty, staff and others see them as students who are a part of a campus activity. For instance, all of those who write on a newspaper and are paid are hired through a professional hiring process, including completing an application form (often found on the newspaper Web site), formal interviews and the reviewing of resumes. Promotion processes at each newspaper also followed professional standards of interviews and other selection standards.

In a common theme, not only do the students see themselves as professionals when they are reporting, many said that their newspapers share the same industry standards as professional newspapers and often meet professional expectations in content and presentation. Furthermore, several of the students saw themselves as reporters before students (which will be discussed in another section) when they are reporting.

Sarah, for instance sees herself as more established, recognized and at the same professional level as professional, non-student publications in the area. Moreover, she

sees the level of professionalism in the student newspaper experience, guiding her in the decisions she makes and balancing her responsibilities to herself, her readers and her school, as discussed in an earlier theme. From her summer experience on the professional newspaper, she made this statement:

This summer, I worked at my hometown newspaper, so I have worked at both the professional and the student newspaper. And because that was a small town, circulation maybe 10,000, I felt like that was much more of a joke. The student paper was much more well-run. They didn't even have a copy editor. They made the reporters go out and shoot photos. The student newspaper runs just so much better, and I don't think people really understand that. We are pretty professional. I mean there are times we will throw the football around the office and make decorations, but at the end of the day, I think we all take it very seriously.

Professional impact on academics. Eight of the ten students I interviewed shared with me distinct stories or examples of how they have or would sacrifice academics for journalistic experiences where they could be influential or partake of unique and exciting situations, such as a fire in the community or the visit of a presidential candidate. Marie explained, "There is a difference between having academics and the actual experience. The actual experience is like to me, personally, the most important part." However, Marie explained how she could miss class or turn in an assignment late because of her unexpected time spent on a last-minute newspaper story, she didn't seem to realize until our conversation just how much time she spent on the newspaper and other jobs, all things non-academic beyond her 17 credits she was taking:

I have two jobs (beyond her role as a news editor at the student newspaper, which took at least five hours per story each week). I work 10 hours a week on the weekends. My Saturdays are gone. My Sundays are gone. I have one of my jobs on Sunday and then the paper prints Sunday night, so I am doing that all day. And Sunday used to be my homework days, but I kinda (sic) can't do that anymore.

Oh, so wait, I work, five, 10, wow, 20 hours a week. Wow. That's a lot.

Steve, at Newspaper #5, also said he spends much of his time at the newspaper, more than studying or being in class. His story would be familiar to the other students I spoke with in that he spends his day balancing class time and making phone calls between lectures:

I spend about 60 percent of my day doing something that is either representing or doing something that is meant for the newspaper. That is a personal choice. Not many [students] have the same level of dedication as me. They may have other jobs or want to be more focused academically or be focused in other fields, but I really like my job and I am willing to put everything aside and put the best work that I can into it.

Experience takes time. Sarah echoed some of Marie and Steve's themes of spending at least eight hours each Sunday (not to mention hours during weeknights) at the newspaper and balancing class days with her work for Newspaper #1 student newspaper:

I always make my reporters come up with stories because I am always in the office all of the time and I don't really know what is going on all of the time. But if I hear something... I remember in my political science class, I heard this girl

announce this new program and when she was passing around the sign up sheet, I wrote down her name and phone number.

Sarah also discussed the idea that students are in college for academics before being reporters:

It is funny because our editor-in-chief would always harp on us that, “You are always a student first.” No, [it was]: “You are a person first, then a student, then a reporter.” I’m not sure I agree with that. I guess because the [newspaper] defines who I am, and I feel like I would drop everything to work on a story. I feel like that because journalism is a little bit easier than the science majors, [and] I feel like I can balance it, then.

At another student newspaper, Joe shared that his staff uses the same mantra of being a person and student before being a reporter. And at his school, he said, the editors and reporters seem to believe the idea; however, it seemed that it took Joe sometime to find that balance because of the nature of the work:

I mean I remember as a freshman I wanted to write for a student newspaper. I thought, “I want to do this.” But there isn’t any advice to help me understand, “Hey this is a job,” and help me know how many hours I would be putting in. But as a freshman here, they were really good at helping my freshman year as I went through some horrible stages. Now, they help with the understanding of what’s expected and that this will take up some time, in all likelihood.

Katie’s frustration about the time it takes to do her job during school surrounds administrators and faculty who do not seem to consider her own time schedule when

returning her calls or emails, often leaving her without university comment in stories that can create a rift between officials and the newspaper:

We are still struggling with the schedule of a full-time school load plus this job, which can be a full-time job, and it can be hard for us to line up interviews with administrators and they are not very understanding of that. It is hard to make interviews work out. . . . [Student affairs professionals and administrators] don't understand deadlines and what we are trying to do, and if we write a story that reflects the university badly that doesn't mean we don't like them.

Recognizing their profession on campus. Most students I spoke with talked to me about how very much they wished those on their campus, mostly administrators, took the reporters and their newspapers more seriously. The students wanted administrators to recognize the amount of time students spent at the newspaper and on their stories. They also told me that they wanted administrators to understand the many struggles (highlighted throughout this project) that student journalists may face to create their product – a professional newspaper.

Steve at Newspaper #5 said that while he is a student writing for other students, he often writes for community members of all types. The student newspapers at Newspaper #4, Newspaper #3, and to some extent, Newspaper #2, compete with professional newspapers in their cities. So, too, Newspaper #5 looks to competition in and outside the newspaper to keep itself relevant and profitable, putting even more pressure on the student journalists who run the newspaper as a business, Steve told me:

This is again conflicting with my personality, but if people aren't going to go out of their way in today's world where everything is fast-paced and everything is

moving at such a quick level, and that it is so competitive that people are either going to remember you by a first impression or they are not going to remember you at all. In today's economy, you are known for what you do but you have to get somewhere... You have to do something extra ordinary to get there.

Most of the discussions surrounding the professional aspects of the student newspapers and the student reporters, themselves, often revolved around expressions of frustration with administration and sources who, the students felt, didn't perceive the reporters or the newspaper as professional. As Sarah said:

It is interesting, because I have a friend interning at the (local) *Business Journal* right now and administrators will call them right back right away and they won't call us back. I think they treat [the student newspaper] as, "Oh, it is just a student newspaper. What does it matter if I am quoted in it?" whereas the *Business Journal*, "It will look bad if I'm not quoted."

To extend her expression of frustration about administration and student newspapers, Sarah added:

We are always looking for balance in a story. I don't want to run something if the administrators don't comment, even if students are complaining. I think it reflects poorly on them if we have to write, "So-and-so refused to comment." It sends the message that they are being secretive. I just don't understand [that] they feel they don't have to call us back when they are calling back other publications.

At Newspaper #2, Elizabeth was able to communicate how her newspaper could make a significant impact equaling that of a professional newspaper with which the community should collaborate and put in high regard:

It's the only newspaper on campus, which makes it a vital role in campus life. If students don't have time to watch the daily news on TV or pick up the (local professional newspaper) or the *The New York Times*, it sums up state, local and government on a national issue. It keeps students aware of what's happening in current events or what's happening that could potentially affect them.

Katie, who shares in the idea that administrators and faculty do not see her and other student reporters at Newspaper #4 as professionals, suggests it may be because the community – especially administrators and professors, who often are targeted as sources for stories – might not be reading the newspaper enough as they do other professional publications:

I don't think they even realize that this is a professional-quality newspaper and what we put out is recognized. I can't count how many times I have been outside and overheard someone. This was just yesterday: One professor said to another, "I had a letter to the editor in (Newspaper #4) today." This was in the journalism school and the other said, "Oh, well I never even read the newspaper, so I didn't see it, but if you tell me I will pick it up." Within the journalism school, they should certainly read the newspaper, but within the community, our publication can compete with the local newspaper here ... and it can beat it most of the time. If administrators read it objectively and didn't read it as, "This is a student newspaper, it's not going to be good," then they would understand and treat us with more respect. I think that would help.

At Newspaper #4, Katie said she enters each setting as a professional reporter and faces sources who want to treat her as just a student:

... it is hard in so many different ways. It's hard as a student because you feel like people will automatically be coming from a student perspective so it won't be fair. It's hard as a student because as a student journalist, sources tend not to take you as seriously, and if you do anything to affect a relationship, if you shed the university in a bad light, it is twice as hard for us as student journalists than a professional newspaper where they will say, "Oh that is their job," whereas the student journalists, "I can't believe they wrote this."

Marie, at Newspaper #5, said she also feels frustrated when she perceives that sources view her as a student, not as a professional journalist who will be publishing a story that could be influential to campus community climate or culture.

Maybe [the campus community could] just understand that students aren't just students when they are going in for an interview for a publication. They are just like going in and trying to be reporters and not think about them being a student. They are going in trying to be professional and think about their assignment.

Sometimes I'm not sure the professors think that we are totally serious or that we are trying to get something down and that they should know we are coming in as journalists.

Marie's comments touch on another aspect of this theme that many student journalists I spoke with revealed: That some student journalists may see themselves more as reporters than students. Yet, it is important to hear now from Mark, at Newspaper #4, who said while it is important to view student journalists as professionals that are on a job, he contributes some interesting thoughts on how the student aspect of journalism can be beneficial to both students and administrators, faculty and staff:

This doesn't happen too much, but don't put on the kid gloves for us. Treat us like another local paper. On both ways, don't say, "Give this kid a break," and don't say you got a message from the [newspaper] and "I don't need to return that."

Mark added later:

I see newspapers as developmental. It is where I learned to write, where I learned to talk to sources and figure out what I need to know, and I feel if they distort that experience for me by treating me differently than they would if I was on a normal paper, then what is that experience worth?

Summary to career choices. Many issues were discussed in this section, describing various aspects of how many of the students I spoke with viewed themselves as professionals on a "job," versus just college students participating in a campus activity or organization. The sense of responsibility and their perceptions of their role in a college community contributes to their sense of dedication to their newspapers. Succinctly, even though these student journalists are paid, they all make around \$6 a story, which could take anywhere from an hour to weeks to complete, a far less salary than many other college student workers on campus and in the service industry, where many college students work.

Also, many of these students feel that they publish newspapers that are comparable to professional newspapers. Indeed, some of the college newspapers I visited do compete with professional newspapers and often outperform them in providing fast, accurate and effective products. Newspaper #4, for instance, is the only newspaper I visited – and one of a few in the country – that offers home delivery to subscribers in the city, fully competing with the city's "professional" newspaper. Yet, many of the students

I talked with told me they feel as though many within higher education view them as just students, not professionals, despite the time and energy the students commit and often times are recognized by state and national newspaper associations. Additionally, these students all spoke of their roles on campus in such a way that it was clear they viewed themselves in demanding positions with influence and responsibility. Yet, as we will visit in another in the *personal and educational goals* theme, a group of students I interviewed were so dedicated to this profession at the college level that they would substitute bylines in their student newspapers for good grades.

This data suggest student journalists are experiencing career development from the day they start at the student newspaper; they believe that day on the job is their first professional day. From that moment, students deal with many facets of their college life based on their role on the student newspaper and their experience there. CAS suggests that students can speak to the kind of work they enjoy and how their skills meet the jobs of their choice, among other areas of development, which students I have interviewed touch upon. Students told me they have found that their skill sets (writing, communicating, analyzing) fit in the journalism field and that they have experience that supports this belief. From their advantage point of reporters, they said, they are able to view other careers, other aspects of work and believe what they are doing (journalism), even at the college level, contributes positively to larger society.

Theme 3: Independence

Ken's desk sits at the edge of the newsroom. From here, he can see all of the news reporters' desks. Behind him, he can peek at the page designers. He also has a window view out onto the community of students at Newspaper #3, one of the two daily student

newspapers on campus. Everyone up this tall staircase just off of campus, in a leased space with wood floors that creak and where decades of news has hit the pages, is a university student. All of the decisions are made by students busy balancing coursework and work on the newspaper – and very few have had experience at a professional newspaper to make tough judgment calls when trouble arises. “Everyone here is a student,” Bill said. “We have hired a board of directors of students. So this really is just us. That’s a scary thought in some ways. It is just us doing everything.”

Later in the conversation, he says how this independence where students call the shots can be taxing:

There are cases, problems come up, and I am at a loss for how to handle them, and that’s not a pleasant feeling. You just do the best you can and move forward. ... There have been small failures, and you don’t get to see those until you put yourself in a position to fail.

That student journalists at these independent student newspapers work without strict guidance from professionals or staff and are often alone in making their own decisions is clear. In the aspect of making decisions, often on a daily basis regarding what stories to cover, which sources to use, how to highlight an issue in the pages of a newspaper, students suggested that this aspect of their roles was directly connected to where they view their responsibilities and how to remain objective. Students said they learn from their mistakes, a quality of their experience that they hold dear, but that they often are relying on each other’s perceptions and ideas to overcome adversity. But it is also this kind of independence, students said, that allowed them to implement their own

ideas of coverage, marketing and business that make their newspaper successful and relevant among the college campus.

Valuing outside involvement. Some students who were interviewed rebuked involvement from faculty, professional journalists and others, believing that involvement would be an intrusion and would threaten the independence all of these newspapers have from the university and administrators. Still, some students said they appreciated involvement (many more said they appreciated some form of outside interest, at least, in how the newspaper worked and what it was like to work on a newspaper) when it came to crisis or management.

Elizabeth, at Newspaper #2, shared how after a handful of student deaths in the river near the bars and pubs of downtown, the newspaper staff had to decide how to cover further stories. For background, it is important to understand that over the course of several years, young, college-age men had apparently become intoxicated and walked from the business district into the river, where their bodies were found, sometimes days later. As of this writing, there was still concern in the community about the drinking behaviors and the deaths.

Elizabeth shared that she and her editorial board has discussed at length how to cover these stories and said the decisions they make can impact students' perceptions of the deaths and drinking itself. To accomplish this, she said throughout the interview, the newspaper staff has turned to independent writers who have written columns – not news stories – about the deaths to remain objective and “positive,” she said. We did not explore what she meant about “positive” or why the staff wasn’t covering this more than they have. However, to assist them on making decisions, the staff “talked to people on the

[professional newspaper] and people on campus and collectively decided not to cover” aspects of the drownings and police investigations surrounding them.

Bill, at his student newspaper, talked about how the student staff had to fire a reporter, Bill’s personal friend, for plagiarism. It was a hard decision, he said, but the staff received help from several journalism professors who had learned of the situation when the news had broken about the firing and was discussed throughout local, professional media. This kind of outside limited (non-solicited) involvement was appreciated, Bill explains:

Our newspaper didn’t look good at all. The same night that all came out we had three professors came in. They went out of their way and came in 7 or 8 at night and sat in this conference room and gave us advice. We are independent of the university, but that three people stepped up and came in really made an impact on us.

Summary on independence. Interviews from the students indicate they work independently from professional guidance. Students also suggested that they thrived in that environment and would not wish for some forms of intervention from journalism or student affairs professionals in fear that they would lose their journalistic independence to write what they want. However, there is an indication that students approve of informal communication from faculty or student affairs professionals surrounding crisis and some professional practices.

Theme 4: Social responsibility

After Katie at Newspaper #4 covered the story of a student who was detained and then removed from the campus for wearing a ski mask to class shortly after the Virginia

Tech shootings, she was bombarded with emails and phone calls from lawyers. Wanting to represent the student for what they considered unfair treatment, the lawyers wanted to use Katie, a student journalist, as an intermediary, to put the two parties in touch. Not only did Katie struggle with her own views about how the university handled the situation and her pity for the student, but she felt put in the middle of the story, ultimately impacting her objectivity, she said. She didn't know where her responsibilities belonged. Her job had been to share this news with the campus community. But she also saw that she owed something to the student who had been, as Katie saw it, wrongfully removed from campus. Yet, what was her responsibility to the university? Did she want to contribute to legal action against it? And how was she supposed to act if she is an objective reporter? Where was the line? She explains the dynamic:

After a couple of days, the press coverage died down a lot and this guy was still facing the lasting effects, because he was trying to figure out if there was any legal action he could take and he wanted me to help him. And then there was the struggle of what I could do as an objective reporter, like what the limit was to help him out. I really wanted to because, personally, even though I could write this, I thought the university was terrible and I wanted him to be able to take action against them for it, but as a reporter it wasn't really my position to help him and connect him to people. And personally that was very difficult for me. So I would give him information if he asked me, "Who would I want to contact if I wanted to take legal action?" But he wanted me to help him to call them for him or to tell him what to say legally, and I couldn't do that.

Katie decided to give the student a phone number for her state's ACLU office. Representatives there thought they would want to help the student with his case. Katie said the struggles with objectivity occurred while she was writing her stories. Simply, she struggles with understanding her role in the concept of objectivity and where the value originated for her:

I don't know how a person couldn't struggle with objectivity. How could you be objective, period? I think maybe the older professionals say they don't struggle with objectivity because they don't try as hard to be objective anymore, and because we are so young it is still in the forefront of all of our thinking that we need to try really hard to be fair about this. So I think it is more of an age thing. I think people just become less affected by it except in the bigger stories as they get older whereas our newsroom every single story even if it is just covering an event, they worry about being too pro this event even if there is not really a con side to cover. I don't know.

An effect of responsibility. CAS defines social responsibility with students being aware of societal injustices and placing themselves in positions to understand societal challenges and participating in creating rights. By the types of stories the student journalists worked on (from the violence in Darfur to sharing with their community the rights of domestic violence victims), students told me that they saw that their role as journalists placed certain responsibilities on them. They said they were responsible to their newspapers, readers, universities and community.

What's concerning is that nine out of the 10 students interviewed said they had struggled with an aspect of objectivity in their reporting, often on stories about social

issues or on stories where the reporter felt a personal connection to a source or a topic. Moreover, students suggested that they would often resolve these issues on their own, with little guidance from professors, peer editors or others in the newsroom.

In part, students' sense of objectivity is connected with their sense of responsibility to competing entities: Themselves as journalists; their universities as places of personal commitment; and their readers, who as consumers, expect objective, honest and interesting reporting. Sarah, for instance, had to struggle with deciding whether to name a fellow student at the private university who was being dismissed from the dental school. She and her staff felt they had a responsibility to the readers to report on a story they felt was interesting and compelling, but they were also torn when it came to the responsibility they had to the dental student.

I know we had a long discussion with the dental student about whether to run his name or not and, yeah, that was more of the ethical things. Do we want to make this public. And I remember talking to my editor and my reporter and we felt it was newsworthy but this is kinda [*sic*] something like this is not something legal, it is ethical.

Sarah also said errors that had occurred throughout the newspaper under her guidance as an editor gave her another level of responsibility to report fair and accurate news: "I feel like there is this responsibility to get the story right and then there is this responsibility to cover stories that students care about."

Marie was more clear than other students, though nearly all agreed in some fashion, about how her role as a journalist leaves her with a feeling of responsibility to represent newsmakers, present information and "help other people," something she has

“always wanted.” Student journalists from all schools talked to me about the types of stories they could cover and have covered. The decision-making issues that took place will be discussed in the *independence* theme, but they all suggested, to varying degrees, that they were torn between their responsibilities as students (to be in class, to be engaged, to perform) and their responsibilities as journalists.

Ken, at Newspaper #3, discussed the conflict of responsibilities that student journalists face when it comes to covering their school’s own administration and campus news:

We are entirely independent of the newspaper, and it should stay that way.

Athletes are wearing the university’s name on their jersey – they are representing the university. We are trying as much as possible, though we are all enrolled here and committed to the mission that we want the university to do well, but we are trying to objectively cover it.

Yet, the idea that the student newspaper is independent of university involvement and tries to influence the community through news coverage in an objective way but maintain a sense of independence, as Ken stated, is directly connected, as well, to the struggle many of the journalists I talked to described when it comes to decision-making.

Independence impact on role. All students, to some degree, discussed aspects of responsibility in what they considered a “job” at the university as a reporter. Nine out of the 10 students used the word “job” to talk about their role as student journalists.

Generally, students felt committed to their universities, and many boasted that they knew more about campus events and politics than other student populations and that they have a duty to work on a newspaper that “keeps students aware of what’s happening in current

events or what's happening that could potentially affect them," as Elizabeth, an editor at Newspaper #2, said. Again, this sense of responsibility is combined with their desire for and struggle with objectivity in independent decision-making as they see themselves as professionals.

Summary on social responsibility. Interviews suggest that the idea of objectivity is connected to the responsibilities the student journalists face through the deep involvement in a role on campus, which they view as a "job" *and* the kinds of decisions that come with that role and responsibilities. The themes students shared with me about their experiences, which are often woven together through instances where they have to balance their objectivity with their views of responsibility to people, places and ideals are based on often difficult decisions they make as students without very much input from professionals and staff members.

Theme 5: Personal and educational goals

Mark, at Newspaper #4, said he makes conscious decisions on how much work he will put into his academics and into his political reporting, influencing how he sees himself as a college student:

I have talked to a lot of people who agree with this, that they put school as a second thing. I've learned how to manipulate, not manipulate, but how to do the right amount of work just to get by in school, like know when to read. I know how to cut corners without losing too much. I am happy with Bs and A minuses. So I don't know. I don't know how I consider myself a student.

Mark also makes a disclaimer about his grades, which are influenced by the time he spends working versus studying. "Yeah, my grades don't dictate my performance," he

said. “I just make sure I don’t get that D minus. So, I think that is different. That is a different mindset than I used to have.” He, and other students I spoke with, is calculated about what kinds of grades that they want. In our conversation, he started talking very strongly about maintaining solid grades and graduating with an undergraduate degree in journalism:

If I was failing out of school, I would have to drop this. There is time in the future to work and get reporting skills, but I am here to get a degree in journalism and to do it in four years... If getting straight As was my priority, I wouldn’t work here, but if getting passing, well more than passing classes and leaving here with a degree, I never take for granted the value of that. If this ever jeopardized me passing and getting a degree, I would leave the newspaper in a heartbeat.

However, within minutes of this discussion, Mark seemed to loosen his grip on grades, seeming to value his stories and experiences more than his academics:

I have a 3.2, or something, and I am fine with that. You have to work harder here to get into the journalism school. From there, you can’t coast, per se, but there is less pressure to get those As. Bs are more acceptable after that point. The jobs when I got here weren’t as time-consuming, but they have gotten more time-consuming as the time as gone by. At the same time, grades have become less important. So I have been able to sacrifice an A for a B as I have taken a promotion and stuff like that. If I didn’t work here, I think I would be doing better. If someone said you could get a 3.0 or even lower and still work here full-time I would do that. If I required getting Ds or failing classes, I couldn’t.

But what's even more concerning is that Mark and seven other students said they see themselves as reporters before being students, placing their emphasis of their college experience on the newspaper. Here is Ken's revealing story:

As an editor of Newspaper #3, Ken holds a level of prominence on campus and in the community. As a 21-year-old, he has covered hundreds of stories during his tenure at his school and has become familiar with those in state politics and in campus workings, such as the city mayor, the state university system and his campus' chancellor. Today, he leads dozens of peers along their own journey as student journalists, competing with two other student newspapers on campus and city press. Ken was clear in the sharing of his stories that he is more focused on her personal and professional goal-setting than setting goals for his education.

But all of this success takes work, and for Ken, he has sacrificed his grades for the experience. Clearly, he said, he sees himself as a journalist on campus before he see himself as a student:

That's been true for two and a half years now, and it is one of those things some people use the catchphrase, "Of course, academics come first. You're a student first." I understand that and I let people do that, but that is not something ever repeated. I think it demands sacrifices to work here. My GPA is awful. It is something I have accepted.

In what truly is a full-time job for him and many other student journalists at Newspaper #3, Ken finds himself in the office most nights of the week until at least 3 a.m. and balancing his class days with phone calls with reporters and sources. When I was talking with Ken, he was taking 15 credits. At one point in his career, he was taking

18, but decided to drop some classes that he was failing to maintain his experience in student journalism. Now, as a junior, when many students are thinking of what's after graduation (graduate school, full-time work, law school, etc.), Ken, with his 2.3 GPA, is lost to what comes next because of the academic sacrifices he has made:

I don't know [what to do after graduation]. I am just starting to think about that, starting to worry about that. I don't know. My guess is half-jokingly is that I will have to get a job at a newspaper somewhere because it is the only marketable skill I have right now. (Long pause). But yeah, I am confident this will serve me well, it is worth it. (Long pause). The only thing I regret is not learning more of the material in classes, not the grades so much. I don't regret the grades, but I think back at some of the classes I have taken and look back at how little I have gotten. And that honest to God does trouble me. Especially when I start to consider how much money is spent on this education... I lose sleep about that sometimes when I think about it too much and I think that is a shame. I really do.

So concerned about his grades and his role on campus, Ken said many of his professors don't even know of his role at the student newspaper or the amount of time he puts in for this job, ultimately impacting how much time he can spend on his studies:

Most of my professors don't even know I work here, and I prefer to keep it that way for a number of reasons, the first being that I am not a good student and I think it reflects poorly on the paper if they know the guy who is running that paper is an awful student in his class.

Learning more from experience. Some students felt more strongly that they gained more from their journalism experience than class activities, and all stressed their

experience on the student newspaper impacted the amount of time they spent studying. They also indicated that their coursework did not impact their journalism, but that they could sometimes weave their journalism experiences into what they were learning in the classroom. Only one student said she was planning for educational goals versus professional or personal goals. Some students said that they wished their academics were more important to them and that they lamented their low grades, which they contributed to long hours at the newspaper. Clearly, students said in the college stories they share that the experiences they cling to and the foundation from which they develop the most is connected to personal and career goals, not educational goals.

Why do these students value their experiences over the classroom? Part of it, according to Steve, is that students learn more from editing with each other and reporting on stories than listening to lectures or even working on projects with classmates:

The thing that a lot of students underestimate is how valuable working at a college newspaper can be, because it gives you so much experience, whereas an advanced reporting class or Writing for the Media or anything having to do with journalism in the classroom doesn't really teach you that aspect. It shows you how to do it on paper, but it doesn't show you how to live it. That's where I think the paper has served me in a lot of ways and allowed me to be the person I am today.

Experience offers more than academe. Sarah said she also questions how many practical lessons are learned in the journalism classroom based on her own experience and what she sees from new writers whose only journalism experience is in the classroom:

I feel like I have learned a lot more on the newspaper than sitting in classes. That would be one thing. We will get stories from stringers in introductory journalism classes, and they are not getting it. And there are people we hire as sophomores and juniors and I do not know what they are learning in the classes. It is either you have it or you don't, and I feel like I guess I would fault the journalism department for that. I feel like when I go into a class I don't improve that much, it is just like my natural ability or what I have learned on the newspaper or through editors.

Yet, other students spoke more strongly against coursework, saying it is more an intrusion into their lives as journalists. According to Ken:

I think the biggest challenge for us here is just how little time we have. We all, almost all of us, are full-time students here. Those classes unfortunately are between 9 and 5. When is the ideal time to be leaving phone calls and being by your phone? And then we are up [late]. Most nights I work I don't leave here until 3 a.m. So that is difficult.

Several students also told me they are frustrated that professors do not seem to be understanding of late assignments, even within the journalism major, when the students believe they are working full-time in a professional manner on the student newspaper and that professors and others on college campuses might see them as students first, rather than journalists. Katie explains:

I think I am a journalist first, honestly. I can't count how many times I have skipped class to come here, not just because I had to, just because I have. If it

came down to take a midterm or, “Quick, our president of the university has died,” it would never even occur to me to go to my midterm...

Second, Katie connects her deep involvement on the student newspaper to her role in the campus community, which might explain why she overlooks academics to some extent to benefit her journalism experience:

I think most people who work on the paper, their grades suffer some. I think a lot of us have good grades anyway, but they could be better. I know they could be better if we didn’t work at the newspaper. And it is not that the newspaper asks us to sacrifice ourselves for it, but when you become more involved in it, it becomes much more important to be actually writing a story than to be in a class telling you how to write a story.

Third, Katie explains how her experience should, in her case, supersede the timeliness of class assignments or the importance of coursework, especially during trying times at the newspaper where she is using her top skills in breaking news, for instance:

It wouldn’t hurt if journalism professors understood that if you need to miss a lecture to cover [presidential candidate Barack] Obama being at the Memorial Union, that that’s probably an OK thing to do. It would be like an engineering student saying, “I can’t come to class today because I am helping NASA launch a space shuttle.” It seems like they should be more understanding that it is to our benefit to miss class occasionally to actually be a part of a publication.

The student affairs effect. Several students made comments throughout their interviews that might indicate they distance their academics and their student journalism experiences based, in part, on their interaction with university administrators and student

affairs professionals. Collectively, they said they have not and likely will not seek help in this aspect of their college experience from those within student affairs because the students felt like those professionals did not recognize their unique experience – and didn't appreciate their contribution to the community. Dave, for instance, indicates that administrators might not value his work outside of the class and that, I suggest, could contribute to how much value the students then believe the university as a whole puts on what they do:

I think mainly since we are distributed throughout campus, [administrators] see what's printed, see the photos and see the stories. And people in student affairs see the newspaper as "somebody is just calling me for another story, and they are bugging me again." I can't speak for them. I don't know, but I would think that's how they see the paper. It is the face of the university in terms of reporting what goes on here, but I don't know that they are concerned with our development.

Summary on personal and educational goals. From these interviews, it is clear that students value their student journalism experiences and make meaning from the stories, interviews and interactions. Yet, academics, to many students, come second. Simply, there is a focus on professional/personal, not educational, goals. Students' grades, in almost all cases, were impacted by their activity on their student newspapers; however, only in a few cases did the students say the grades would impact their journalism careers in the professional world; whereas, they said they were learning more about the professional world, themselves and the journalism industry that will be critical to their success if they pursue journalism professionally.

Theme 6: Enhanced self-esteem

It was late in the afternoon. Only a few reporters and editors were editing the newspaper for publication the next day. It was a quiet Sunday afternoon. Sarah, a reporter at Newspaper #1, received a phone call – a tip that a dental student was being dismissed from the university after allegedly posting negative comments about a professor on an Internet blog. Immediately, reporters moved into action. This was news. It was also deadline day. And the team had a difficult decision to make: Do we name the student? Sarah was the reporter responsible for naming the student (which the paper did) or to protect the student's identity. She also was faced with talking to the student himself and the student's parents, who had threatened to sue the newspaper. This experience, Sarah said, influenced her views on how to make ethical decisions and how to overcome a fear of interviewing people over the phone. But it also gave her something else: A sense of confidence and self-esteem.

The impact of this story from her freshman year, she said, influences her reporting methods, but introduced her to how to make responsible and hard decisions, as well as boosting her confidence. "I remember that was like my first big story," Sarah said, "because I was always a little apprehensive and I thought after that, 'Okay, I can do this.'"

Of the four women I interviewed, all said they had been shy before they started on the newspaper and have since been able to better confront controversial situations and find more comfort in the way they communicate with peers and sources. Clearly, students I spoke with said they sensed that they gained confidence from their experiences, whether that means having experience that made them more comfortable talking with sources or

overcoming challenges and being published. CAS suggests in the learning outcome about enhanced self-esteem that students should show aspects of self-respect and move to positive outcomes and goals, while working without a constant need for affirmation. However, students I spoke with said while they come through experiences with more self-esteem and confidence, some students suggested there is a deeper issue occurring through this outcome – that they base their identity on what they do as student journalists.

Katie, because of her role as a reporter where she often is in touch with readers who comment on her stories online or call and email with feedback, said:

I am a lot less shy. I am a lot more vocal about things that I think need to be said.

As a person, my feelings get hurt a lot less, I think because people, as a journalist, people are rude to you all of the time, sending you ranting emails. I think this helps you have a thicker skin.

Marie also said she had a similar experience in strengthening her confidence and social skills from her contact with sources as a student reporter:

I think because I have always been a really shy person that I developed interview skills that I'm not the one shaking at the interview, that it is the person sitting across the table from me. And that was a good thing for me, because I was always so shy and I didn't want to offend anyone, and now I have learned that sometimes you have to ask the uncomfortable questions to get the information you need.

The men, too, made connections to how they define themselves and their roles as journalists on campus. Ken, for example, said he recognized how his role as an influential journalist (an editor) on campus could benefit him academically through contact with faculty, and possibly, he said, if they understood how much work it took to be a journalist

that can impact his grades. Yet, he said he did not want special treatment in his classes because of his role at the newspaper. Moreover, Ken said, this dynamic has impacted his view of himself in college. During our conversation, Ken said his grades dictate that he was not successful at college. A few minutes later, after we talked more about his work as a journalist and his embarrassment over his poor grades, Ken wanted to “refine” his answer on if he viewed himself as a success in college, separating himself as a student and a journalist. Here, he is answering one of my questions from earlier in the conversation:

Back to your question about being a successful student. It depends... I want to refine my answer. It depends on how you define student. I was thinking of it in the terms of if I have been a successful scholar... As a student at this university, by the virtue of my position, I am one of the more influential student leaders on this campus. This is part of being a student, and I shouldn't dismiss that. This is part of being a person. It isn't just a side-job that I have – it is a student newspaper. So, I would refine that, that, yes, I have been a successful student. In terms of in class, absolutely not.

Summary on self-esteem. Interviews suggest that the students view themselves through their roles as student journalists. All women interviewed for this project said they gained “confidence” from reporting experiences when they first felt “shy.” Further, students said they identified first as being reporters than students, saying that they gained positive perceptions of themselves from their being published and overcoming challenges in their interactions with other students, staff and the community as journalists. However, students lack guidance or intervention from others to help them frame themselves in

positive ways: All students said that they, alone, formed their perceptions of themselves from their roles and experiences as journalists.

Theme 7: Clarified values

It was an important meeting, a day when a Board of Regents was expected to advance a decision about whether to provide employee insurance and other benefits to same sex couples. It was Bill's job to cover the story. A conservative, Bill said he still struggled to understand the university's perspective (at the time) to not provide such benefits:

That was a big, heated, contentious issue here on campus and throughout the state and the regents took stances and heard from people, and it was really an emotionally draining story, hearing from people how they were leaving [this school] because of this and just a big, general struggle. It's strange, as much as I love [this school], it's strange to hear that they can't be here as much as they want to. That hits you hard to see the struggles that they are going through.

Yet, Bill told me he has not been able to determine his own values around this topic, partly because he was so close to the subject through his interviews with people who were in same-sex partnerships and would be denied benefits by the university system:

I am honestly not set on one side, you could say. I voted against, so I voted against the amendment to ban gay marriage because I didn't think it was necessary. Am I for gay marriage? I don't know. I'm for gay people having the same rights as other individuals. As for marriage, I'm not sure, just cause [*sic*] it's a gut feeling of mine

Additionally, Bill said this close experience with an issue and people, which influenced his own values, he said, and that he spends so much energy on understanding other's view points, that he doesn't even have a clear idea of his own anymore on issues:

I've talked to people on both sides (of the gay marriage issue) and I tried to ask them the same questions and use the same tone. One thing I really try is not to let my own emotions or opinions really get to me with my reporting. I really try to avoid that most of all. I think I've done so well at that and perhaps that's why I don't have such strong opinions on issues, because I focus on reporting both sides of an issue.

CAS suggests programs help students understand and articulate their personal ideals and values. This learning outcome suggests that it is important for students to understand and evaluate other's views. Student journalists who spoke with me suggested that they struggle with their own views, partially because their roles require them to be objective. Students said they have vast experiences that develop their thoughts and views and help them analyze perspectives in stories that they write, but it is clear – as we see with Bill – that often their own developed, clarified values takes second chair to understanding those of others.

Experience influences politics. Sarah, at the private university, had never been a political reporter as a student. She had, however, developed personal beliefs and had ideology that had made political organizations and activities on campus attractive to her before becoming a student reporter. However, as she dealt with the personal responsibilities as a reporter and she became more involved with her campus community

in the role of a journalist charged with covering political events and topics, she developed new views about politics:

I started out being very involved politically and trying to balance that with the journalism. And I think, I don't think I have become disillusioned with politics, but I think I have come to that I would rather report on it objectively. I feel that that's more important.

While Sarah did not tell me she has changed her own views and politics because of her experience as a student journalist, other students did. Yet, Sarah has in common with these other students at least one thing: Being deeply involved in political climate and culture – often at a personal level when dealing with sources and newsmakers – and were able to – or strived to – step outside of the political theater to evaluate issues and topics through political veils. Moreover, several of the students I spoke with were able to isolate instances where they began to question or change their views on both politics and values (ideology) that were set from their earlier development. Further, the students' experiences that spurred these changes were from their time as student reporters. And while not all students discussed the same aspects of change that was influenced by experience, combined, their stories suggest that their experiences reporting and writing that forced them to deal with issues of their own politics, their religions or directly contributed to the creation of a personal desire to understand other views on social issues.

Sarah's change in politics, as discussed above, were not as much personal as they were about her perceptions of politics itself. Sarah was very clear with me about how she entered college with strong political views, and that she had participated actively in some political organizations, which clashed with her desire to be objective as a reporter:

This year I was like I really wanted to go to this protest I did my freshman year and I wondered, “Can I still do it?” And I went to a meeting of one of the groups I went to my freshman year, and I was so frustrated because it was so ineffective that I wasn’t going to get any work done here; whereas, if I assigned a reporter to do a story to cover some social justice thing people will actually read that.

In the same respect, Mark at Newspaper #4, who didn’t say whether he was personally influenced politically through the stories he covered as a political reporter for the student newspaper, did say that he, like Sarah, became frustrated with the nature of politics. Mark’s third story on the newspaper was covering a presidential candidate visit by John Edwards. Since, Mark has covered many visits by national candidates, meeting them personally. Yet, the covering of political news, Mark suggested, became structured, almost monotonous:

I mean if you cover an event X candidate spoke to Y number of people about Z, you know: Plug quote, plug quote, crowd quote, stamp it. While I try to avoid that, and I try to get background in because [Newspaper #4] doesn’t have the [leading state newspaper’s] constant background being updated, you kind of have to work it into the event pieces. I try to do that but it is still very – you go there you write down what the politician says, you pull two to five people from the crowd, ask what they think. Find the best quotes of those. If you can, put a recorder in front of the politician’s face afterwards. If something weird happens, maybe call an expert. But I have done 30 or 40 of these things and they all become the same after a while.

Making connections to personal views. Still, other students – in fact, two at Newspaper #3 – said their personal politics were very much influenced from their college experience as reporters. Ken was from a liberal area of the East Coast and worked since his first year at Newspaper #3, a historically conservative newspaper. He said his experience watching the campus respond through protest and discussion after the newspaper published a Danish cartoon of Prophet Mohammed, which many in the Arab world found offensive, moved him further to the conservative side of politics:

... it really shocked me to see how irrationally people responded to that. It really disillusioned me in some ways to the culture of the multicultural- and tolerance-driven environment at the university where people in the Middle East were reacting so irrationally to those cartoons being printed. People were being killed and they were burning down KFCs and stuff and instead of distancing themselves from that instead of acknowledging their roles as Americans and people of enlightened values at a university, they [student groups on campus] made excuses for it. They excused that behavior and said we were wrong for printing it. I mean it is OK they feel that way, but it was disappointing to me, the reaction.

Ken said before he was a student at the school, “I wouldn’t even seriously consider a Republican candidate for president.” He said he started changing his thoughts about politics and opening his mind to other ideals when he was:

[H]earing the editor in the chief at the time say he voted for Bush in 2004. I was stunned. It was like a foreign concept to me. I look back at myself when I started here and I was amazingly sheltered in that way. From my upbringing up home and coming here.

Ken also said he still talks to his friends back on the East Coast who are still liberal and his parents who have comments about his change of ideals, but “they don’t have a problem with it,” he said.

Bill, on the other hand, comes from a conservative background outside of the city, and is faced with pressures by friends and family who are concerned he is attending a school that they perceive to be too politically liberal:

I will get people asking me about articles at home and they will ask me, why this is the way it is, and it is just because that’s how people think. It’s a much different atmosphere here than it is at home, and so it is being raised like that and coming here like this, both are pulling you and that is a little difficult, I guess you could say...

Bill said while he struggles with the conflicting politics from those at home and at school as a reporter, he will not be influenced by another person’s politics in deciding what to write or how to write it. “I’m not going to do a story because someone says, “Here is a story, and here is what you should think and try to make people look bad,” he said. “I’m not going to do that.”

Experience influences religion. Two other students told me they had to work through their issues with religion when writing stories. Ultimately, these stories influenced their own religious views. Marie, for instance, said she was influenced by stories she wrote and even more by what she has read in newspapers about the Catholic faith (she didn’t expand on specific stories) that she began to question her own Catholic commitment.

It is hard, because when you learn the loopholes in religion, it is hard to go back. Once you learn something, it is hard to erase it from your memory. It is difficult sometimes. That's hard when you learn about something you can't sit in denial when you know it's not true.

Joe was clearer about how he grappled with his own religious views (he is agnostic) from his story of covering the "What Would Jesus Do" sign at the center of the campus where Joe works at Newspaper #2. He told me he struggled with understanding the Christian perspectives in the debate and in communicating with some Christian student leaders whose views he considered offensive to his own beliefs. However, he was able to express what he learned from this experience:

I just understood their side more after the article, and in the long term I can understand the opposing religious view and how deeply or even more so how deeply religion can influence people's choices.

Joe said he was able to connect his experiences in religion as a student to his role as a student in the classroom where he was better able to make meaning from his experiences. He added that he would not have been able to understand these religious perspectives from coursework and class discussion alone:

I am an English major and there is a lot of discussion, but to get people to talk about it [personal religion], opening up without some sort of context of a book... The ideas come up and are always present in discussions and to get it when they are just talking about religion, that aspect doesn't just come up: "This is what I believe." And to other degrees to that idea, I don't think I would have gotten that [an understanding].

While not all students I spoke with could speak about their religious impact, surely more students discussed how their experiences as student journalists opened their eyes to more social issues, including religion.

Experience influences desire to understand other views. Elizabeth said her experience as an editor at the student newspaper helped her examine other world-views and perspectives as she and other staff members discussed issues that they would place in the newspaper or in editorials. She said the interaction and discussion from a diverse group of people who were interested in various topics broadened her own understanding of issues and introduced her to new ideas:

I am open to more viewpoints now. At the editorial board, there are a lot of great ideas but if I don't see how it's going to help out paper maybe opening my mind to more viewpoints. As a co-news editor, I work with another person and we collaborate [on what issues are selected for coverage].

Joe said his interaction with people and situations broadened his perspectives and forced him to challenge his own ideas and values. Through these experiences, he said, he has been able to view people on his campus and situations through a difference lens:

I think even person to person, you never know what is going on in the lives of someone, whether they dealt with the death of someone the week before or if they are dealing with such and such a thing. It is up to both sides, I think, to explain what is going on and keep the communication going on.

Later in the interview, Joe continued with the same idea that his experiences – both where he grew through challenge and positive interactions with people as a student journalist – said he was able to make more connections to people:

I care about what the kid sitting next to me is feeling like, what he is doing and what his weekend is about. I really care about that. Even like in the small classes as an English major, not one of the largest majors on campus, I start recognizing faces from year to year. I start recognizing a lot of them, and it's like I care about what they are feeling like.

Marie said she was forced to reflect on the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks for the first time after covering a story about a university professor who had lectured that the attacks were conspired by United States politicians. Her telling of how this experience articulates how her role as a student journalist has influenced her viewpoints on the event and how people responded:

I had to write an article on (University of Wisconsin-Madison lecturer) Kevin Barrett, and like for some reason any time 9/11 would come up, I would get really emotional and I would try to avoid watching it because it would really upset me. I had to interview him and I saw the way people would treat him. There were conservative students on campus and they would stand up and turn their backs to him. And it was ridiculous, and like afterwards I would actually try watching this stuff. I went to my house and watched TV and I knew the History Channel would show this kind of stuff and things like this and I watched it and I broke down. I don't know why I wanted to watch it, but I did, and I kind of broke down and I needed to deal with this and realize that I needed to deal with it.

Summary on clarified values. From these interviews, it is clear some students have made meaning and personal connections to either the stories they have worked on or the situations they have encountered. More over, their experiences have forced them to

evaluate their values, though their conversations suggest they have not been able to clarify their values, with the experiences offering chances to explore perspectives, but not to better develop their own.

Theme 8: Healthy behavior

Steve sat in the courtroom, a student reporter covering one of his hardest stories yet – a trial over allegations that one college student raped another. Across the room, Steve saw the alleged attacker crying, repeating out loud how sorry he was for what he had done. The mother of that man walked up to Steve, crying, pleading that Steve not publish negative words about her son. “Just don't make my son look bad,” she said to him.

Afterward, Steve wrote his story. He said he struggled with the language, how to portray the victim and the assailant. He knew he was struggling with the emotion, of it all, he told me, but he never talked to anyone about it. Instead, he turned into himself, hiding the emotion, and never revealing how he felt walking away from this story. He has never told this story to anyone – except to me:

No, I haven't exchanged stories about the emotional weight with anyone except for you, coincidentally. That was a feat I had to deal with myself and that's something I had to do. To show you were having trouble with anything I think it is a sign you are not quite ready to have the job, and I still want the job, so I didn't share that information with anyone.

Eight of the 10 students I spoke with indicated that they have had to deal with an emotional, political or ideological struggle from their contacts with sources or environments around a story and have not been able to – or chose not to – talk about them

with anyone on their newspaper staffs or on their college campuses. For example, one of the eight students had not reflected on the number of hours she worked at the newspaper and how many credits she was taking until our conversation. Two students, beyond the eight who said they did not reflect with others, said they have spoken with their mothers about some issues they struggled with. As I discussed in this study's introduction and will expand upon in Chapter 5, that there is a vital connection between experiences, reflection and learning, and, therefore, an opportunity for students through reflection to make educated choices to influence their behaviors, attitudes and health.

Whereas other student populations may reflect with peers and mentors the majority of student journalists I spoke with said talking about their thoughts and their "jobs" as student reporters meant they were weak and unprofessional.

Indeed, when I asked Steve if he would like to have a closer advisor, possibly from the university, to help him and other students work through their issues after or during stories, Steve said that would infringe on the newspaper's independence from the school:

I think it would be an interesting venue for some, but again this is just a byproduct of my personality, I am very highly individualist. I believe if someone can't accomplish something by themselves that they should either step up the ante [*sic*] or just quit. I'm not saying being a mentor to help someone grow is a bad thing, it is just not the thing for me. You would also have to identify what would be made available, how a mentorship would be funded, and it may just prove to be useless.

The reasons why students restricted themselves from sharing their struggles, many that are discussed in these results – from time management and the public's

perception of the newspaper and reporters to their emotional baggage created by the nature and culture of the newspaper world – varied; however, most students suggested reflection on their experiences did not have a place in a college journalism setting.

With what students may be dealing. Beginning with Steve’s example above, and again below, we can explore some exact experiences that, for these students, proved to be challenging and may have benefited from reflection. For Steve, some of the hardest decisions he has to make include what he is going to write and how he is going to write it. On the story about a student who was on trial for allegedly raping another student, Steve decided he wanted to write an emotional piece about how the case impacted the assailant. Steve said he was touched more by the alleged assailant than the victim and he struggled with his sense of responsibility (was it to the victim, the assailant?) and he struggled with his sense of objectivity (how or should he keep his personal feelings out of the story?). Steve said the experience of being in the courtroom as a fellow student and as a reporter influenced how he decided to write and what he would write about:

I went to the courthouse to cover that story the day he was being sentenced. He came in in shackles and in chains. He looked very pale, very distraught and worried. And I couldn’t help to think that regardless of what he has done, what I am doing is shedding light on what the man had done wrong and what his life was going to be like next. What was more difficult was that the mother of the defendant was present and she came up to me in tears crying, “Please don’t make my son look bad.” It kinda just pulled at the heartstrings.

This unique experience had its impact for Steve from seeing an aspect of the court system and of society in a personal way, which led him to challenge how he will write and how objective he will be:

I just kind of reflected, recollected what I witnessed and at the end, I wrote a 730-some-word story about it. And I tried to be as detailed as I could, whereas you will sometimes in some court sentencing where they just present the facts, a very quick, 400-word essay: “This happened, and this happened.” I wanted to take a little more care of it. I even included some as a quote, and I included he wept and said, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” I felt a weight on the shoulders so I emailed my mother and told her about that happened and how I felt about it and how that I was kind of in a struggle at the time that I was reacting to emotion.

Other students also said they struggled with decision-making, a theme that was connected to their beliefs of how their roles as journalists impact change, but also impact them personally. Students said they are professionals that require tough, professional standards, none of which include reflection, but require thick skins and definite decisions. At the private university, Sarah said she had to make a conscious decision to keep her own politics out of stories that she said she felt close to. Yet, more than that, she said the kind of “job” she had on campus (a theme unto itself, which is explored in another section) set her apart in from other student populations in terms of the kinds of decisions she has to make:

I feel like most students just have on-campus jobs (and) that they do it just to make money; whereas, not many get to have jobs on campus that are actually what their career goals are. And so I feel like I take it more seriously, then. I guess

I feel like we have to deal with a whole variety of issues that no one else does in terms of decision-making. I know this year we had a story about one of the athletic coaches, that a girl was accusing him of like going up to her hotel room and we had to decide: “Do we run that?” And I don’t think most people have to consider the implications of doing this to someone. I think we do have more power than most students. We take it seriously. [Other] people are just hanging out on Monday night. We are putting together the production of a newspaper.

Keeping some emotions, sharing others. There is clear evidence that the students I spoke with would keep more to themselves than what they would share to friends, family and faculty, for instance. However, there were a few instances that showed how some students balance what they share and what they do not. Marie said she did not start to deal with the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the East Coast until several years later when she was covering a controversial University of Wisconsin-Madison lecturer who was speaking on her campus about how the United States government contributed to the attacks. Even that the story she was writing forced her to come to terms with the attacks and what they meant to her, she was not able to share those feelings with anyone around her. Instead, she went home and tried to struggle through the feelings alone. She also said that the writing process itself is a way she is able to work through her feelings on an issue she is covering:

While I am writing, I am still thinking of things in the back of my mind while I am still focusing on getting a newsworthy article out. After the article is published, I read it again and you start remembering things and then you can reflect at that point, too, after reading your own article in the paper.

On the other hand, Joe discussed how he has dealt with issues, which involved a bit of reflecting during the interviews he has with sources and afterwards with family members. However, he said he did not spend a lot of time focusing on the need for reflection and that sometimes it was best if he tried to work it out himself. While covering a controversial religious story for his newspaper, Joe said listening to:

[O]ne of the Christian organization leaders, was, well some of his comments could be taken as offensive. I was taking them that way, so it was hard for me to just sit there and do my job without getting into a discussion without tying myself into the article, into the interview, instead of just listening to what he had to say.

And after what he called a highly stressful altercation with a conservative source on the issue of religion (Joe, himself, is Agnostic and felt threatened to believe in Christianity by the source), he said he needed to work through his own feelings while balancing his objectivity:

It was a challenge, which I accepted. You only have a week to get out this story, we are a weekly newspaper, and I wanted to see what I could do with it. And in talking about my own misgiving within the interviews, I had to keep my own opinions out of it.

Joe also said about his immediate reaction to the interviews and the story, that he needed time alone to deal with the issues before turning to his mother for more help:

That Friday, I didn't talk to anyone. I sorted through things. It was after the article was published when I was thinking about it more for myself about why I took on the challenge of doing the article. And then I think the next week I called my parents in the usual, weekly phone call, and I think I talked with my roommate at

the point, too. First, I figured it out for myself and then I was like, “Hey, I did this article last week.” I remember my mom was very supportive in questioning and saying, “I know you are very agnostic. Why did you take this article on?”

Sarah, at the private university, said she started by keeping her emotions to herself, but has tried to build bonds with those she works with who might be able to help her work through struggles:

I think that is one of the things I have kinda [*sic*] changed, to internalize things,” she said. “But since I have come close with people on staff I feel like I can bring that to them. So I say, “Yeah, I go to people on staff, because they have the same issues.”

Summary on healthy behaviors. Through these interviews we see that some students are reflecting on their experience, a healthy behavior to make meaning and to develop from experiences. However, the reflection seems reserved and is not guided by principles to increase the understanding of a situation. Some students tend to do their own reflection in quiet or even through writing. Others, however, seem resistant to reflection or struggle to see its purpose. Students suggested they valued their writing experiences, the act of it and the nature and purpose of it over their need for reflection. That reflection is not a priority in the student journalism experience can be concerning after hearing from students that they have meaningful experiences that can influence their perceptions and beliefs through pivotal exchanges with sources and subjects.

To varying degrees, each student recognized that they needed to remain objective in their reporting and that they struggled with the process of being non-biased, often times failing to turn to others for help in the challenge. Again, Sarah, at the private

university, suggests students struggle in two ways with objectivity when they are immersed in their college community: Each is a student who has a vested interest in the success of their student lives and the image of their institution; and each is a reporter who is charged with acting as a watchdog. Yet, Sarah, as other students told me, did not discuss the issue with others, though she says she was able to work through the challenge to a positive outcome.

Results summary

Combined, these themes suggest that there are significant amounts of areas of student journalist development that need research and understanding. Awareness of how this student population develops through college experiences would help in providing possible advising resources to these students or other developmental assistance, including career development, assisting with developing healthy behaviors and the other key learning outcomes mentioned throughout this study.

For example, understanding that this student population bases much of their identities on their student newspaper work can help us connect them with other areas of their college and life experiences that can help shape their self-image and self-esteem. Also, this overall awareness can further highlight areas of support for students in this field while they are in college and help those within student affairs to better understand the needs and challenges this population face. Student affairs professionals can also help student journalists in at least two other areas of interest: Data from this study suggests that students can use assistance in clarifying their personal values; and students could use guidance to develop stronger personal and educational goals, areas with which the students I interviewed struggled.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

It is a freezing winter night in this college city. The surrounding lakes blow air from the tips of floating ice against buildings, shooting bursts of cold down them and out the sides onto the campus. At two in the morning in the middle of the week, it is not uncommon for some students to still be out, even in the cold. The libraries are nearly empty, but lights are still on in residence halls and in other buildings lining the core of student life and activity. In two locations, however, students are not only awake; they are working.

Inside the newsrooms, one of two daily student newspapers at this school, a dozen students type away, chat on the phone, yell to each other on each end of the room that's up a high creaky staircase. Desks line the center of the room, scattered with laptops, papers, books, cell phones and iPods. The wood floors ache with heavy footsteps as reporters pass-off stories to editors and page designers walk between computers, making final touches before putting the paper "to bed."

This could-be scene is likely the clearest for understanding a student journalist's experience, because it is something we can see, if we choose. But what student affairs professionals and other educators need to understand about this population is that what may need to be known about these students (how they develop and experience college) may not be as noticeable as reading the newspapers on news stands in the morning. To better understand this population, we must ask whether we recognize, among other things, the impact the stories we read have on those who write them. Simply: How do student journalists experience college through the pages of their newspaper, and what are

the areas in which student affairs professionals can assist this population during its unique college experience?

Little to no scholarly research has been done on the development of this population to answer these types of questions, which I set out to answer in this project. What I found from meeting with student journalists on their college campuses, in their own environments and after spending time reviewing their conversations to find the common themes of interests is that, as with all student populations, deeper needs and experiences lie beneath what we may initially believe – or recognize. From my own experience as a professional reporter during college – and two years as an editor of an infrequent student newspaper at one of the University of Wisconsin’s two-year colleges – I have sensed that we, the student reporters, experience college in a different way than many may believe, and certainly in unique ways. The students who spoke with me for this study confirmed that.

In this investigation, it is important to first understand (through the stories and the scenarios that students shared in their interviews) what a college journalism experience can be like. The experience can be exciting, full of new revelations each story. But the experience can also have difficult lasting impacts. In fact, one of the students in particular I met through this project told me a story that has stuck with me about covering the trial of a fellow student accused of raping another university student and how the challenge of that story – the imagery, the details and the actual meeting of perpetrator and victim who were the reporter’s same age and fellow peers, but yet were involved in something so deep, personal and foreign to him – follows this reporter today. Some of my journalism colleagues have told me they decided to leave the field because of this kind of contact;

however, it appears that the same struggles that make reporting trying and tiring are the same struggles that make journalism interesting and challenging enough for students to desire this experience more than many other experiences that college has to offer them (only one of the ten students I interviewed for this project were involved in anything other than the student newspaper). Yet, these students also told me that these experiences come with internal struggles that no one knows or talks about.

Educational research has not delved into the process of reporting among college students. Moreover, we have not researched how these situations are impacting the very ones who are covering the news, the student journalists themselves. From this study, I suggest, among many ideas, that it is not uncommon for student journalists to struggle with: how they are viewed on college campuses; their sometimes competing responsibilities; and the development of their self-esteem and values that appears to be greatly linked to their role as a journalist. This populations could also likely use assistance in career development, and in forming healthy behaviors by which they can understand their experiences.

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study was to explore how the college student journalists I spoke with saw their experiences as journalists on college newspapers impacting their overall college experience and their personal development. By talking about what they experienced through the stories and situations in which they found themselves as journalists, I was able to extrapolate eight “themes of interest.” Through these themes, which were funneled through the learning outcomes developed by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), I was able to assess how this

population might be experiencing college compared to how the student affairs profession may desire or expect them to be doing so. Certainly, through this project, we are able to recognize several areas of future research regarding this population, which are identified at the end of this study.

Identifying themes

Several themes of interest have been identified throughout this study. Many of them have direct connections to each other, which adds to the complexity of this population's development and reveal questions for future research that will be discussed below. The eight themes of interest are highlighted here and the connections between them evaluated to develop questions for future research.

Meaningful experiences. All of the students I spoke with told me of meaningful experiences that they had had as student journalists. In all of the stories, students told me about new ideas or perspectives they had learned, about personal values that were impacted by exposure to others, and instances they will remember as they continue to develop, from visiting a homeless shelter blocks from campus to helping readers understand the effects of domestic violence through a story about a speaker who was personally abused and visited campus to lecture on the issue. While “meaningful experiences” is not a CAS learning outcome, it is important to understand in this theme that the students were growing through their experiences and that they were able to articulate the meaning of their experiences in conversation. Simply, their experiences, students said through interviews, impacted all of their other areas of development explored in this study. The interest in this theme, then, is that without understanding the complex scenarios and situations students experience during their college years as student

journalists (their *meaningful experiences*), we are uneducated as we delve deeper to assess their needs and provide necessary resources as educators.

Career choices. Students interviewed shared the common theme that they see themselves as professionals while in college, and that they base their identity and their self-esteem on their journalism experience, not academic progress or other college affiliation. Further, how they view themselves through their experiences, the decision-making, ethical issues and social responsibilities they view as directly related to their profession and career choice, impacts how they focus on their academics, their peer relationships and their future personal and educational goals.

That the student journalists I spoke with told me they have already chosen their careers, at least for this part of their lives, also meant to them that they were ready to work as professionals. Many of the students told me they worked at least 20 hours a week. Some worked 40 hours a week, many of those hours from 3 p.m. to 2 a.m. as they edited the newspaper. This workload, students told me, had an obvious impact on their academics, but they said that they valued the experience enough to sacrifice other areas of their lives, including peer relationships and grades. If we treat student journalists as professionals, or at least as working students (for most, but not all students I spoke with, the student newspaper was their only job) we see that they could be at risk as other students who work while in college. Stern, McMillion, Hopkins, & Stone (1990) indicated through evaluation of past research and their own conclusions that, among other traits, college students who work, to varying degrees, are less likely to persist or tend to extend the amount of time before graduation. The researchers also indicated that students who work do not suffer more academically than counterparts who do not work. However,

what we see from data in this study of student journalists is that academics do suffer for those in this population because of their involvement in the newspaper, making them unique to other students who work while in college.

Students also expressed that they held themselves to their interpretation of professionalism by not reflecting with journalist peers on sometimes challenging experiences. Students said that talking about the challenges would impact them negatively on the student newspaper as professionals. Finally, nine students said they believed they were already working on a “job” at the university as reporters, further creating a boundary between themselves, other student populations (which two journalists called “normal students”) and student affairs professionals; eight of the students said they viewed themselves as professionals.

Independence. Students collectively revealed to me through conversation that they have become independent workers and people, another CAS outcome that desires students be self-reliant, work interdependently and manage time effectively. In this theme, student journalists described structure and process that indicates that they are self-reliant, though they often work in teams with editors and other reporters. However, this independence often keeps them at a distance from professional advice and faculty guidance, as well as intervention and assistance from student affairs professionals.

Social responsibility. Students I interviewed connected, quite strongly, to the CAS outcome of social responsibility. CAS suggests meeting this outcome requires participation in governance, participating in aspects of social change, and challenging of unjust behaviors of society, a benefit of the college experience, defined by Sanford:

In college ... we seek to develop a higher order of social responsibility, which consists of loyalty to certain ideals that the individual understands, rather than to an aggregate of people whom he regards as being like himself (p. 68).

In this outcome, the struggle among student journalists was not that they did not understand the idea of social responsibility; rather, they struggled with the degree to which they, as reporters, should advocate for others. To the same degree, the students also struggled with whether they should use their roles as reporters, who the students believed should remain as objective as possible, to create change themselves or for others. Plainly, students struggled with their multiple role as journalists, students and peers. The struggle with responsibility created situations where it was hard for them to detach from some issues, which again indicates a possible effect of working independently in the campus community. However, students as a whole met a goal of this CAS outcome: They each expressed how their experiences as student journalists developed their own beliefs, whether that be on religion, the role of journalists, or as members of a larger society.

In summary, as students began to understand the other themes discussed here (that they were sometimes in daily situations that challenged their perceptions or provided them with unique and complex experiences; that they considered themselves professionals in a college setting; that they were sometimes peers or watchdogs over faculty members and leaders), students suggested they struggled with their sense of social responsibility and could use further developmental assistance by student affairs professionals. Here, we begin to see how some of these themes are interwoven, creating complex developmental issues that could be examined further.

Personal and educational goals. Students told me their academic performance suffered because of their involvement in the student newspaper. Some said that they had extended their academic programs at least one semester because they had dropped courses to concentrate more on their journalism, which impacted their academic performance. In turn, this balance between maintaining grades and having success at their journalism experience deeply impacted their views of self. Students, however, were not clear as to how they could gain assistance in this struggle or if they felt like they had a place to go to assist them through the challenges of both their academics and their journalism experience. That sense of help is crucial to developing positive self-esteem and identity, as we see in Hamrick, Evans and Schuh's (2002) in *Foundations of Student Affairs Practice*, which compiles multiple student development theories to explore a student's self-esteem and identity, turning specifically to Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates:

The most critical issue regarding campus environments and student involvement is creating a sense of belonging, a feeling on the part of the students that the institution acknowledges the human needs of social and psychological comfort, and that they are full and valued members of the campus community (p. 87).

Students told me that they felt like they belonged in a social group of journalists and that they developed a sense of self from the contributions they felt they made through their reporting and analysis of campus news and viewpoints. Yet, they distanced themselves from other groups ("normal students") and often were not involved in other social or academic populations outside of the newsroom. The students also clearly shared that their identity and self-esteem were negatively impacted by a lack of understanding

for their experiences and their work, and by the lack of acknowledgement of student affairs professionals, faculty members and others in the community that the students consider themselves professionals on a “job” at the student newspaper. Nine of the students, for example, either told me they saw themselves as being journalists before being students, or have put – and will continue to put – their newspaper work ahead of their coursework.

Enhanced self-esteem. The involvement student journalists have through their journalism on campus and the success students have through these experiences contribute to the student’s self-esteem and identity. If they are not seen as professionals (as the students define themselves), their experiences then add to a lack of self-esteem and positive identity. Their role as journalists, as well, students told me, also contributes to how they identify themselves; students overwhelmingly told me they see themselves as being journalists rather than being students in college. In fact, all of the women (four) interviewed for this study discussed how they became less shy and gained more confidence from their experience on the student newspaper. The female students also said they had achieved a goal of becoming more comfortable in social settings, from talking on the phone with sources to interviewing others and gaining confidence in their own beliefs.

The role of self-esteem in development can take many forms throughout aspects of student affairs programming. DiRamio and Payne (2007) even suggest there may be connections between substance abuse, campus programming and student self-efficacy, which lends one to believe future research of student journalists and the issue of self-efficacy and identity could reveal results unique to the population. Further, Hsieh,

Sullivan, and Guerra (2007) suggest that self-efficacy can contribute to a student's success in college, academic achievement and how they develop given the independence (another of this study's themes of interest) many college students find when they begin their higher education. More so, the research by Hsieh, Sullivan and Guerra (2007) found a connection between self-efficacy and meeting goals, which, too, matches one of the CAS learning outcomes and a theme of interest addressed in this study. The idea, then, that identity plays a role in the development of student journalists is clear, and could make this theme of interest a pivotal one around which the other themes circle.

Clarified values. CAS suggests students should “(articulate) personal values,” “(make) decisions that reflect personal values,” and “(identify) personal, work and lifestyle values and (explain) how they identify decision-making” (Stayhorn, 2006, p. 2). While all students said they had meaningful experiences as student journalists, eight students I interviewed suggested their experience as student journalists impacted their own beliefs on areas of life, including: politics; religion; and the role of higher education in society. However, one student was very clear that his role as an objective reporter had forced him to understand many views and aspects of an issue, thus clouding his own, personal ideals.

Healthy behaviors. However well students were able to express their own emotions and stories about their journalism experience does not mean they had truly worked through any of the lasting issues they faced as reporters – or that they fully understood what their experiences meant. Students told me they still struggled through their own religious, political, ethical and responsibility decisions that they were faced with as they worked on stories. They told me they had not been able to find a balance

between their experience and their academics. They also struggled with finding mentors to help them through challenges.

As discussed below, reflection can be used as a means to assist one through challenges, allowing the person to assess his or her accomplishments and needs in development to create balance and make healthy lifestyles and choices. To understand reflection itself, we can turn to Kenworthy-U'Ren (2003) who describes the connection of reflection to wellness, an idea that lives within the definition of healthy behavior for the CAS learning outcome. She also makes the connection, through the adoption of theorists, including John Dewey, that experiences alone do not create learning – that it takes reflection to make connections for students. “Students must be able to see the value of their learning, not only as a tool for self-development and heightened interpersonal skills but also as a catalyst for social awareness” (Kenworthy-U'Ren, p. 55), which could potentially be a useful mechanism to further the development of student journalists as we see when used in service-learning programming, for instance. Scott (2004) suggests reflection is a vital component of service-learning on college campuses, an increasingly attractive method of extending coursework beyond the classroom door on many college campuses that also provides students by experiences with which they can better connect coursework to life and articulate its meaning to them and to society. Scott tell us that reflection:

[P]rovides students opportunities to develop, reflect about, and enact civic responsibility. This emphasis on civic responsibility can be motivating to students, leading them to look beyond their career preparation or their success in

the course, and prompting them to engage with others in community problem-solving (p. 289).

Further, in a report titled “*Spirituality and the professoriate: A national study of faculty beliefs, attitudes and behaviors*” (Lindholm, & Astin, H.S., & Astin, A.W., 2005), researchers found that 45 percent of the 112,000-some undergraduates surveyed were sometimes disappointed about the amount of reflection opportunities their institutions provided them to help them explore their spirituality (p.1). Hatcher and Bringle (1997) defined reflection as a mixture of cognitive and structured learning activity that is “intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives” (p. 153). Reflection, then, helps clarify challenges and can result in the individual making healthy choices (balancing work and sleep or coming to a personal understanding on a complicated issue, for example).

As discussed, all students I spoke with told me that they had meaningful experiences from their time as a student journalist; eight said that their experience somehow influenced either their ideals or perceptions and held personal meaning for them. Yet, many said that they did not reflect on these experiences outside of themselves to evaluate that meaning and that experience. In some cases, students said they hoped for more reflection that could help them make sense of some of the experiences, but felt compelled not to reflect with other student journalists, at least, because they felt it was unprofessional and could negatively impact their success at the student newspaper. In fact, some students also told me they did not believe they had a group of confidants who understood their experiences as journalists and thus would not be able to help in any kind of effective reflection.

Potential implications for students

Breaking into the experiences of college student journalists is clearly a complex area of research. As with each kind of development a person experiences in life, including in college, there is much research and much time that needs to be devoted to gain and grasp a full understanding – for both that person and the outsider. We already know a college experience is full of complex changes, both emotional and cognitive, for students. As Hamrick, Evans and Schuh (2002) tell us:

The college experience is widely regarded as offering many opportunities for students to develop, among other things, personal and professional identity; knowledge of their learning, working and interaction styles and capacities; knowledge of and about other people; and a sense of self as an integral part of such collectives as work group, family, community, or network (p. 135).

Hamrick, Evans and Schuh (2002) also tell us that student development theories used in the student affairs profession have roots in the understanding that development, as Sanford defined it, “is viewed as a positive growth process in which the indivisible becomes able to deal with increasingly complex experiences” (p. 31). Further, the authors share that students develop through many levels of social and psychosocial levels because of their experiences both inside and outside of the classroom, stressing that there needs to be a learning of what those experiences mean to the self to make the experiences valuable. To further this idea of learning from experience, the authors turn to Astin who suggests: “the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program” (p. 84).

When this understanding is combined with knowledge of a student journalist's college experience seen through the lens of a journalists (since they view themselves as reporters before students) as has been done in this study, we can see how this population may compare with what the student affairs profession expects and hopes. Knowing specific challenges within this population would allow student affairs professionals to create programs or initiatives to assist in that challenge. Here, I summarize how knowledge of this student population can influence the contributions of student affairs professionals.

Being understood. To understand a member of a population, it is important to better understand the environments in which they work – and live – the most. Regarding student journalists, student affairs professionals and theorists have informed us about how we can turn to college student newspapers to understand our campus communities, including Clement and Rickard (1992) and Upcraft and Schuh (1996). Newspapers, these researchers have said, can play a key role in the shaping of or interpretation of culture and climate of a college campus. Indeed, the influence of the student newspaper can influence campus programs and policies. According to Upcraft and Schuh (1996):

Just reading the letters to the editor in the student newspaper will provide a hint about what is in the minds of students. Obviously, further investigation beyond reading letters to the editor would be necessary before committing substantial funds to new programs or services, but if students write many letters to the editor expressing concern about some aspect of campus life, this area may need to be reconceptualized [*sic*] and perhaps changed (p. 135).

Student affairs researchers and administrators also tend to provide advice on how to respond to student journalists, yet there is little research to suggest that this advice is based on a knowledge of how this population is developing. An example of this advice is this includes the statement that “student affairs administrators must accept students’ desire to sometimes define student publications in terms of opposition to an administration” (Bankes, Boss, Cochran, Duemer, et al., p. 35).

Further, Upcraft and Schuh (1996) discuss that newspapers hold their own ethics, agendas and “border on the sensational since neither good instruction nor a well-managed and fiscally prudent college generally are news” (p. 154-155), and that understanding the culture of student newspapers can help student affairs professionals respond to and collaborate with student media to serve larger communities through communication. Yet, more striking is the authors’ assessment of the impact newspapers may have on the journalists themselves: “The fact is that members of the senior staff of student papers are among the very few students on campus who have a reasonably global view of life on campus, especially if the campus newspaper covers all campus news well” (Upcraft, & Schuh, p. 155).

Yet what is not answered or studied further by the above researchers is exactly what impact that “global view of life on campus” and other characteristics of a college student journalist experience has on that student, in that student’s own development. Indeed, better understanding the student journalist’s development is not the purpose of Upcraft and Schuh’s (1996) argument above, but the impact upon this large population of students can not simply be overlooked as these authors have here in such ways that ignores student development theory or research on the deeper lessons, which can be

found through investigating the experience of this population. That we openly recognize and accept that student journalists may play vital and unique roles on college campuses means we need to further study what those experiences mean to those students.

Potential implications for student affairs

Here, I highlight major implications for student affairs professionals, three of likely many more that can be deciphered from this study that are valuable to aid in future research.

Better serve population. Student affairs professionals can better serve a student population when they know that population's needs. Currently, as revealed in this literature review, there is a limited understanding of the overall experience of student journalists. By just asking the questions and expelling some resources to learn can help us see this population in more dimensions. Clearly, already in student affairs, and throughout higher education, there is a desire to use our knowledge to create situations where students learn within their environments, and the way we look at this issue extends from our own courses and programs to the entire campus and community. That idea is articulated here:

“The point is that we want to know what affects student learning and development in the college environment in which we work. Such knowledge may allow professionals to shape their practice to directly influence students in desirable way” (Creamer, 2003, p. 112-113).

Simply, I argue, if we can find ways to improve our services for this population, we can improve our impact for a population that clearly needs more attention. Student affairs professionals have developed and implemented theory into programming for

students to extend the learning of the college experience from the classroom deeper into the campus community. Creamer (2003) for instance writes about extending this learning from the classroom to campus involvement, methods which, I argue, could be applied, too, to the student journalist population:

Further, when students learn or do not learn depends more, or at least as much, on them as it does on the provider of the programs and services. Students who are motivated to learn, will. Those who are not motivated may not, regardless of efforts on their behalf. Research studies, therefore, need to attempt to determine casual relationships between program features and activities and student learning and development (Creamer, p. 113).

What Creamer requires for that kind of learning and development, then, is an engaged student. Clearly, student journalists, as we see in this study, are quite engaged, making this population a prime one on college campuses available for interactive and meaningful (intentional) programming to enhance and connect their experiences with academics. The missing element for student journalists to partake in this kind of education and development outside of the classroom is the intentional involvement of faculty members or student affairs professionals. Yet, we see in this study at least two examples of the population reaching for this kind of involvement in their experiences: First, at Newspaper #3, for instance, faculty members – without being asked – appear in the newsroom to discuss the sensitive situation when a student was fired for plagiarism, students told me; and the students appreciated the involvement. Second, at Newspaper #2, student journalists are wanting assistance from professional journalists and seeking it themselves by forming an outside professional advisory board. Clearly, students I spoke

with are torn about how much involvement there should be from the “outside,” making this issue one for further research, but we can see some desire for involvement – and certainly some developmental needs that exist.

Broaden knowledge. Student affairs professionals thrive on understanding student development and the needs of populations. For example, knowledge has advanced the development of career advising and academic advising (Gordon, Habley, & Associates, 2000), student conduct (Paterson & Kibler, 1998) and the implementation of programs to assist in the needs of students with learning concerns, such as Asperger’s Syndrome in recent years (Smith, 2007). Once we understand specific needs within units of institutions or within student populations, we are able to provide educational solutions to areas of interest that we have understood. For example, academic learning communities have been established within residence life to provide academic and social assistance to a broad department on college campuses (Johnson & Romanoff, 1999). Certainly it is in the best interest of the student affairs profession to continue its quest for understanding of populations on college campuses as of the Millennial generation (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). Investigating what impacts the development of this generation of students has influenced how student affairs professionals create effective online orientations for students (Murphy, & Hawkes, & Law, 2003), how self-efficacy influences retention (Hsieh, & Sullivan, & Guerra, 2007) how to involve parents of this generation in parental notification policies (Hoover, 2006), and how to use Facebook to help students connect before they become roommates (Farrell, 2006). Similar results in how to service and respond to student needs could occur for student journalists, dependent upon further research of the population.

Create solutions. If we can learn more about the challenges student journalists face, what makes them successful, what makes them struggle with their concerns that were expressed in the above themes, then student affairs professionals can enter with theory and practice to assist in the development among these students. Clearly in some of the conversations I had with students, they told me that they wanted connection with mentors or advisors, to some degree; other students I spoke with just wanted to be understood.

Questions for further research

Understanding various student populations on college campuses is valuable, yet student affairs as a profession has not studied how student journalists experience college in terms of their experiencing college differently than others through their roles as vocal leaders, who often find themselves immersed in news stories, controversies and often highly emotional stories, sometimes including sexual violence, crime and protest. This study reveals that college student journalists as a population have unique experiences through their journalism in college. A lack of scholarly research sheds little light on how this population develops, which leaves student affairs professionals – and others within higher education, especially those who work directly with this student population – without an understanding of what is happening in the students' lives. Without that knowledge, we are unable to service the needs, help students navigate the challenges, or advocate for them in any way. However, the interviews and common themes assessed from them can point us to some questions that should be asked in the future. Five of the main questions are listed below.

What is the student journalism experience? A longitudinal study with broader demographics could help unmask further elements of how student journalist might be experiencing college. It would be helpful to have a deeper understanding of each of the themes (or other themes, if further research reveals them) to better understand how students are experiencing the various aspects of their development. A study on identity and self-esteem among a larger pool of students, for instance, could reveal how students could be mentored to balance the weights they place on their work to evaluate themselves. A look at career choices, as another example, could assist career counselors or academic advisors, even faculty members, to counsel student journalists on their profession. Better, understanding the struggles discussed in this study where students view themselves as professionals and spend more energy on their experience rather than on their studies, can help those who are exposed to student journalists comprehend the student perspective and counsel them accordingly.

Additionally, students in this study expressed through their stories issues with effective time management skills that would help them balance work with academics. Further, they have expressed difficulties balancing goal-setting between their careers at the student newspaper and other activities on campus – including coursework – that could broaden their developmental experiences. Finally, students expressed thoughts and ideals that are also common in the profession outside of college, from decision-making struggles and struggling with personal and industry ethics, to political bias in covering the news and issues, which can lead to larger concerns about how they view their roles as individuals and reporters in a larger society when it comes to responsibilities and objectivity.

Are student journalists a population of their own? The student journalists I spoke with may develop as a separate population in the same way as resident assistants Healea (2005), with unique responsibilities within the campus community and exposure to experiences specific to their role as journalists. This idea is especially clear in that two students from two separate universities continued to use the word “normal” when describing students who did not work at the college newspaper. While the resident assistants’ influence is often limited to a residence hall floor or building, the student journalist’s influence, students told me, is far wider. Stories they write about a sexual assault, for instance, are read by – in some cases – tens of thousands of people online, on campus and throughout the larger community. Further, the theme of how their self-identity and self-esteem is connected to their student journalist experience is clear in the conversations I had with students for this study and have similar experiences to those studied by Henningham (1997), which found among a group of Australian reporters their role of journalists in the community contribute to their level of being extroverted, which furthers the idea that journalists, themselves, have unique experiences simply based on their roles in society. Further research is needed to understand how students develop, and if they do so separate from other populations of which we have a better understanding.

What are the challenges student journalists face? This study has highlighted several areas of interest for students, from healthy behavior and facing issues of social responsibility to setting and meeting personal and educational goals. What other challenges are there? This study focused, in part, on the healthy behavior learning outcome and the concern that students do not reflect on their experiences to help work through their challenges. It would be interesting to see if reflection is a potential solution

and element of development for this population, as it is with other college student populations, such as service-learning, which has been discussed above. Finally, it would be interesting to see what challenges are presented by the students who say they see themselves already as professionals by asking whether that is a stimulus most injected by professional journalists or rather if students place that perception upon themselves.

What development theories are applicable to this population? A study to evaluate what areas of student development theory exists within the student journalism culture and its place in student affairs development theories would be helpful. However, we can already connect much of what student journalists experience – or might experience – with current-day student development theory. For example, if we turn to Sanford’s (1968) theories of challenge and support, we see that “the college environment must balance the challenge and support presented to students” (Ward, Trautvetter, & Braskamp, 2005, p. 1) to ensure holistic development. Later, Ward, Trautvetter, and Braskamp (2005) take this idea of challenge and support further, through which one could see elements that directly relate to this study on student journalists:

Regardless of how one views the need to integrate support and challenge, everyone – faculty and student affairs professionals – agree that developing students takes time, requires place for students to gather, discuss, and reflect, and learn from and receive feedback from experienced adults (i.e., faculty and staff) (Ward, Trautvetter, & Braskamp (p. 3).

How can change be implemented? Once we know more about this student population, it is important to determine how to implement change to assist them. Surely, assessment is without virtue without proper implementation to “close the loop” on an

environment or situation. It would be helpful to include in this evaluation what influences student journalists the most – student development theory (if implemented properly) or professional standards (at least the students' perception of standards). We can also use a further evaluation to measure against what we then deem as successful developmental environments already existing in both college newsrooms and throughout programs in student affairs, such as orientation, academic advising, campus programs, residence life and visitor services (Arminio, 2004), to name a few.

Conclusion

This study in itself has been a valuable experience for both myself and the students with whom I worked. As the researcher, I was able to connect with students who experienced some of the same challenges I did when I was a professional reporter and a college student. I saw within their experiences and from their stories how I struggled, until later in my educational career and as a professional, with a balance between personal and educational goals, career choice, and self-esteem and identity formation.

For the students, their ability to articulate their experience on the student newspaper and its impact on their own lives seemed to be foreign, yet to each individual an awakening experience. As mentioned throughout this study, two students were able to come to a realization about at least one troubling aspect of their student journalism experience in our conversation, and perhaps were then aware of that issue for future reflection. However, all students involved were thoughtful and intentional in the stories they shared, in their honest assessments of their experiences, their shortcomings, successes and challenges.

This mutual sharing of experiences and insights has led to an expressed understanding between both myself and the students I have interviewed that further research among this population would be valuable to the population's own development and to the ability of student affairs professionals to service the needs of students and influence a collaborative relationship between institutions and student media. It is vital for student affairs professionals to identify student populations that may have needs and explore the potential for involvement to better serve students. Understanding can also increase the role student affairs professionals play on college campuses and in student lives, and can help communicate with other professionals and educators about the diverse populations on our college campuses that express unique experiences and needs. Student journalists surely fit among the more vocal and noticeable students on our campuses who contribute to various levels of our communities. Certainly, they deserve a deeper look.

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