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Professor Anna Scott

**Final Essay**

Journalism pisses me off. What a way of starting an essay, huh? Well that's one of the main things that I have learned after struggling through the article investigation. Now what exactly do I mean by this, you may ask? Going through the experience of proposing an article, interviewing sources, and peer reviewing, among other things has showed me that journalism is full of annoyances and multiple answers to everything. Allowing for everything to have a right answer as well as everything to have a wrong answer is a characteristic of journalism that I faced every corner I turned. The textbook for the course, The Elements of Journalism by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, also gave the class as a whole a framework to work with on how to be a journalist. Journalism is a hard and often times a difficult idea to practice due to it’s many facets that it places on news.

I’m a pretty practical person in regards to making decisions and choices. I tend to make a choice and stick to it until it’s end. In journalism it seems difficult to do that, and when I was coming up with the proposal for the profile story indeed it was. When I was writing the proposal for the profile story, I had three people available to interview and had each one fleshed out a bit with information on why to write about each individual.

My initial proposal went well, with everyone in the class liking all three of the candidates. Well, tragedy hit when two of the three people decided that they could not meet up in time for me to write up the profile story. These two people were in fact my first and second choices since their story seemed pretty clear, meaning that I could already see how I would end up writing the profile story.

I resorted to my last choice, not to say that she was any lesser than the other choices, but it would have been easier to write the other two stories. It became a bit of a arduous task for the final proposal, because I was trying to sell my third choice, one that I had to work on to make the profile interesting and relevant to the student body. Her position in the school administration hierarchy was pretty high up as well as important, so you would think that it would be simple to bring out the importance, right? Well as important as she is, her position was difficult to try and relate it to regular everyday IIT students.

A struggle that I faced when writing the paper was deciding whether I was lying or just not telling all the truth. That’s a big issue because while I may not be necessarily lying to the reader, I sometimes leave out information. For the most part in the two stories for the class, I didn’t provide every detail in order to save time and space (and even avoid writing a person’s resume). From that I can see that journalism is not something for me because to most journalist, “... getting the facts right…”(50) is what they value most.

That was something interesting that I noticed during our proposals, that some individuals proposals were great and clearly showed why it was important, while others seemed to force the importance on to the profile subject. Which kind of defeats the purpose of a news story, one which has the importance molded onto it. The news stories that are written should be about topics and ideas that have actual news value that people can use. That’s the thing about being forced to write a story, because for the most part time forces you to shove a square into a triangular hole. They are then trying to make a topic, they believe is boring or uninteresting, into a newsworthy article and relevant to the readers.

This all ends up being a mashed up write up that doesn’t read well. One of the things that ends up happening is that news articles become sensationalized, giving up relevance for engagement. In the textbook, the authors say, “When people talk about making the news engaging and relevant the discussion often becomes an unhelpful dichotomy - engaging versus relevant.”(213). When in actuality the two should go hand in hand. It seems to me that if a journalist's is able to find a story that is truly newsworthy, the interesting aspect about it that will catch a reader’s eyes will be their, the journalists won’t need to try to much to find it.

Something interesting that came up in chapter 8, was the idea that scandal news may actually be necessary. Obviously there will always be sensational news because, “...infotainment, celebrity, and scandal will always provide easy ways to catch audience's attention”(220) , and in a sense that’s necessary. People need to know though, the difference between news and sensationalism, by having a label that separates the two.

During the main interview with April, in which I asked questions and got the most information, I tried to keep myself from being bias in my questions. I have known April since the summer before freshman year of college, through one of her programs Exelon Summer Institute, a program in which I took part. Knowing this I tried to ask her open ended questions, some of which I already knew the answer to before, the problem with this was trying to avoid me suggesting answers to her. Instead of giving her two options, I would try and let her give reasoning to why something would happen.

That leads me to chapter 5, the chapter that talks about being independent from faction. It was difficult for me to keep my bias out of the

Starting the news proposal was quick work because I was already involved in a student organization on campus called Union Board. I also had some connections to the Student Government Association. The third student org was actually something that was just starting up, it is actually part of April Welch’s (from my profile story) ESI program, was a ESI Board that was designed to be another voice for students on campus. I for sure though had to fight against any biases that I had since I was involved in two out of the three organizations I was proposing to cover.

Now why did I risk allowing my biases to enter my writing? Well for a similar reason to how William Safire was able to become part of the same press that he criticized. In the book it’s stated that Safire believed his political past gave him a sort of edge over other journalist, because he had inside sources, knowledge of how things work behind the locked doors, as well as who was trustworthy(141).

I similarly had been on both sides of Union Board, for example. Before joining Union Board, all I had heard about the organization was that they were given too much money compared to other organizations, so I had an idea of what the general student body has as an opinion of Union Board. Now having been involved a semester and a half, the problems I thought I had (which was actually others problems) turned out to be hard to hold up. In my interviews with non-Union Board members, I was able to ask questions from a perspective in which I was not bias towards the organization, and could understand where they were coming from with their answers.

One of the things that really stuck to me was the idea that the newspaper is supposed to be a public forum. For the first story this was a tall order to ask for because it was a profile story. I thought about how I could make a debate or discussion but decided that I should just focus on making the profile about the person in a similar way as the Peekaboo Paradox profile story. Since I was speaking about one person only and their profile, there was no reason to debate anything about her.

Now the news story was pretty simple to create a forum since I was mainly exploring an issue between the students and the student organization. By asking the non Union Board members about the organization I was able to get their side of the argument as to why they believed what they did believe. I then interviewed the general body members as well as some of the executive board ve members of Union Board to see how they respond to the accusations and claims that students have about the organization as a whole.

I was taking both sides of the argument, in order to, “[be] available to all parts of the community, not just those who are most vocal…”(199). In a proper argument all sides of an issue should be represented, and in a news story all voices should be given a chance to speak in a public forum.

Even though I now despise working to be a journalist, the textbook we went through taught me that transparency is one of the best things that you can do in order to have people trust and believe in you. In chapter 4, they discuss this idea of being transparent in order to have readers that trust the newspaper (114). While having readers that were trusting of me was not to big of a concern at the time, having interviewees that trusted me was a challenge I did face in the profile story but not so much in the news story.

In the April Welch profile story, I asked April if their was anyone else that I could interview in order to get another point of view. She said that I could interview her boss and that she could setup a meeting between the two of us. I for sure needed April to talk to her boss Michael because I would have had a difficult time getting the interview since I did not know Michael and there was no established trust between the two of us.

Thats one thing about trust in journalism, not only do you need to have people trust the news story that they read or watch, but you as a journalist needs to have trust in the people that you interview, and they in you.

One of the common tropes of journalism is that of monitoring people in power, and in chapter 6 of the textbook they explored this idea of keeping an eye on the government and those powerful institutions in our society (173). While writing the news story I wanted to investigate, in a sense, I was being a watchdog by bringing to the attention of Union Board the complaints that a large part of students had against the organization. While each member that I interviewed had already heard of the way people saw UB, they seemed to not have the chance to explain the reasoning behind some of their actions.

Writing these articles, while they did show the annoyances and difficulties behind writing news, actually show that there needs to be people to do this work. And unless you enjoy facing brick wall after brick wall, journalism is not for you. It’s many facets to finding the truth and justice make it a minefield to traverse, and it seems that only those truly dedicated to the righteousness can be true journalists.

**Works Cited**

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). *The elements of journalism: what news people should know and the public should expect*. New York: Three Rivers Press.