

UBC VoterMedia Video Transcripts

At the time of writing (2010-11-05) we have two videos completed and linked from votermedia.org (including #4 below). Most of the transcripts below are for videos still in production. You can read them to see what UBC students are saying about VoterMedia (which they call VFM = Voter Funded Media) after four years of experience with it. Interviews conducted April through June 2010.

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9	03:27	Evolution of VoterMedia at UBC
10	03:35	Spread VoterMedia to other universities
11	04:32	Expand VoterMedia to municipal politics
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Speakers:

FirstName	LastName	Role
Alex	Lougheed	AMS VP Academic 2008-2009; Blogger, UBC Insiders
Andrew	Carne	Blogger, UBC Insiders
Bijan	Ahmadian	AMS President 2010-2011
Fred	Cutler	Professor Fred Cutler; Political Science, UBC
Isabel	Ferreras	AMS Elections Administrator 2010
Jason	Ng	Blogger, Social Capital
Jeff	Fong	Blogger, Social Capital
Justin	McElroy	Coordinating Editor, The Ubyyssey
Kai	Green	Blogger, AMS Confidential
Matthew	Naylor	AMS VFM Committee; Blogger, Radical Beer Tribune
Mitch	Wright	AMS VFM Administrator 2009; Blogger, UBC Spectator
Neal	Yonson	Blogger, UBC Insiders
Taylor	Lukacin	Blogger, AMS Confidential

Speaker Transcript

title: What is VoterMedia?

text: University of British Columbia students use VoterMedia (= voter funded media = VFM) to cover their student union:

Taylor Voter funded media is a great way for unaccredited media such as blogs to get funding for the work that they do, and it's also a really great chance to build community with different readerships and different audiences...

- Kai It's basically a way for blogs to tell how well they're doing interacting with the student body, and in covering the issues at hand. So you enter the competition as a blog, and then people vote on you based on how well you're doing. And sometimes there are monetary rewards for that.
- Lougheed So, what voter funded media is, it's an innovative incentive structure to encourage independent media to develop and to flourish and to cover events in their local communities.
- Justin Voter funded media is simply a way for, you know, students and voters wherever they are to directly say to the people producing the information, what they like and what they don't like. I mean too often media organizations are in a bubble where they do their job day after day thinking that what they're doing is the best, without any direct feedback from their audience as to what they're doing that's really valued. If you have voter funded media, that's a real way where people know, of the stuff that they're putting out there, whether it's important or not.
- Taylor I think there's a really big opportunity within VFM to reach out to your average UBC student, who just comes to class, commutes in, goes back home, doesn't really care about what's going on. Um, that's reaching out to them by, perhaps publicizing more...
- Taylor I think that each VFM blog brings something different, and I think the main goal of AMS Confidential is to engage the average student and make it, the AMS, seem really approachable, really easy to understand.
- Justin ...VFMs create a UBC community that is talking about everything that's happening on campus, and the amazing things that students are doing all over the place. And the more that students are talking and discussing how do we make this campus and this experience better for everyone, the better off that we'll be and the better off that VFMs will be.
- Kai ...it's a great and useful tool on any campus, just to have multiple sources of student-focused media.
- Neal ... all this competition really encourages good information and diversity of viewpoints on whatever we're covering, and in this case it's student society elections. So it keeps us busy, and keeps us definitely motivated and uh, and competitive.
- Neal ...it's very helpful to students on campus that, you know, there's a new way to make your opinion heard and to try to, uh, bring about change.
- Lougheed One of the great things about VFM is that it's self-regulatory. It's a very free market approach to solving a lot of the media... the problems with media today.
- Cutler ...I was keen to uh, to hear about it, and fascinated really because, in a way, you know, you have to think of the history of democracy as one of experiments, and so all the things we take for granted now were untested experiments at one point. And VFM to me seemed like something that, you know, had at least a shot at becoming one of those things that we take for granted in a little while...
- Naylor VFM's the thing that's going to change the world.

text: VoterMedia.org is a free platform for supporting media in your voter community.

title: **What's it like to be a VoterMedia blogger?**

- text: University of British Columbia bloggers on the VoterMedia (= voter funded media = VFM) experience:
- Taylor ...when we started Confidential, Kai and our whole experience started with this idea of a hook-up chart, to chart how everyone [laughter] is interacted, and it grew into making a credible blog... and, it's great... and VFM was... introduced me to a whole new community of people that I now love and cherish, and it's a really great way to just get involved without having to have absolutely any knowledge previously, and just your ability to work hard and pay attention to the AMS.
- Kai ...overall, it's an overwhelmingly positive experience, and you get to work with and interact with and get feedback from these amazing student journalists.
- Jason Essentially in smaller communities, media is really driven by individuals. And voter funded media, the concept is basically, help, having the community provide a bit of support, so that those individuals can come together and provide information that's vital to an election in a given community.
- Neal The pro is the obvious one, we get funding for our work, which really goes a long way to keeping it going. Um, since, otherwise it would be completely volunteer. Um, it does take up a lot of time to put together the stories that we do, and do so much background research. So it's, it helps that you can take that time away from other things, and still get funded and don't worry about, you know, about having to work a part-time all the time, although lots of people do.
- Mitch ...and I think it's great that, um, the level of participation in AMS politics is being increased because more and more people find it easier to get involved, and set up a blog. All it takes is a couple of clicks and zero dollars to even start your own kind of blog and get your opinion out there.
- Lougheed One of the neat things that you don't really notice from VFM is, how it is for the people actually writing and contributing to the VFM, and how much that really contributes to their personal gross.. growth. Uh, I myself am not a journalist, I only play one on the internet. And through relaunching and a lot of discussions around UBC Insiders I've really gained a bit of an insight into that entire profession. You know, we've managed to abstract some editorial policies. We've done readership polls, and we've found out what people actually want to be reading. We've relaunched a website and we're in the middle of re-relaunching the website, so we can have more dynamic media and things like that. I've learned a lot about AV and graphic design, and a little bit about statistical polling as well, when you're doing surveys and things like that. So it's not only going to be of net benefit to your community and campus as well, but also to those people that are being engaged within that process itself. And so that kind of brings it all back to the educational mission of the university, in that having something like this, something for students to go out there, experiment and really kind of deal with these issues of running a project, kind of independently and on their own, in an entrepreneurial kind of way, really hearkens and speaks to the mission that all universities try to achieve.
- text: More info at VoterMedia.org.
- title: VoterMedia increases democratic engagement**
- text: VoterMedia (= voter funded media = VFM) has engaged more University of British Columbia students in their student union:

- Isabel VFM has the potential to have a really positive impact I think, 'cause personally I think it's very important for students to care about what's going on at their own university, even if they're there for four years, just like I just was.
- Bijan ...from my perspective as a candidate, as someone who has been trying to engage more students, uh VoterMedia has uh really brought that sense of engagement uh and has acted as this really uh really good tool in order to increase uh a sense of participation and a sense of belonging uh when it comes to building a community around campus.
- Jason I think one of the challenges that UBC has always been dealing with over the past few years is: You've got a campus of 45,000 students; that's enough for a pretty big town. And everyone has different interests, everyone's from all kinds of places, and it's hard to bring that community together. And voter funded media has, has helped start that. It's helped bring together students that were not interested, necessarily, in student politics before. And helped them realise that a lot of the issues that affect UBC are, go beyond students that have a direct interest in politics, and really affect all the students that are part of the community for the years that they're here. And voter funded media has helped start that and helped generate a greater interest. I think we're seeing that reflected through better voter turnout, through better attendance at voter-related events. That hasn't happened before in previous years, partly because of the support that voter funded media has provided.
- Lougheed So, has VFM affected UBC students? I really think so. Uh, a great example of that is the AMS Confidential blog. It's a tabloid that just kind of ridicules all the going-ons on campus, and what they've managed to do is, they've managed to engage students that typically weren't engaged with the student politics, or with, uh, UBC administration and governments, governance affairs generally.
- Lougheed But while at the same time, while they're laughing, they're also learning a bit here and there. It's a bit of a bridge, uh a bit of a gateway VFM, towards other VFMs.
- Justin ...in terms of creating a conversation though, on campus, I think that that's what VFMs really do well. Um, it allows it that if you do care or if you want to care about what's happening, um, with your student government, with the, just, with the provincial government, with the UBC administration, there are lots of people talking about it, there are a lot of views there, and it's easy to quickly find a lot of people from different perspectives who want to engage you, and want to discuss the pros and cons of different situations and, you know, regardless of where you stand, that's good.
- Mitch ...it's presenting a wider variety of opinions that people can access and, and judge, of their own, like, their own mind, like they can decide, "I love this, I agree with this person, I disagree with this person." They can decide, um, uh, their own opinion on a lot of issues that previously didn't really get a lot of coverage, except for one or two news sources. So I think it's incredibly beneficial that people are prevented, uh presented with a whole wide spectrum of things they can choose from, and form their own opinion, much more informative, uh, much more informed opinion than they previously could have.
- Naylor ...this past year when coverage of a major scandal at our student society uh was covered largely in the VFMs. Uh and that kind of engagement, that kind of productive, um analysis that went on, really engaged more people in the student political process than ever before.

Lougheed ...what I think a well-engaged population is, is a population that understands what's going on, cares about what's going on, and contributes to what's going on. A great example of this is, with a recent scandal within the AMS, um, called "U.N.-gate", uh, there was an executive, kind of conspiracy, uh, to go behind the back of their, the students' council, the board of directors of the society, and act unilaterally without their consent. Uh, what happened was the VFM picked that up immediately. Um, we were able to respond much more quickly than the kind of mainstream media, and break the story. As a result you saw a huge influx of student engagement of these students that typically aren't engaged. Um, there were meeting halls packed with students, and it was really the VFM that were carrying the torch there, leading them forward, explaining to them how they can become engaged in response to this activity.

Naylor VFM has been able to not only democratize the mediasphere of campus life, but also has been able to engage more people in the process itself, because more people know what's going on, more people around the council table know what's going on, executives know better what they're doing, and how their portfolios are being viewed by the uh campus population, and more members-at-large have gotten involved.

text: VoterMedia.org can help you try this in your voter community.

title: How VoterMedia affects election campaigns

text: VoterMedia (= voter funded media = VFM) at the University of British Columbia's student union, the Alma Mater Society (AMS)

Bijan VoterMedia has definitely made uh the election process more accessible

Bijan ... voter media uh really play an important role and ha have really been um you know, centre of gravity uh for for, for voters to come together and uh discuss issues, discuss candidates, uh discuss their values, um and give candidates an opportunity to respond, uh to engage with the voters, um and it just feels like, more like a democracy, uh than it used to, I think, from my perspective.

Lougheed ...it's definitely definitely improved the quality of candidates that run in the elections. And the reason for that is there's far more scrutiny, and candidates have to work their butt off quite a bit more, in order to just make ends meet. As a candidate, it's really common to get a ton of emails from each of the VFMs, may they have questionnaires, may they want interviews, may they want to do photo shoots, any of those kinds of things. Uh, and that's really increased the amount of public scrutiny on those officials, you know, they're now aware, and they have to be more cognizant of the issues that are at hand, and they also have to have ideas, and they have to be able to contribute to that dialog...

Naylor I thought that the rather meager amount of coverage that we used to get in our school paper, uh you know, wasn't really the best way to talk to the people who ended up voting in the election. Uh and, through VFM there were much more detailed questions, and you know, I thought that it not only helped me reach out to people, but through those questions I felt it made me a better candidate, because I had to think about what I was saying, and I had to think about what my policies were and how I was going to answer them, and it, you know, made me come up with positions, uh and do my research, so that I could better step into the position once I finally was elected, the time that I was elected [laughs].

Lougheed So one of the big indirect benefits of VFM was that those who the VFM write on, now have to pay more attention and be more engaged. Perfect example for this is campaigns on campus. So campaigns have really evolved from what they once were...

Lougheed ...in order to be a campaigner before VFM, what you would do is, you would go down to The Ubyyssey offices (the established media on campus), and fill out a questionnaire for about 30 minutes...

Lougheed ...You would be out, you know, putting up posters, or chalking on the sidewalk, or canvassing. The result of that was that the campaigns were often shallow, and somewhat dry, right? When you're trying to appeal to as many people as possible, you're going to use buzz-words, you're going to use short snappy things like "Vote for me, I'm going to be accountable, sustainable, and I have a great history", right? That's not really what is good, for the future. So what you've noticed a... since VFM is that campaigns are now more proactive. The VFMs are going to the candidates and asking questions, more detailed than before. And the reason they can get away with that is because those kind of high level questions are already being covered by the VFM and by The Ubyyssey itself. Now, the media who understand the issues, possibly quite a bit better than the general electorate, are able to ask the candidates these questions, able to not only get their responses, but also distill their responses into "This is what this person actually stands for." Right? So what you're noticing now though, then, is these campaigns that are really focused in on people and their ideas, instead of simply who has the most volunteers and the most friends. And that's been a great change for campus, and it's really kind of made students governments a lot more responsive to what's going on within the student body at, at the time.

Naylor You know, Arts was an interesting experiment for VFM.

Naylor ...the amount of coverage that we saw was far and above beyond anything that we had ever seen for an undergraduate society election, ever before. Uh, you know, third party analysis of candidates, you know, having people ask questions, rather than having the candidates just print up a 150-word blurb, and putting it on a website or in a handout, is way more effective...

Naylor ...and they ask the questions, and they, uh you know, deepened the candidates' uh understanding of their own portfolios, and the electorate's understanding of what the candidates wanted to do.

Lougheed If you really want to influence what people are going to be up to for the rest of the year, you bring it up during the elections and you hammer it home then.

Lougheed ...the goal of all that was to train and have those who are about to be elected understand what they're getting into, what we think the priorities for them in office should be, and lastly just have a little bit of fun with it.

Lougheed In this past year as well, uh, it's gotten to the point where VFM, as well in partnership with the more established media, um, have started to assume certain roles that other campus institutions used to take on.

Lougheed So traditionally, the elections committee has run debates. Then this past year, uh UBC Insiders and The Ubyyssey decided they didn't quite like the way that those debates were going, so they hosted their own – a kind of U.S. presidential-ish style debate.

Lougheed That's one example of how VFM has taken the institutions that have classically existed, and kind of adapted them and made them more modern, uh, because it's a much more flexible system.

text: VoterMedia.org is a free platform for supporting media in your voter community.

title: How VoterMedia affects government

text: How VoterMedia (= voter funded media = VFM) improves student government and the University of British Columbia administration:

Bijan So VoterMedia ha- has created a number of blogs that uh ha- have become extremely popular, and they have emerged because of this VoterMedia contest. Um so when you get elected, you don't just sort of stop. You usually continue going back as, as sort of elected official looking back at these blogs to again check the pulse of what, what are the things that is on, is on the voters' radars, on in on the constituency's radars.

Naylor I think that the impact of VFM has been that it has raised the quality of debate.

Lougheed VFM has really changed the way that politics happens on campus, and the administration, the UBC administration really knows this and understands it.

Lougheed So it's not uncommon for VFM to partner with student governments. I know that during my year on student government, Neal Yonson of UBC Insiders, uh, was often around our offices, in particular working with the AMS President at the time, Michael Duncan, over, over UBC's athletics fees. Neal is someone who really cares about athleticism on campus, and in particular how expensive it was, and UBC had the most expensive rates in Canada compared to similar universities. So what Neal did is, he started writing stories about it. He started doing some research. He gathered the numbers. And Mike Duncan, who was the President at the time was talking to him about these numbers, trying to assist in the advocacy. And as a result we had this joint approach. You would have Mike Duncan in committee meetings speaking with university officials, presenting them with data and information that Neal investigated for his, for the blog, for the VFM. Neal would then turn around, you know, and they would talk, and they would be like, well we have this information, this is what these people have been saying, well let's bring it to the public eye, let's post it onto the blog.

Lougheed So what you saw at the end of the day was UBC virtually eliminated all of its athletics fees, and that couldn't have been done without Neal through the VFM, and it couldn't have been done without Mike working within student government.

Neal ...a lot of the stories we've done this year have resulted in changes...

Neal ...our VP Finance of the university came on our blog, and basically called us conspiracy theorists, for uh, for pointing out some really odd things that were going on in the university. Saying that there's nothing strange about this at all, even though it was clearly very strange.

Justin ...that post comes up, it says there's a board meeting happening, these are weird things that are occurring, and then you get responses back immediately from the VP of, uh, of Finance defending themselves, you have a conversation going on. And you have issues, and you have hundreds of students suddenly knowing about something. That, in the past, wouldn't occur.

- Bijan ...so it has really created an engagement between the administration and the students. Ah, I mean it's not typical for a day-to-day, you know, student that, that comes to campus to get to meet face to face with, you know, the Vice President Finance of the university. But now that vice president, uh along with the Vice President Students, is uh, is on line blogging, commenting and, and that just creates a connection, and a sense of um uh you know, communication, uh between these constituencies, uh that is, just really makes a decision-making process a lot more engaging.
- Neal ...one of the cool things that we can do on our blog is, is be connected, and and tell you what's going to happen before it's going to happen. As opposed to traditional media which only tells you what happened after it happened. And, and so that's a really good way of driving the debate, of, of saying "Hey, this is coming up. Do you have an opinion on it?"
- Justin ...VFM allows people the chance to be more active in that, and to be actual actors on the stage, and like Neal said, driving that agenda, which at the end of the day is good, especially when you have three or four, you know, in the UBC community multiple blogs, that all have their different passions, and all have the different things that they're caring about. And uh, that's only good for students.
- Lougheed Also in this readership survey we got some feedback that we have some national viewers as well, in particular around Ottawa, and one of the reasons for that is, from time to time we cover things to deal with the national student movement – things to do with the Canadian Federation of Students and the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. Uh, it's a very pertinent issue on the UBC campus, and so when we're able to cover it as this kind of sideline observer approach, it really helps those national organizations understand how the local politic is going on. Um, there were issues in the past when the AMS was kind of deliberately misrepresenting things that were going on on the national stage. And so when we would cover what we're viewing on the local stage, these kind of national bodies can look in and be like "Oh, but that's not what's actually going on here." And it would provide a forum for them to still be engaged directly with that discussion.
- Lougheed It's been extremely helpful in keeping elected officials accountable, because traditionally they would only... it would be their job to be the messenger of what happens in Ottawa, right? Whereas now when we write about, you know, this is what this person's saying what's happening in Ottawa, we're giving Ottawa a chance to come back and say "Well, actually, hold on, that's not exactly what's happening." And so it helps keep those people accountable.
- Lougheed Another indirect benefit of VFM that's not related to the voter turnout is that you get a more informed, uh, student government, a more... a student government that has to read more, that has to care more, that might have to respond to more public criticism, and all those kinds of things.
- text: VoterMedia.org is a free platform for supporting media in your voter community.
- title: Mainstream media vs VoterMedia**
- text: VoterMedia (= voter funded media = VFM) provides healthy competition to the University of British Columbia's established student newspaper, The Ubyyssey:

Justin As an editor of the student newspaper which isn't a part of that and you know, relies on student funding from everyone, it's, you know, a way of frankly ensuring that, you know, there's competition out there.

Justin ...I wrote for The Ubyyssey in 2006, 2007, um, and I would always see UBC Insiders, and other blogs be able to deliver the information quicker and faster and with more analysis, about stuff that was happening on campus. Now part of that was and part of it will always be that these people are connected, you know, they uh, they've been involved with the decisions, they're right there at the end of the day. Um, but part of it is that simply the established media, the one that students are giving their money to, and are more or less bound to giving, um, you know, that media wasn't doing its job, and so competition is always good. It ensures that people do their best, and try to break the stories first, and get that information out there. And from a simple standpoint of, uh, does it ensure that The Ubyyssey does a better job meeting the needs of students and getting stories out there, VFMs ensure that, because it provides accountability to us, simply because if a story's out there by a VFM that's better than ours before us, you know, we have egg on our face. So, we're paid way more money, we have way more resources...

Kai And one of the major advantages is actually that we're not held to that, sort of, journalistic neutrality, I mean... VFM is, it provides sort of a voice for these minority viewpoints on campus.

Justin I think the advantage that, uh, as you alluded to that you have is because (a) you don't have that print version, uh, and simply 'cause, you know, you're free from those boundaries, as that when something happens and when a VFM thinks that something is important that needs to be put up there, they can immediately put it up. There isn't, you know, you know, 2 or 3 or 4 layers of red tape and people checking over things, and uh, making sure that this is coming out for print in the correct way, and getting a photo that is just like this to, uh, you know, ensure it comes out. And that, and also, you know, with us that money from students is already there and, you know, we're mindful of that responsibility, but it also makes us a little bit conservative and cautious about doing things. Um, with VFMs, they can put things out that they believe in and quickly, you know, just get that information to students. And it's students who decide, you know, after the fact, whether they get funded or not and to what degree. And so that gives them uh, you know, freedom and a creativity that, uh, you know, a campus paper simply, you know, it's difficult for them to establish.

Justin ...you have blogs out there right now that can clearly say "We stand for this." And that these are the issues that we care about, and they can write with a voice and with a passion that, you know, you simply won't find when you have a more broad agenda of, you know, covering all issues...

Justin ...the fundamental questions of whether, does VFM work for students? I think yes. Does it increase campus discussion and student engagement? I think absolutely. Does it ensure that established media, you know, does a better job? Yeah. Uh and, you know, are students and is this campus better off because of that? Well, absolutely.

text: More info at VoterMedia.org.

title: An Insider's view of VoterMedia

text: From politician to blogger: VoterMedia (= voter funded media = VFM) at the University of British Columbia

Lougheed UBC Insiders was one of the first blogs, uh, to come out of VFM. Uh, it was started by Tim Louman-Gardiner and Gina Eom, and it was kind of the go-to place for stories that the bigger media wasn't covering. And that's because the people that were writing it weren't from that kind of journalistic background. They were from the more engaged, kind of student political background. They had been in the trenches. It's called UBC Insiders for a reason. Uh, and so they started up this blog, and it was very popular, uh, within its first year.

Lougheed but what's really great about VFM though, is that it's changed. That blog in particular has changed quite a bit, and it has adapted to this kind of media landscape that's come up because of VFM. Students have this incentive now, to just publish. To write about, basically whatever. Uh, you'll notice that all, most of what people write about are related to elections, and that's because VFM at UBC come out around the elections period, annually. So there's a lot of blogs that cover student politics in particular, and candidates and the personalities that play there, but you won't find two blogs that are quite the same. UBC Insiders focuses in on investigative stuff, more research based.

Lougheed So, as I was in office, one of the big things in particular, uh, was that the VFMs were helpful, uh, to me. And one of the reasons for that is, one of the VFMs exist because they care. They were willing to put in some work, and they were really willing to act as a bit of a resource to me, while at the same time keeping me accountable. Uh, so I often partnered with Neal Yonson, who was an editor for UBC Insiders at the time, and still is, to, for instance, talk about liquor licensing regulations. We would sit down, we would discuss these things, he would bounce some ideas off me, I would bounce ideas off him. It wasn't uncommon for Neal to be around the offices once every couple of days. Um, and we felt like we would have to be with him, because he had such a viewership, uh through his VFM, 'cause Insiders has been around, and is one of the more popular VFM. A result of that is that the work that he's done on liquor licensing in particular, um has been very successful, uh, there's been changes to the kind of campus climate in that realm, and that really couldn't have been possible without that kind of partnership there. Uh, having those eyes, uh going toward a student voice that's well informed, uh has been instrumental, not only as a tool for student governments to get their message across, but also as a tool for the student body to get their message across to student governments.

Lougheed ...over that summer I'd spoken with Neal quite a bit before, we'd become friends while I was in office, and we sat down and we chatted, and I was interested in joining on UBC Insiders.

Lougheed I wanted to take it in a new direction, and Neal kind of wanted that fresh blood, and he wanted to go in a new direction as well. So over a series of monthly barbecues over that summer, we kind of came up with some broad editorial principles.

Lougheed And one of them was focusing in on the issues that matter. And when we say that, we mean the issues that matter to students, whether or not they know it.

Lougheed ...we had more insight into the going-ons at the university, we knew the players in the university, and all those kinds of things. And so we thought we would try to cover those things that no one else was, and in effect, try and have people deal with these issues that we would bring up.

text: VoterMedia.org can help you try this in your voter community.

title: **VoterMedia should be Continuous**

text: Year-round VoterMedia (= voter funded media = VFM) encourages year-round coverage by bloggers

Bijan So the biggest opportunity I see uh at UBC is to extend the VoterMedia uh from uh beyond the election to make it a continuous one uh throughout the year, and really experiment with that.

Lougheed One of the big changes that I would personally like to see with VFM is it moving from, what it currently is, is predominantly an elections-based event that happens annually, to what is more of a continuous round-the-clock kind of coverage system. So there are certain times when you obviously want media to pay more attention to what's going on within student politics. And the biggest time and occasion for that is elections, because they set the tone for the year. And... but the thing is, after that, you still need coverage going on. You still need that kind of independent voice carrying forward, to make sure that what happens during the elections, you know, is carried through with, throughout the rest of the year.

Justin ...during the month of January there's, you know, hundreds and hundreds of posts overall. During the other 11 months, there's very very little, simply because there's no funding. And you know, as a result, what gets focused on, and what people are debating, um, may go towards the more sensational, and election-ready, rather than, without provoking laughter, the issues that matter.

Taylor As you can see though, from the funding, from the mini-VFM that occurred, it would obviously be great to have that all year round.

Taylor It took us, I think, ten days to get 1%. We were at 0% for a while, and then we reached 10% and just kept growing...

Kai ... and there were some frantic midnight texts "Oh My God, 10%!"

Taylor So and we just saw it grow over time so continuous is really great for that. And then, like when everything was reset in March again, for the AUS elections, it was really great to see, um, the results and...

Kai ...to be number 1!

Justin Well I mean, you know, your point about continuous is, you know, people don't participate with the media on a one-time basis, and thus voting for media on a one-time basis is, in my mind, a silly way of doing it. I mean people decide what they like for media every single day, simply based on what articles are the best out there, and what's illuminating them, and what's making them critically think, and what's making them argue with people on comments, right? And uh, when you have continuous it forces people to be more engaged and to think about that. And therefore as media, continually post and continue to prove their relevance to students. I think, you know, this past year with continuous as well as in during the spring and summer of 2008 I believe it was, when there was continuous, it makes people more accountable, simply because that money is always possibly coming in, and therefore you have an incentive to always produce for students.

Naylor Yeah, one of the things that we have now, that we didn't have four years ago is actual data. Um, you know, we have evidence to show that, one, VFM works. Uh, it's able to provide coverage, it's able to raise the quality of debate, and it's able to hold candidates to account. Um, and we have some evidence that says that certain voting systems are better than other voting systems, and, you know, a growing public consensus, both amongst uh the political class and the uh, the media that moving towards a certain system, in this case Continuous VFM, would be a, a good idea.

- Isabel I guess what I would say, um, to improve the VFM contest in the future, I would say we should allocate more money towards Continuous VFM, and perhaps eventually get rid of one-time VFM altogether.
- Lougheed ...continuous VFM kind of yielded results that people thought were more accurate, uh, given the amount of effort the VFM had been putting in, and the amount of contribution they give to that dialog. Whereas one-time VFM was a bit more... there was a lot more noise in the results. Uh, so going ahead, uh, it... it's kind of, kind of hard to say. Because with one-off VFM, uh, you have uh more people voting, you have a more engaged population, and that provides an incentive for the VFM to reach those people and to say "Hey, you should vote for us if you're going to vote anyways."
- Naylor ...the school paper came out after the last VFM contest in the last election and said that VFM should move from the one-time system that we have now to a continuous system, and I think that that's a good choice, and I would encourage the AMS to take that step.
- Justin I think it's something that I hope will only grow and prosper, you know, not just during the season where people elect their AMS executives, but the entire year.
- text: VoterMedia.org is a free platform for continuous media in your voter community.
- title: Evolution of VoterMedia at UBC**
- text: VoterMedia (= voter funded media = VFM) at the University of British Columbia: Past, present, future
- Lougheed It's been about four years with the project. I was involved on AMS Council when Mark first came to us, kind of, with this idea, uh, that he really wanted to get off the ground. Uh, at the time, uh, we figured, hey, this is a great idea, you know, we'll give it a shot, it's not going to cost that much, it's not a big deal. If it fails, it fails, if it succeeds, it succeeds. And it far surpassed any of anyone's expectations.
- Neal ...VFM certainly gives those who are interested in finding out more, a lot of resources. And one of the things that we do is, we look at other universities in B.C., and other media across the country, other student media, and it, it really doesn't seem like there's anything quite like this at any other university in Canada? Um, where you have media that goes far, far beyond the uh, the student, the official student newspaper, giving more stories or breaking stories, or just more fun...
- Kai And you see it in even the small scale of VFM, is that you get a more nuanced opinion on issues. So it's not just about left versus right on this issue it's, let's look at this thing from ten different points of view. And so I think you get a much more informed voters, and you get a much broader, younger, more technologically linked-in voter base.
- Justin ...that's 10, 11, 12, whatever, different voices that are getting information, that are doing research on campus, that are uncovering facts that ultimately benefit students.
- Justin ...that ensures that that information is fresh. And that wouldn't happen in the first place if there weren't these VFMs there, doing that work on issues that they care about.

- Justin ...VFM's are able to tip the scales of debate simply because, if they care about something, and if they post great information out there, that gets people talking. Then ultimately that's the benefit, long term, to voters as a whole.
- Naylor I think the future of VFM at UBC is bright, I think that it should continue to grow. Everyone seems to be supporting it now, which is exciting, uh, even people who were against it. Um, well they've all, they've all gone through the same conversion that I've gone through in that, uh, they've seen what VFM is able to do. Uh, it can be a kind of alien concept at, initially, and uh, after actually being able to see the results, um, everyone seems to have come around to the pro VFM camp.
- Isabel I just think that VFM, um, my prediction for the way it's going to go in the next year is, it's going to build and build on what we've already created, and that's really exciting. Um, you know as someone who's just graduated from the university, uh I feel like I'm still going to read up on these, just because there's a real incentive to create better reporting and more accessible reporting. And, you know, the viewership has never been higher before, and I'm hearing great things from all the bloggers. So it's good, they're training people, they're developing their content, and they're becoming more comprehensive. So I'm glad about that, and I'm sure that there will be lots of new suggestions for next year, and that we can only go up, so...
- text: VoterMedia.org can help you try this in your voter community.
- title: Spread VoterMedia to other universities**
- text: VoterMedia (= voter funded media = VFM) is spreading from the University of British Columbia to other student unions:
- Naylor You know, I think that VFM is fantastic, and I think that it's been an incredible boon to the civil discourse at the AMS. And I think that any organization will be well served to adopt it.
- Isabel During my time as elections administrator I received multiple emails from other universities asking about how they could get VFM started at their own establishments, which is a really positive thing, I think, because UBC's setting an example. Um, again you know, voter apathy is something that, you know, it exists among all universities I think to some extent, at least in Canada this is what I've heard. Um so finding a new accessible way, a really easy way to get students interested in the issues that go on at their own universities, I think is always a positive thing. And um, it increases engagement. Uh, it increases perhaps student pride in their own universities, or maybe not, but [laugh] depending on the events, but um, I think it's up to UBC to really set an example and provide guidance to these other institutions. So if people are interested, they should really, you know, contact us. So, for example, there's a movement at U Vic I know, to sort of, get this started. And I've also heard things from University of Calgary, so that's just an example.
- Lougheed So we wrote up this one post about UBC's athletics fees and how they're administered, and we got a response, uh, almost immediately, from someone at U Vic, uh, who really cared about those kinds of issues, uh, and who ran their grad student society over there. U Vic had some issues with athletics fees in the past, uh, and so we posted this up and they really enjoyed it. They followed the blog already. And so having that kind of dynamic interplay means that, you know, our VFM are reaching out not only to those at UBC, but also those within British Columbia, and also nationally.

Naylor ...I've talked about the project with people at other universities, uh Calgary and um Western Washington, uh and the response has generally been pretty positive. I think it's something that definitely should expand to other places. Um it's been a huge, huge help in terms of media quality and coverage quality, uh at UBC. I think that the, the quality of, you know, every paper, not only the ones that participated in the contest, has been improved, just because of the competition that's inherent in the whole, uh you know, process.

Lougheed My one piece of advice for other student unions would be, don't be all that afraid of VFM. Give it a shot. Uh, it's not that expensive for the first round, and see how you like it. Odds are you'll end up having a campus that's a bit more fun, uh, because fun VFMs just kind of naturally evolve, they've always been around, and you'll also have a campus that's a bit more informed. Uh, you'll have the VFM covering the more detailed issues and things like that. Odds are, a bunch of you in student government right now would probably start up a VFM as well. Uh, either you're graduating or something like that, and you're thinking, well, I still want to be engaged, and involved, but not necessarily in a formal sense. I'm just going to throw up a blog, write some rants, and we'll see whether or not people like 'em. Uh, so I wouldn't be all that afraid about starting it up. At least give it a shot, and see how it goes for your campus.

text: More info at VoterMedia.org.

title: Expand VoterMedia to municipal politics

text: How VoterMedia (= voter funded media = VFM) can expand from student unions to larger democracies:

Taylor I would love to see VFM expand throughout the Vancouver region. We have a really intense and really awesome blogging community within Vancouver which, um, I was a part of before VFM, and I think that there's lots of potential there to elevate some of the smaller local blogs become more notorious? I think that's a really great area of opportunity...

Naylor You know, I think municipal politics is fertile ground for VFM to uh, uh plant itself in. I think that any politics would be, in all honesty, but I think municipal is a good starting place. Uh you know, the amount of local detail is something that isn't covered a lot in major papers, and I think that the, the nuance and the attention to detail that is inherent within a VFM system, um, will cause the, the quality of debate which, you know, at a municipal level I think is pretty low, uh to improve drastically.

Andrew ...when you look at the mainstream media, on an issue, there's generally the same opinion rehashed again and again and again. You get these smaller media outlets, that actually do their own investigative work, they are able to present a different outlook on a story than the mainstream media does. So you get different opinions out there, and you may even get more facts, and information, than you do from the CBC or whoever's reporting.

Justin ...I think there's a fantastic opportunity, because even in municipal elections when, especially with municipal elections, you know, there's your local papers and TV stations, but they deal very much still with the superficial, um, with the one or two issues that everyone's talking about, and with the current scandal of the day. You know, you have alternative media out there that's talking about the issues they care about and they have knowledge of, you have a better sense of what voters as a whole care about, and that, at the end of the day, benefits the, you know, community, benefits the city, benefits the election much more, because you're having these alternative viewpoints come out, and an actual discussion happen, about things which may not be able to get on page 1 or 3 of the paper.

Jeff I would say right now for voter funded media, if you were to put it into a municipal election, or perhaps something larger, the one big thing it would do, it would democratize the media. As right now media's heavily controlled by the major newspapers, the TVs, the radio, whatever. But voter funded media could help publicize all these different smaller outlets, and then exactly determine, and actually show what people are saying who aren't involved at all these giant organizations. While blogs currently are written by people who actually care, if you could use voter funded media and aggregate all this information, it would definitely help increase the knowledge, the public opinion, and what the issues are for people.

Jason Yeah, I agree, I think there's an increasing trend towards people needing to be aware of their local roots. Like these days we get a lot of news out there that's national or worldwide, and we hear about all these things happening in the world, but we don't understand what's happening in our own neighbourhoods. And that's I think an area where VFM, if properly executed, could be a, could play a role in all kinds of areas, whether it's a huge city, whether it's a small community. I think people want to identify with their local roots, and VFM would, would be able to provide them with a way of doing that, that any other program that I've seen hasn't been able to.

Cutler ...what's interesting for me is that VFM may have in fact more potential in traditionally low engagement, low information settings. Um, and municipal politics is a natural extension, in the sense that we know that voters don't have nearly the same amount of information when they go to the polls in municipal elections as they do when they vote in, in a national or provincial election.

Mitch So, it could possibly even shake up the system that has been in place in Vancouver for over a hundred years as we've had people dominating the at-large city elections. So I think it's very crucial, um, that some more media outlets start to come into place in the city, and start making people realize that there are a lot more viable alternatives to the status quo.

text: VoterMedia.org is a free platform for supporting media in your voter community.