

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

# EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

1. The role of Editor-in-Chief
2. Setting up your office
3. Maintaining proper documents
4. Filing
5. Recruiting people to the paper
6. Giving seminars
7. Dealing with difficult staff
8. Open forums: Letters, op/eds, events
9. Promoting your paper
10. Avoiding burnout
11. Democracy in the office
12. Continuity
13. Boards and bylaws





# The role of editor-in-chief

BY ERIN MILLAR

- ▶ Being the editor-in-chief (or whatever your paper calls it) can be both exciting and confusing. The role is often a catch-all position and it is difficult to describe exactly what your responsibilities are. So without going into the specific logistics of your job at your paper, this section will attempt to describe what the role of editor is in terms of a manager, cheerleader, and campus personality.

Your job is to know and anticipate everything that could possibly affect the publication. I know that this sounds crazy but ultimately, it's true. Every decision that you make should be made in light of what is best for the publication. You are in the position of being paid for by "tax dollars" (aka. student levy) which means two things: that you can do things knowing that for the most part your revenue is safe; and that you have a special responsibility to your membership (the students).

This responsibility should not be taken for granted. Your publication is not there to be the reflection of your personal ideal publication. It is there to be a resource for your membership. That can mean that you are there to lobby for, research for, teach and entertain the students on your campus. Whatever you see as your purpose, remember that you are there because of them and for them. Be careful not to make decisions for the wrong reasons.

When I say that you need to know and anticipate everything, I mean that you are the only staff person that has a holistic perspective on the paper. Your business manager worries about money, your arts editor worries about arts coverage, and your art director worries

about the visuals, but you are the only one who worries about how it all works together. Every big project needs one person to be responsible to make sure that it all comes together. You are that person. That might mean writing three articles in one night, firing someone even if you like them, or spending 15 hours trying to fix some computer glitch that screwed up your print file. If all else falls through, you need to be there.

It also means that you need to show leadership all of the time. Your editorial team needs to believe in their leader if they're going to work their asses off for little or no money. My best example of this is a conflict that my previous publication had with a campus anti-war group. The paper published an article that criticized the organization and upset a number of students with close social ties to members of our editorial team. We agreed that the article was strongly written and that the opinions were justified and supported. But there were still considerable hard feelings and some internal conflict. We questioned ourselves, and each other, and it posed a risk to the team that we had built. The biggest problem, though, wasn't whether we won the argument with the anti-war group, but that we were not supporting each other as a team.

Your staff won't always agree with each other, and they shouldn't, but they do have to understand and respect each other and your editorial decisions. My editorial team walked away from a conflict resolution meeting with the anti-war group believing in each other and the editorial decisions that were made. It was priceless in terms of our ability to work together.

There are at least three concrete things

that you can do to achieve this kind of staff unity:

## 1• Stick to your guns

If you make thoughtful, careful decisions, everything will be peachy most of the time. But sometimes you will be criticized or just plain wrong. When this happens, don't buckle. If you reconsider and come to the conclusion that you were wrong, take responsibility and apologize. But if you honestly think that you made the best decision that you could have with the information you had available at the time, don't back down. You are going to come up against upsetting situations in this job, but you need to be confident and rational if everyone around you is going to continue to take you seriously.

## 2• Stick by your staff

If you believe in your staff, their skills, and their ability to make decisions, you need to stick by them when they screw up. Even if you don't necessarily agree, you must support them. This doesn't mean that you should bite your tongue, but you should (almost) always present yourself to the outside world as if you are united in your decisions. Whether it is a conflict with the SU, or a critical letter to the editor, help them figure out the right response and support them.

## 3• Be a reasonable role model

Your editorial team will not accept being bossed around by someone who isn't pulling their own weight. Make sure that you are always living up to what you expect. On the other hand, be reasonable. People are much more likely to let you know what is going on if you are reasonable and open with them. Talk to them about their personal lives and give them slack when they need it. That gives you the right to



## 2 The role of editor-in-chief

demand more when it is appropriate. Sometimes, people need you to be intuitive and anticipate what they need, even when they may not ask for it.

Be transparent. The best way to pursue that trust you need from your staff is by being completely transparent. Don't conceal your motives or shy from telling people what you want and they will respect you for it.

One of the things that stops student editors from making real progress is either fear or lack of initiative to make big changes. Most likely, you have inherited a publication with a rich history that many people have worked on. However, that doesn't mean that changes shouldn't be made because of an attachment to legacy. Try new things. Be brilliant sometimes, mess up sometimes. Learn everything you can and eventually you will make progress. This is the nature of student publishing. Go crazy.

Finally, remember that legally you can be held accountable for anything and everything published in that paper. So make sure that you thoroughly know everything that is published and that you believe in it and its legality. ◀

*Erin Millar was EIC of the Cap Courier, CUP Treasurer on the CUP 68 board of directors, and CUP president in CUP 69.*



# Setting up your office

- ▶ Every newspaper office needs to be attractive to potential volunteers. It needs to draw them in without being intimidating and without posing any barriers.

Every door in your office should be well marked with the paper's name, the function of the room (e.g. production room) and decorated with colourful posters, collages, paintings, or other random bursts of creativity. This goes double for the front door, which should shout the paper's name to passersby.

Putting schedules on the door that show editors' hours is a good idea. Some papers have gone further and posted the names, phone numbers and headshots of the editors or staff on the doors. This is nice for strangers to the office, though you should have everybody's permission before you post their phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

On darkroom and production office doors, it's a good idea to post a usage schedule where people sign up for equipment time. Don't forget to fill it in first with ample time for vital newspaper work.

It's also worth saving a space on or beside the door for regular announcements from the paper — upcoming seminars, staff meeting times, deadlines and ticket contests. Keep a template on your computer for weekly updates that you can post outside the office and this will go a long way to connecting students with the workings of the newspaper.

Equally important, you should try to have some kind of front desk, where people can sit, work, answer the phone and greet people as they come into the

office. This is also an excellent place to pile unsorted mail, keep the contact book and to store a staff copy of the constitution.

## MAXIMUM USE OF SPACE

Most student newspaper offices are too small already, so don't waste a square millimeter of space. This doesn't mean you have to clutter up your office, but don't allow for blocked corners, obstructed passageways or meandering alleys. Strike a balance between clutter and empty space, between work space and relaxation space, between storage space and office space, between efficiency and comfort.

## PRIVATE VERSUS SOCIAL SPACE

Create central locations that everybody will pass through or naturally congregate in. Most importantly, make sure the main doorway leads directly to a large social space which will invite people into the room. That large space should be the central point for staff meetings.

Private offices encourage isolation and tunnel vision. That being said, some people may need their own space. Try to keep an open-door policy whenever possible while allowing for a couple of alternate spaces where small groups and small meetings can gather.

Try to create a corner or two where people can work, conduct interviews or talk on the phone with a bit of peace and quiet. Filling the office with room dividers, however, turns the room into a rat maze, and closes people off in little boxes. Ideally, people should see open group areas when they first walk in,

with separate offices near the back.

Knocking down walls or adding new ones can help give your office a better balance of open space and private offices. Check your lease agreement before you do anything drastic, though. The last thing you want is to be served with an eviction notice on production night.

## FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT

You need computers, a scanner, a printer, telephones, chairs, desks, tables, coat racks, bookshelves, magazine racks, a photocopier and about a dozen other pieces of equipment that you'll slowly add to your list as time goes on. If people are working late and someone needs to sleep, do you have couches or cots available?

Get whatever you can on the cheap. Scrounge around the school. Go to used-furniture shops and garage sales. When someone on staff is moving away from town, ask them if they have any stuff the paper could use. Search your neighbourhood on large item garbage days. Every now and then the university will be getting rid of some surplus furniture and this could also be a good time to move in.

Keep inventory. Keep a diagram of where everything in the office is, or where you'd like it to go. Be as organized as possible and you'll lose less to theft, vandalism, and accidents.

## SAFETY

People should be able to walk around the office without tripping over electrical cords, cutting themselves on sharp



## 2 Setting up your office

or broken edges, bumping into people with exacto knives and so on. Dark-rooms and computers create special problems. Do a safety audit of your office at the beginning of every year and make the necessary changes.

### LIVABILITY

Is there enough ventilation in your office? Enough light? Is it the right kind of light? Is there anything you can do about it?

How about a fridge, a hot plate, a microwave? Eating food brought from home is much more affordable and healthier than buying french fries all the time. Buy a coffee maker and kettle, too, it is an absolute necessity.

### CLEANLINESS

Make sure spaces aren't so narrow or tight that they're impossible for you to clean up. The whole office, when organized, should have a clean, well-organized appearance. The best way to do this is to clearly delineate the production area from the meeting area, the storage area from the newsroom, and so on. "Have a place for everything," as your grandmother would say, "and everything in its place."

There should be a place right near the door for editors and staff to put their things. Every house has a junk drawer and every office has a catch-all table. You can buy shelves with cubbyholes in them, just like in kindergarten, and then label each one with the names of editors and staff. Or, for true high school chic, see if you can find some used lockers hanging around in university stor-

age rooms, and use those instead.

If you haven't got the money or space for shelves and lockers, at least get a coat rack, some hooks on the wall, and some desk space for people to spread their papers out on.

### EASY ACCESS

Have plenty of boxes near the door for letters, events, announcements, and op/ed pieces to be submitted by non-staff members. Put a mail slot in your door, or a mailbox outside, so people who drop by outside office hours aren't prevented from submitting their material.

Some papers have even gone as far as to attach letters boxes to their distribution boxes. Well-marked with the paper's flag and painted bright colours, these boxes encourage submissions from all over campus. They also mean, however, that you have to go around and collect all the submissions every few days. If you do post boxes, remember to use a fairly thin slot and a lock on each box. Without these barriers, you'll end up with either submissions of garbage or no submissions at all.

### NO CONFUSION

The more information you post in the office, the better. For semi-permanent information, big wall posters are best. For day-to-day ephemera, try massive bulletin boards in several parts of the office, each divided into thematic sections.

On the massive bulletin boards in your office, you can post deadlines for each section, the phone numbers of editors, schedules, copy lists (if you don't have

competitors who'll come in and steal your story ideas), ad rates, style sheets, meeting times and agendas, bulletins from affiliated organizations, event publicity, a ride board, "roommates wanted" listings, phone messages, etc.

### ORGANIZED COPY FLOW

Each department should have a set of shelves, baskets, or boxes into which copy and disks can be placed in the editor's absence.

These should be in a fairly obvious place in the office, labeled clearly and with an explanation of what to do (e.g. "Write your name on the front page or disk label, with a date, time and phone number").

It's a good idea, too, to have one big box or basket or shelf called "If you don't know where to put it, put it here." That way, all the confusion stays in one place and you can sort it out once a day.

### STANDARDS BOARD

You might consider posting a style sheet, saying what style and/or font and type size to use for body type, headlines, cutlines, by-lines, photo and graphics credits, call-outs, reefers, continuents, and so on. There should also be a copy of these beside every computer used for layout.

A headline chart is also useful — it should tell you how many characters of each size and style of headline fit into one, two, three, four or five columns. Improved heads can result if you use this chart to write headlines before they actually have to be produced.



## 3 Setting up your office

### BY THE PHONE

Often people in the office will have to answer the phone even if they haven't been working at the paper very long, or aren't familiar with some aspects of it.

Make up a standard notice to post beside every telephone. Include ad rates (or your business office phone number, if you have one), a publication schedule, editors' phone numbers (if they agree) and instructions for putting people on hold and transferring calls.

If you can, buy or make ink-erasable wall chart on which every staffer can write their name, where they went out to, when they expect to be back, and any other important notes (e.g. "If the president calls, tell her she can reach me at this number . . . If Nate calls, tell him the pepsi is in the fridge . . ."). That way, when there's a phone call you won't have to yell all around the office, or run over to the coffee shop, looking for the person being called. You'll just read the info off the chart.

### THE GREAT WALLS

High, hard-to-reach places should be covered with colourful posters. Go with whatever strikes your paper's fancy — movie posters, lists of jokes, anti-corporate flyers or editing mistakes made by major dailies.

Walls can be painted bright colours or even murals. Regular items that are actually important should have a clearly marked spot (i.e. "Staff meeting agenda") and not be mingled with notes, postcards, and story ideas. Coloured paper or duct tape can be used to line-off sections of the wall for different purposes.

If you find yourself short of necessary wall space, baffles covered with cork can be a good solution.

You can also use sound-absorbent baffles to dampen office noise. They're pricey, but they work.

### PLENTY OF SHELF SPACE

If everything that belongs in the office is to have its own separate place, you'll obviously need a lot of shelves and cupboards. Every bit of wall that isn't used for some other purpose can be used for shelving and cupboards. There's almost no such thing as too much.

Shelving is expensive unless you use your imagination. Most universities and colleges have storerooms where piles of old, slightly damaged and disused equipment sit, waiting to be claimed. Bricks and boards will do in a pinch. Beer cases and fruit boxes can serve as file holders.

Send an email to your facilities coordinator at the university. Chances are good that they'll be able to direct you to a room or department that is undergoing renovation or has old equipment that is in the way.

### INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Aside from message boards, blackboards and general mailboxes, each staff member, especially editors, must have a mail slot. Internal documents, press releases, mail and the like should be placed in the appropriate person's (or at least the appropriate department or beat's) mail slot. Some editors prefer this slot to be the "in" box on their desk

while others prefer to have a little mail box at the front of the office. Find a delivery system that works best for your office environment.

Because not all mail will be able to be sorted immediately, you might also put an in/out box on your front desk for incoming and outgoing mail, which people can sort when they have a few spare moments.

### READ ALONG WITH US

Set up a magazine rack or table, where staff members can pick up and drop off magazines and newspapers. A volunteer staff coordinator can solicit contributions and buy interesting alternative publications for the paper's use.

Magazines are a great source of background, story ideas, graphics and inspiration. Not everybody makes the effort to seek them out, so it can help to expose your staff to them directly. Post a sign requesting that nobody take the magazines home. Although you'll lose a lot of them anyway, you should let people know that they're intended for the paper.

### BE FRIENDLY

A happy office is a productive office and, in the end, we're all students trying to deal with a million things at once. A well organized office that is bright and inviting will help to take a lot of the edge off of those long production nights, especially when you have an academic essay due the next morning. ◀



# Maintaining proper documents

BY CARL WILSON AND KAREN HILL

- ▶ One of the most frustrating discoveries I made during my time at a student paper was that many of the problems we were struggling with had been solved years before, but nobody had recorded the information.

Talking to former editors and staffers is one good way to unearth forgotten lore, as is reading back issues of the paper. It's crazy that institutions whose purpose is to publish writing rely so heavily on oral tradition for their history. Most student papers keep only a bare minimum of written information.

Person-to-person training and late-night drinking sessions are invaluable, but how-to and what-was-done will last longer if it's put in black-and-white. By devoting an hour or so each week to generating the documents that will preserve your intentions and ideas for the next generations of staffers, you do the paper an immeasurable service.

What follows are capsule descriptions of some of the essential documents you should make, have, and use around your office.

## CONSTITUTION

The constitution should be thought of as a defensive wall you build around the paper, which spells out how decisions are made, who you answer to and how.

It needs to be responsible enough to give you rhetorical power — you should be able to point out that an elected board of directors, for example, allows students at large a voice in how their

money gets spent, and an open staff structure allows every student to get involved in the editorial process.

The constitution should also anticipate every possible abuse or attack on these structures by the paper's enemies, including those which may come from within, and provide a legal means for thwarting saboteurs. Either a board or a judicial committee should have the power to make rulings on the constitutionality of challenges.

The constitution of your paper will likely outline a whole slew of things that have a bearing on — but usually not a direct relation to — the day-to-day running of the paper.

It should tell you:

- The definition of a staff member — x number of contributions over x issues.
- Who the members of the corporation are, i.e. how much the student levy is, who has to pay it and the fact that the university administration collects it for the paper.
- The rules governing the annual meeting which receives the paper's audit and its quorum requirements.
- Rules governing a general meeting. This is generally the kind of meeting held after a particularly controversial article. Members of the corporation can usually call a general meeting by collecting a specified number of signatures, and the paper's board of directors must then convene a meeting.
- The composition of the board of directors, i.e., how many staff reps as

well as general student reps.

- Impeachment proceedings against editors.
- Who the officers of the corporation are (the folks who sign the cheques).
- Duties and powers of the directors of the board. Usually says that they manage legal and financial affairs, receive staff complaints unresolved at the staff level, force the paper to print a retraction or apology if the board deems it necessary, approve job descriptions and wages, hire employees, ratify staff elections, but don't set editorial policy.
- How staff elections and board elections are run.
- How the board can remove an editor, and how the staff can overturn a board's decision to do so.
- How staff meetings are run, who can call them, what quorum is, what kind of business can be decided there.
- How to change the constitution (usually must go to a general student referendum).
- The paper's statement of policies or principles — i.e., the paper will be fair, encourage students to participate, won't discriminate, will serve and protect freedom of speech, plus any other political goals.
- A code of ethics governing reporters.

All this information is absolutely vital to the way your paper works. What's more, if the people who engineered your autonomy were smart, they've likely built



## 2 Maintaining proper documents

a whole set of checks and balances and defence mechanisms into the Constitution. Study it, discuss it and be ready to use it.

### LEASES/CONTRACTS

Not everything of value to your paper is likely included in your constitution. Most glaringly, very few papers own their own office spaces. Many don't own their own equipment. The university usually exerts a lot of control over distribution, recycling and so on.

Never let your basic needs rest on verbal understandings. Demand that you put the exact conditions of co-existence into leases and contracts. The contract should specify any obligations the two parties have, the length of time until renegotiation and any reasons that would allow one side to dissolve the contract before that time.

Decide how long the contract should last on the basis of how favourable or unfavourable it is to the paper. But keep in mind that every time a contract or lease is renegotiated, there's the potential for disaster, blackmail and wasted time. Longer contracts allow for more stability.

### STATEMENTS OF PRINCIPLES/ CODES OF ETHICS (SOP/COE)

Again, this might be part of your constitution. However you package it, it is vital that every paper develop its own statement of principles and code of journalistic ethics.

Often student papers in Canada will agree simply to abide by the SoP/CoE

of CUP or some other large association, otherwise they rarely have these statements at all. Neither option is wise. A homegrown set of principles and ethics, democratically developed and approved by the editors and staff of the paper, brings a sense of purpose and conscience to the whole enterprise that is almost certainly out of reach by any other means.

These documents define a vision of the newspaper for the benefit of the public, new staff members as well as veterans who are getting jaded. They define your obligations to your readers and your craft, most importantly, they provide a focal point for discussion of these aspects of your work at staff meetings and in day-to-day practice.

The SoP is essentially a philosophical statement, which should provide the context for your whole journalistic project. In the statement of principles, consider the following questions: what is the primary role of your paper? What does this imply about the kind of journalism you wish to practice? Are there any particular issues or groups of people the paper is particularly intended to examine? What are the concrete, direct effects you wish the paper to have? Does this imply certain structural requirements like an open and democratic staff, or particular responsibilities to the community?

The Code of Ethics, on the other hand, is more or less a set of guidelines and rules to follow in your work. It should cover everything from conflict of interest to protecting sources to avoiding bigotry, in the form "The journalist should (or will) . . ."

Both these documents need to articu-

late precisely and eloquently the desires and beliefs of the staff, to explain and to inspire. They should be developed by a few people in rough draft, then thrown open to a general meeting for discussion and revision.

They should be reviewed frequently, so that they remain living documents. They should be taken seriously as the cornerstone of the newspaper, the way in which your paper thinks through and declares its standpoint, biases and obligations to the communities it serves.

•[See: Ch 7. Ethics]

### JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Written job descriptions should spell out the responsibilities of every official position at the paper. Employees need them, so there's no confusion about who they're responsible to or for what. Editors need them, partly to avoid overlap with other editors and partly as a to-do list while they're learning their roles. The staff needs them, to evaluate the performance of elected or hired officials, to conduct elections, to help individuals decide whether to seek positions and generally to make sure everything is taken care of.

Job descriptions should be thorough and give a sense of what to strive for, but should also be realistic. Include all regular, routine duties, even those that arise only occasionally. Do not include special projects, though you might wish to say "Shall also be responsible from time to time for special projects as mandated by staff."

Be extremely specific — say how many stories per issue this editor is responsi-





## 3 Maintaining proper documents

ble for and from what beats, how many hours they're expected to be in the office, and so on. Vague, unrealistic or selective job descriptions are unfair.

Pass these statements through the staff, revise them periodically and don't lose them. For some reason, job descriptions seem the most misplaced items in any newspaper office. Some papers put them in the bylaws of their constitutions, but this seems to be too formal and rigid. Better to put them in the policy manual.

### POLICY MANUALS

Very few student papers have active policy manuals.

Constitutions can't and shouldn't cover every aspect of the day-to-day operations of the paper. But neither should staff have to make up their letters policy year after year without referring to any solid information from the past.

With a general policy manual, where major staff decisions are preserved, staff meetings can go twice as quickly and you can avoid uninformed answers to questions from the public.

Include in the policy manual: job descriptions; procedures for mediating disputes or grievances (sexual harassment, for example); the rules by which staff meetings are run; what staff members do if asked about advertising; who is responsible for unsolicited books, CDs, press releases or feature articles that come in the mail; how special issues are allotted; responsibilities for office maintenance and files; policies on free ads to charities or political groups; how editorials are assigned and attrib-

uted; policies on letters, op/ed pieces; how, when, and which editorial positions can be occupied by more than one person; policies for allowing other publications to reprint articles or graphics; policies on allowing other groups or individuals to use office equipment and anything else which might need to be addressed.

Get started by putting together a small committee to go through meeting minutes and compile existing policies. Bring a draft to staff. Put the maintenance of the policy manual in somebody's job description. And you may wish to require all policies to be reviewed with a certain frequency — perhaps every two years.

### STYLEGUIDES, STAFF MANUALS AND STYLESHEETS

Besides administrative information, you should have reference materials on the paper's format for writing and design.

It's always important to have an introductory guide to student journalism to help train new staff and volunteers. A booklet should be provided to every new volunteer to outline the basics of news, feature and review writing, departmental breakdown, how to turn the computers on, decision-making procedures and so on. It should be short enough to be accessible but long enough to be useful.

You also might create an even more comprehensive staff manual or style guide, which would explain exactly how to size a headline, make a motion at a staff meeting, sort the mail, spell labour/labor, use gender-neutral language and attribute quotes, etc.

If a whole manual seems beyond you, gradually compile such notes into a series of pamphlets or tip sheets. Photocopy them, hand them out, put them up on the wall or keep them on file. This practice helps maintain consistency and continuity in the paper.

This guide would differ from the policy manual in that it doesn't give rules and procedures so much as advice and explanations. You should still pass it through a staff meeting and ask for suggestions and revisions.

Finally, you should have standard style sheets that specifies what typeface to use for headlines, your byline format, photo credit formalities, spellings, acronyms and short forms you use. Post them next to computers or on the wall for easy reference.

### ALUMNI LISTS

To supplement all these records, you should keep an up-to-date list of the names, professions, addresses and telephone numbers of ex-staff. Every past editor should be included, as should anyone else who was on staff for a long time. The list should specify time periods and positions held beside every name. You may also wish to list particular projects, crises or other unusual experiences they had at the paper, as well as their areas of knowledge and expertise.

There are several uses for this. First, you can call for advice and information. Second, they can provide financial or moral support in a crisis or for a special project. Third, you can list well-known ex-staffers in house ads and posters to boost recruitment. Fourth, anyone who



## 4 Maintaining proper documents

researches the history of the paper or of the student press will need such lists. The list can also serve as a guest list for reunions and anniversary parties on special occasions.

Call everyone you're listing to ensure they're willing to be listed, and restrict access to editors only. The paper needs to know who these people are, but you don't want to violate their privacy (after all, it'll be your turn someday). The list should be updated annually for changes in address and to add names.

### ROUTINE ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS

Editors, typesetters and business people regularly need to list items for inclusion in the paper, and provide status reports on what's been edited or laid-out. The best way to do so is with standard forms and charts. The following can be photocopied, filled out and posted in a central place (keep the master copies in a safe place):

- Copy lists for the upcoming issue (include spaces for the topic of the story, the name of the writer, the editor to contact, possibly the photographer, and the deadline).
- Photo and graphics lists (list the topic, the deadlines, the photographer or artist, the writer or editor of the related story).
- Copy lists for the current issue (include spaces for topics, writers, photo/graphics (yes or no), headline ideas, the page or section the story's going on, editing (how many times and by whom), location (what disk, under what title), laid out (check) and proofread (check).

- Ad list form. Include ad title, advertiser, name of layout artist, date to run, page number, specs (size, colours), a place to checkmark.

- Upcoming events forms for the coming events column. Include name of event, brief description, date and time, location, sponsoring organization and a number to contact for further information.

- Classifieds forms, for classified advertisers. Include name, phone number, date bought, dates to run, cost, text of ad and any special features (such as bolding, etc.).

- Recruitment forms for new staffers to fill out when they join (include interests, experience, all phone numbers, address (optional), place of origin, applicable skills (e.g., do you know how to use a Mac? Do you have any accounting experience?).

### ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

#### Rate card

Every paper should have a standard form giving advertising rates for different sizes, colours, etc., to hand out to prospective advertisers.

#### Meeting agendas and minutes

Agendas should be prepared in advance for staff, board and other committee meetings. If possible, post them so staff members can suggest additions or subtractions. Minutes should be taken at every meeting, with as much thoroughness as practicable. Keep copies of the minutes in binders or in your files. Do not throw out minutes at the end of every year. Though you may not wish to keep minutes forever, having

the past two or three years' minutes can be invaluable in times of crisis and confusion.

#### Correspondence

Keep copies of all your administrative and business correspondence on file, more or less permanently. In event of lawsuits and other disputes, letters will often be the most important record you have of who said what.

#### Reports

At the end of each year, or after major projects, committees and editors should write final reports to summarize what they've done, interesting things they've learned, viewpoints on the state of the paper and so on. Written reports might sometimes be prepared as well to keep staff up-to-date on progress of a project, and people who attend conferences and seminars on the paper's behalf should also write up reports to staff. Progress and conference reports are expendable, but final reports should be kept on file forever as repositories of the wisdom of experience.

#### Indexes

Your filing system should be indexed, with explanations of how to maintain it, and these indexes should be available in a prominent place in the office.

•[See: Ch 10. Filing]

#### Staff and resource person lists

These are basically phone lists for current staff and for people to consult when computers break down, you have libel problems, or need a seminar on writing. They should be kept out of public sight, obviously. This will become very useful when your paper's "go-to person" disappears/is put out of commission/graduates.



## 5 Maintaining proper documents

### Boycott lists

At some papers, each year the staff passes a list of companies, services and products to be boycotted as advertisers. Papers that do this should document who they're boycotting, the reason why, what they produce and contact numbers for further information on a public list (you may wish to publish it). You should also keep a list of publications and organizations to consult for boycott information, to make this process easier each year. While you don't absolutely have to hold on to these lists, they are valuable when people are researching the dastardly deeds of the corporate world.

•[See: Ch 11. Boycott policies]

### Mailing lists

You should keep an up-to-date list of institutions and individuals for mailouts of the newspaper, including CUP papers, other student papers, other media, businesses, community groups and government bureaus.

•[See: Ch 11. Distribution]

### Subscription lists

Keep a list of publications the paper subscribes to, with space for suggestions for new subscriptions. Review subscriptions annually.

### Inventories and wish lists

You should have a list of all the equipment, furniture and general stuff the paper owns, plus wish lists of stuff you'd like to buy if you come into extra cash. Keep these on file for future reference.

### Financial records

Obviously, you need to keep up-to-date and accurate books, budgets, payroll

logs, tax forms, etc. If your business manager isn't fluent with accounting, consult business and finance students on campus, or friendly pros. And, of course, conduct an annual audit.

### Promotional materials

Make pamphlets, brochures, posters and handbills promoting the paper, its ideals and its achievements. Supply them to community centres and campus groups' hand them out or post them around campus.

## EXTRAS AND FRILLS

### Office maps

Supplement your inventory with a map of the office, the files, the archives, the newsroom and desks. Keep a copy on file, send copies to other papers to provide office ideas, and post some on the wall to help new staff find their way around. Campus, city and transit maps are also worth having on your wall.

### Resource and position papers

Encourage editors and staff to write up ideas, tips and opinions in mini-essays, for discussion. Stick some silly graphics on and help liven up your office life and paper history.

### Resource lists and bibliographies

Compile lists of books, magazines, organizations and people to look up for background information on particular issues or skills. File them with your clippings and related materials.

### Newsletters

Keep your school's and other organizational newsletters on bulletin boards and in the files for reference. Encourage staff members to contribute to them and become more involved. This helps

give the paper a visible presence in the organizations to which it belongs.

### Staff newsletters

If you have a large-ish staff, it can be useful and fun to make a staff newsletter, including resource and position papers, meeting minutes, upcoming events at the paper and CUP, gossip, silly songs and poems and graphics made late on production night, and paper history. Make one every two weeks or so and hand it out to staff and post it in the office. Two weeks later, file a couple away as historical artifacts.

This can be a fun way to get new staffers involved in the administrative side of the paper. Appoint them as newsletter editor or assign them a newsletter story about how successful recruitment was or an office poll on an internal controversy.

Newsletters also build staff cohesion by bridging cliques, helping people get acquainted and giving staffers a sense of the paper as a living institution with a personal touch. ◀



# Filing

BY TREENA KHAN

- ▶ Time is precious. With an organized newspaper office, staff save time looking for information and explaining to new recruits where to find what they're looking for. Instead, time can be spent on the real job of putting out the paper. Both new and more experienced staff will write better stories if you can point them to a file full of research on their topic before they even begin.

An organized filing system also means preserving student history, which is generally not available from any source other than the back issues of your paper.

Every year, staff learn a little bit more about how to run the paper effectively. They find suppliers, contacts for stories, shortcuts, ways of dealing with council, and dozens of others. Without a filing system, these lessons have to be learned year after year. With a filing system, this knowledge can be used and built upon.

## •[See: Ch 8. Continuity]

By setting aside space for your clippings, documents, and photos, you can prevent valuable information from being lost in the garbage.

Your filing system can be divided into the following sections. This is only a preliminary list, though, and can be edited at will.

- Archives
- Contacts
- Research
- Photos
- Graphics
- Newspaper Administration

- Production
- Business
- Advertising
- Organizations (including CUP)
- Resource & position papers

## ARCHIVES

Given the limited space of a newspaper office, millions of copies of back issues collecting dust in a corner — or worse, a filing cabinet — prove to be more annoying than useful. But having back copies of the paper is absolutely necessary as a public service, for research, for reference and as history.

Keep at least 50 copies of each issue from the current year in your office. People always come into the office looking for particular stories or advertisements from way back.

Keep papers in labeled boxes separated by string or coloured paper or on shelves designated for the purpose so that they won't get kicked around.

For issues older than the current year, bound volumes are good to have. At the end of the publishing season, take four complete sets of newspapers off to the bindery (or more if staff members place orders and pay for their own bound volumes in advance). If you don't know where a bindery is in your area, speak with university archives and they'll likely be able to point you in the right direction.

Invest in good quality, hardcover binding to ensure that issues do not disappear without a trace, and that they remain in good condition for many years. Don't get the tape-and-cardboard binding. They fall apart easily, cannot be

opened completely without breaking the spine — especially if you want to photocopy anything — and can't stand up vertically on a shelf.

If you're feeling really ambitious, you might consider indexing the stories in those issues, either in a file-card system or on a database. However, this is a major job, and you'll either need to hire people over the summer to do it or organize a squad of volunteers.

Another great idea is to get the issues preserved on microfilm. Ask your local or campus librarian. The National Archives in Ottawa microfilms some of the bigger campus papers, so check and see if you're on the list. Some campuses automatically keep microfilm archives without even telling the paper (or word hasn't been passed down through the editors), so see if your university is already doing this for you and keeping them in the library.

As far as other student papers go, keep them for a reasonable period, then clip what you need and dispose of the husk. The same applies to daily papers, periodicals and news exchanges. While it might seem neat to have entire back copies of the Gleaner or This Magazine around, but it might also be nice to leave some space for staff members and maybe a plant or two.

## CONTACTS

The main research tool of the journalist is the interview. Therefore a contact bank or file is an asset to every newspaper filing system. Set aside sections for staff, other papers, suppliers/printers, campus contacts, community contacts, provincial contacts, national



## 2 Filing

contacts, international contacts and issues contacts.

Often, papers plan a spreadsheet of contacts. While this is the best, as copies can easily be provided to all staff members — on condition they don't exploit it for personal use — it's often easier to do it in a physical book as new contacts are made. The easier it is, after all, the more likely it is to get done.

Use dividers to set these sections off, and file folders for subcategories. Write the name, title, address, phone numbers, expertise and anything else about the contact that would help somebody figure out where the person is and whether they would be useful, all on one piece of paper. Put them in alphabetical order within each folder.

It's important to keep one monolithic file of contacts to preserve all the names and numbers. However, you can supplement this system with rolodexes, contact books, binders, scribblers, wall charts, plastic boxes of cards, computerized lists or anything else that seems useful. Having a dual or triple or quadruple system helps ensure that no one person will steal or lose all your important contact information.

Make sure all editors and staff are aware of the contact files and their responsibility to keep them up to date. Put a well-marked box in a permanent place where staff members can drop in new contacts or new information. Then have a regularly-scheduled time (say every second Thursday) to transfer these notes into your main system.

### RESEARCH

The cabinets should contain a folder for every issue that comes up in your news and features, plus areas for arts, sports, etc. These files should include newspaper and magazine articles on the issues, relevant reports, notes from old stories and lists of contacts and sources.

Come up with as many distinct categories as you can and create folders for them. If a story fits into more than one category, you could try cross-referencing. Put the actual article in one folder, then put a card in the other folder giving the title, date, details of the article, and where to find it.

However, this takes time to set up and to use. To make things quicker in the long run, photocopy the article and put one copy in each file, including "see also X" marked on the margin or the reverse.

It's good to divide your resources into two main sections: documents and clippings. The former contains official minutes, reports, studies, while the clippings consists of articles from your own paper as well as other publications.

If you need to prioritize, remember that most organizations and bodies have accessible copies of their minutes, while reports often go missing. Make sure you have your own copies of important reports.

Clip articles from newspapers, magazines, radio transcripts and any other alternative news sources. Contact campus and community groups and get on their mailing lists. Encourage writers to add to the files when they pick up any new information.

After clipping anything, note the publication and date on the article to help writers trace sources and keep events in order.

The first step in organizing clippings may be to put the clippings into boxes labeled with major section headings, such as campus, local, provincial and national, or else major issues like education, women, military, environment, etc.

When you have time to go through it all, you can develop the sub-categories, and gradually divide the collection into more specific topics. Try to keep an alphabetical system of folders and a chronological order of clippings within the files to stave off impending chaos.

Finally, it's a good idea to supplement your contact bank by keeping a sheet of paper stapled to each research folder to put down names and phone numbers of people to contact.

### PHOTOS/GRAPHICS

Without photo and graphics files, layout can be a hellish experience. At 4 a.m., it's unlikely your photographer will want to be calling the student council president for a head shot.

Photographers should always be collecting photos. You can attract a good crew of shutterbugs if you can give them specific assignments. Shots of administrators, student council executives, speakers, campus buildings, classrooms and crowds are invaluable. So is keeping them for later use.

Setting shots are also valuable. Pictures of people eating lunch, demonstrating,



## 3 Filing

or sleeping through a lecture are timeless and can be used to complement a wide variety of stories. File photos according to personalities, locations, topics, issues, etc.

Contact sheets and negatives (if applicable) also should be carefully kept on file. If an entire contact sheet deals with one topic, it's best to file it in the particular category. If the contact sheet includes several topics, you can always cross-reference it.

Ensure all files are labeled clearly, with the photographer's name and what the photo is of. The automatic name, or even something clever, won't matter in five years. It's best to use a standard format with the date, author's name, and photo caption.

You can file your graphics in the same folders as the photos, or develop a parallel system for graphics alone. You might also want to consider marking down the dates the graphic has been reprinted, or keeping separate "new graphics" and "used graphics" sections, to avoid the embarrassment of accidentally reprinting the same graphic several times in a couple of years.

### PRODUCTION

This section should be constantly updated with tips to improve your paper's production since production techniques and habits tend to change as quickly as office technology does.

Keep an eye out for interesting layouts from other papers and magazines to help your paper look better. Also, watch out for articles on new software and technology. You might want to include

how-to guides here as well as in the resource section.

Keep manuals and information about all production equipment here, as well as master copies of the flag, folios, masthead, logos, template and other major design elements, including style sheets. Save everything on a back-up drive or two in case the production computer mysteriously dies.

Tips like how to size photos, how to create headlines, and basic page layout shouldn't be hidden in the files. That sort of information should also be posted on the wall of the office (or in a style guide) so staffers can do it on their own without turning production into a game of 20 questions.

### NEWSPAPER ADMINISTRATION

Here's where you keep copies of your paper's constitution, minutes of meetings, subscriptions lists, contracts, policy manuals, job descriptions, style sheets, accreditation forms, contact lists for ex-staff members and originals of forms used around the office.

It is a good idea to keep the originals in transparent envelopes in a binder. That way, people will use them only to photocopy more forms, instead of using the original. Keep a copy of your stationary and envelopes there as well. Don't forget to keep the digital files, especially the InDesign/Quark files.

You should also keep incoming and outgoing correspondence in this section — not letters to the editor but letters from and to campus institutions, legal advice and the like. Make sure everything is dated, since it may be im-

portant to know later in what order letters were written.

### BUSINESS

Don't throw out anything to do with your paper's finances. Lost bills are difficult to pay and unpaid creditors are difficult to do further business with. Similarly, lost invoices are difficult to collect on. You should keep a detailed record of transactions to refer to in case of a dispute.

If you have a business manager, they will have a better idea of what files should be kept. Otherwise, make sure you keep track of all correspondence with your printer, your suppliers, and anyone else you do business with. This should also be the drawer where you keep your bank account information, your chequebook, ledger, and receipts. Keep these files separate from the paper's other files, and agree among the staff who will maintain them, so as to avoid inadvertent misfiling, loss or other accidents.

### ADVERTISING

Keep your advertising files with your business files, but in a separate section. Divide advertising files into four categories: advertising policy, design, contracts, and sales procedures.

The advertising policy section should contain documentation on your paper's policies on boycotting ads, sexism, racism, and other potential problems with advertising.

The design section should include back copies of ads already designed, guide-



## 4 Filing

lines for ad design and placement, and spare graphics or type that may be useful to ad designers.

The contracts section should have one file per customer in which a copy of the ad contract is kept. You may want to keep your Campus Plus contracts separate from local contracts.

The sales procedures section should include your rate card, details on billing procedures, and other tips on selling.

### ORGANIZATIONS

In this section you should keep all agreements and information from organizations the newspaper has joined or wishes to join, including media associations like CUP, and political coalitions.

It isn't necessary to accumulate all the documents and newsletters you receive over the years, since most of it is only relevant to the year it comes out, especially pre-conference information.

However, sift through at the end of each year for documents that are especially interesting in mail-outs, house organs and newsletters. Always keep constitutions and correspondence that will matter to membership debates and reform efforts.

### RESOURCE & POSITION PAPERS

A large and prominent part of your filing system should be kept for resource papers, how-to guides, critiques, position papers and other material that will help staff members think about the way they write, produce and administer the

newspaper.

Document the way things are done or the way you'd like them done. Collect similar documents from other papers and groups. Keep lessons on objectivity (for and against), newswriting, social issues, features, research techniques, reviewing, sports writing, editing, libel, the paper's role in the community, alternative media, student papers, autonomy, censorship, and production methods each in their own separate files. Include bibliographies if you can find them.

Use these files for staff training and inspiration.

### MISCELLANY

There are certain things you should keep out of the cabinet drawers and open in the office for all staffers to use. These include styleguides, dictionaries, local phone books, staff phone lists and source directories on a prominent shelf. Try and get three or four copies of each, so people won't have to wait in line for them.

#### Hints for filing

- Look for filing cabinets at garage sales and used furniture stores. Slightly damaged cabinets go for a lot less than new ones.

- Buy your folders wholesale to save money.

- Hanging file folders are great to have. They keep your cabinets a lot neater, since file folders can't stand on their own, and can hold thicker folders upright.

- Colour coding is a handy way to

make things easier to find. Keep each section, i.e., research, photos, production, a different colour. Coordinate the colours of the folders, the labels, and the labels on the drawers.

- Keep the sections in separate drawers, if you have space, leaving room to add extra folders later on. Divide subsections in each drawer by tabs on the hanging folders.

### CARE AND FEEDING

Once your filing system is set up, routine is everything. It makes it easier in the long run. Set aside a few hours each week to do the clipping and filing, maybe the day after your paper comes out, when the office calms down a bit. Putting it off until you have some spare time means it will never get done. Since when does a student journalist have spare time? Set a schedule and stick to it.

Divide the labour. Let everyone know that the files exist, and have them keep an eye out for relevant documentation to add. If writers file their own stories and add names to the contact list, the work will be minimal for everyone. ◀

*Treena Khan was the editor at the *Charlatan* (Carleton University) in 1991-92.*



# Recruiting people to the paper

BY JOHN MONTESANTO

- ▶ With the constant struggle that is putting out a student newspaper, the easiest way to find helping hands is to recruit early and to recruit often. A few creative recruiting tricks and a little time management will help to round up a brand new crew of new volunteers every year.

A lot of newspapers find that first-year students believe that the student newspaper is one of the most exclusive, hard-to-get-into groups on campus. When you start recruitment, make sure new writers know that anyone can join the paper and everyone gets a chance to learn. The keys to doing this successfully, though, are starting early, planning well and being consistent.

## GETTING READY

Start your recruitment drive at the same time as your school's Frosh Week, when new students are checking out all the clubs to see which ones interest them most. The beauty of this is that you'll have the entire summer to plan your drive and maybe even organize some special promotional events.

If your paper can do it, elect or appoint a volunteer manager to run the drive. Leaving one person in charge of all the details will make everyone's lives easier. Even if you can't afford to pay someone, make it a volunteer position. You'll likely have at least one first-year volunteer who is looking for more experience and will be happy just to have some sort of official responsibility on the paper.

Draw up a job description and advertise the position. The position can ei-

ther be charged with running a beginning-of-the-semester campaign or to continue with different training and recruitment projects all year long. In the mid-term periods, this person could be responsible for organizing social events, calling everybody up the night before the staff meeting and organizing speakers or training seminars.

Other staff members should appreciate the need for recruitment and be prepared to set time aside for it. New people enrich not only the paper but the quality of the office experience.

## THINGS TO DO IN THE SUMMER

- Hold planning sessions about recruitment during summer editorial board meetings. Have you thought about including an issue in first-year student mail outs?
- Check out events that are being held during orientation week, and see if you can get a recruitment table there.
- Choose and order promo items (see below).
- Book any kind of tables or rooms you'll need.
- Start contacting professors who might let you speak at their lectures.
- Remind staffers that the more they help with recruitment, the more writers they will find to help them in turn.
- Get creative with ways to bring new people in. Have fun with it.

## WHY ALL THE FUSS?

Try to remember why you joined your paper in the first place. At a staff meet-

ing brainstorm a list of what staffers have gained from their experiences at the paper. Some obvious points might be:

- A chance for individuals to change their school and play an important role in the campus community.
- The paper is the cheapest academic course on campus. We learn across a broad spectrum of information, gain social and technical skills and get practical experience in publishing.
- Friendships develop in newspaper offices.

Call up from the deep recesses of your memory all the things that made you join the paper. Think of the things the editors said and did, then turn around and do them.

The number one marketing tool you have is the paper itself. You already know that your paper should be as excellent as can be. Include material that tackles unconventional and controversial subjects. Well-written and tightly pulled together articles and a great sense of humour combined with a clean layout make your paper the best in the land.

During your recruitment drive you should give your paper that extra little kick that shows the world you can cover the news in ways no other media can.

## DRAWING PEOPLE IN: MAKING CONTACT

You may not have the cash to buy beer for the whole campus, but you can spring for a cooler of pop to reach out to students.





## 2 Recruiting people to the paper

### Tables in main foyers

This will probably be where you get most of your new volunteers. Set up a table in heavy traffic areas on campus (some schools insist on scheduling table times, so check in advance). Make sure at least two members of staff are there at all times. Prepare sign-up sheets with your paper's logo on them and have flyers and giveaways at the ready.

### Paying visits

Don't wait for students to knock on your door asking to help. Recruitment plans must include efforts to leave your office shelter and meet people.

Make plans to attend club meetings, classes and social events on campus. If students meet staff members they will be more inclined to come to your office.

Ask permission in advance from the professor, club leadership or event organizers. When you get up to speak, be brief. Tell students about your recruitment campaign. Ask them to put recruitment posters on their wall and leave your name and number with everyone. Allow people to grill you about the paper. In other words, sell your soul. It works.

The table should be tended by various staff people who will hand out copies of your paper, answer questions and take the names of volunteers.

Don't just set up tables in areas of campus familiar to you. Hit the cafeteria entrances, the music building, the computer lab corridors (a great way to pick up graphic artists). Target your signs and information to these students and target their distribution appropriately. Some papers have a big blast at the be-

ginning of the year and invite the whole school. Offer free goodies and take down people's names and numbers.

You might also combine a recruitment information meeting with an open-house party — tell all your new recruits that after the recruitment meeting, there's going to be a pub crawl or a pizza party, whatever you have the energy and money to do. Potential writers can get all the vital information they need and meet the paper's staff in an informal setting all at the same time.

### Promotional Items

Make up some posters and t-shirt designs and plaster the campus with your material. It might be a good idea to call other papers and get some ideas. Be careful with these types of projects, though. Bad designs or lame slogans can make things worse.

Produce a big banner that you can drag around to rallies, recruitment drives, and campus parties. Make it funky.

Sell the T-shirts at cost — don't try to make money. The idea is to increase public awareness and the profile of your product. If people think you're trying to make a buck off of them they won't like it.

Forget flyers and pamphlets that are just going to get thrown in the garbage immediately after you've handed them to someone. Stand on corners and hand out copies of the paper. Which would you rather read: a flyer about your student newspaper, or the paper itself?

It's also a good idea to order promotional items in the summertime so that you have them ready for fall recruitment. They last much longer than post-

ers, and any leftovers you have can be used as prizes at staff meetings. People will collect anything as long as it's free. There's also a greater chance that a new student will come to your first staff meeting if they get something free when they sign up.

### House ads

Advertise to potential new recruits in your paper. Make the ads flashy and don't be afraid to make them big. Don't wait until the last minute and use house ads as filler. Sloppy house ads could deter prospective staffers. Get a person/group of people to make the ads well in advance. Keep them on file and use them regularly. Some house ad rules:

- 1• Always include your paper name, number, and/or email address.
- 2• Have specific ads prepared for different sections (news, arts) and notices of upcoming meetings (staff, special issues).
- 3• Always use a graphic and eye-catching type.
- 4• Use a consistent recruitment slogan for a whole campaign — “Be heard, not herded”, “Write for the Student Paper... before it writes about you!”, “Disorient yourself”. Make them all-inclusive, positive, unusual.
- 5• Use specific slogans to reach different campus constituencies — “Take pride in the power of the press”, “The problem with women in the press is: There aren't enough of us”, “This is an ethnically diverse campus. The student press is our voice. Come write.”
- 6• Run house ads advertising upcoming special supplements well in



## 3 Recruiting people to the paper

advance. These ads should both solicit material from new writers and inform readers about the issue.

7• Make house ads BIG. Some papers run full page recruitment ads.

8• Turn house ads into posters and plaster them around campus.

9• House ads should welcome new writers, not intimidate them. Avoid inside jokes and heavy ideology.

10• Use house ads to inform potential volunteers about conferences or special training seminars organized by the paper.

### Events

Sponsor public forums, debates and concerts. It's better if these events relate to the paper in some way, but it's not necessary. Make staff members a visible part of these events and plug your recruitment efforts. People interested in the issues you address will show up and maybe stick around to do some work of their own.

### Raids

There are probably dozens of other activities happening around campus. Radio stations, theatre groups, bands and speeches are all worth observing (or reporting on). Meet the people involved. As you spot bright, talented people, woo them to the paper. Suggest they write something related to the activity you met them doing, or (better yet), an interest they've told you about that isn't being satisfied by the current group.

### Cooperative projects

Another good way to snag talented people is to work together to spon-

sor an event or put out a supplement. The people who enjoy working with the paper on this project may be willing to come around again.

Some papers also appoint issues coordinators to help with recruitment. Women's, racial, gay/lesbian's and poor people's coordinators help to develop material for special supplements, regular issues, or to build ties with their respective communities. They also help recruit new staff members to the paper. Some students might feel more comfortable approaching them than they do the editor or other staff members.

This doesn't work at all papers, mostly due to a lack of resources. But it is something you might consider.

### KEEPING STAFF

Recruiting never stops. The key to successful recruitment lies not in getting people in the door so much as keeping them there.

Everyone knows the pattern: it's September and there's a flood of interested students at your door. Everyone wants to know something about your paper. By mid-October, though, the onslaught of volunteers dwindles down to a handful of keeners. Some students just crack under the academic pressure, but others left for reasons specific to the working environment at your newspaper.

One of the biggest reason students stop coming back to the newspaper is that they didn't feel like they were useful. This is often the result of too little information, staff meetings that don't address key issues, overbearing senior staffers or poor organization.

When a student walks into your office, you should go out of your way to make them feel important. Make everything easily accessible, well-organized and alienation-free.

### Provide access to information

Try signs on the wall outlining production procedures. Have work assignments such as developing graphics, taking photos, designing house ads and writing articles set aside for first-time volunteers. You don't want someone to feel like a burden because you have to train them. Have an office manual handy that outlines the history, styles and procedures of the paper. Make it easy for a student to tap into the press.

### Be well-organized

Don't keep a messy office. Volunteers don't want to spend hours searching for a file photo or the phone book. First impressions count. The office doesn't have to be spotless but it shouldn't be a mess.

•[See: Ch 10. Setting up the office, Filing]

### Don't keep someone waiting around

It might help to have a volunteer coordinator who can get feedback from recruits on paper structure and content from day one. It's a good way to show a person that you care about their thoughts on the paper.

### Work intensely with new writer

For their first couple of articles spend time showing them how to improve. Do the first few edits together, pointing out their common errors and ways to improve. Help them develop questions for their first interviews. Keep the atmosphere light, and go out for pizza afterwards. Do this and you'll



## 4 Recruiting people to the paper

quickly develop a pool of reliable writers.

### Keep staff meetings short

Most students can't afford to spend hours and hours at staff meetings. It's important not to stifle debate but if the same people are repeating the same point over and over again, you could be stifling participation.

Not everyone can devote their life to the paper. Allow people to participate as much or as little as they wish. This, in turn, promotes a variety of contributors.

### Avoid cliques

It's bound to happen, but since people naturally split off into little groups of three or four people they get along with well, it can look exclusionary to newcomers. Sometimes just knowing about them and talking about it can be the greatest weapon against cliques.

Be aware of your office atmosphere. Cliques play a large part of this, but so do a number of other factors. Some people are not aggressive enough to compete with fiery egos, other's can't work in an environment that feels like a jazz lounge.

Problems with office atmosphere are usually more complex than that. Who talks the most? Who writes news on your paper, who writes sports? Do you have a diverse staff (both ethnically and otherwise)? Do you notice people who are regularly disengaged from others during layout or at staff meetings? Do you have lots of news writers, but nobody who stays for the production night? When you answer these questions, you might notice some patterns emerging in your office culture.

Hold a staff meeting to discuss changes.

Sometimes bringing in a third, neutral party to talk to your staff and share ideas can help. Try a popular ex-editor, a friendly CUP staff person, or someone who's just experienced in group process (for example, someone from a conflict resolution or popular education group.) Sometimes it might be as easy as acting like a leader and bringing other people into the fold, making them more comfortable with the office environment and indicating to others that this indicates a change in the culture.

### Think about financial aid

There is a real need for honoraria if positions are to be fully accessible. Some students will opt out of a position at the paper because they simply won't be able to afford investing their time there instead of a part time job.

Smaller papers usually can't afford the money or the perks (free dinners, events, etc.). Government grants might help some papers provide honoraria. You should also see if your school provides work study opportunities. It works like a bursary for students, but the school pays for someone to work a job at your paper. For more information, contact papers that have successful grant systems already set up.

•[See: Ch 11. Fundraising]

## IN THE END

Ultimately, recruitment is hard work and a great responsibility. Aside from the fact that a wide variety of student interests will improve the quality of your paper, it is your responsibility to represent those interests. The more people you have with different opinions and opposing political stances, the better

you'll be living up to the axiom of free and equitable journalism everywhere. With your recruitment drive, you'll not only say it, you'll begin to think it and preach it too. ◀



# Giving seminars

BY **DONNE FLANAGAN**

- ▶ Confucius said: “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.”

The more your audience participates in the process of a seminar, the more they are likely to retain and use that information in the future. This means the content and delivery of a seminar should both be creative and are of equal importance. But creativity in education is something fairly alien to most university and college students.

Central to any successful seminar is the development of an activity, or several short activities, that demonstrate some of the issues being dealt with.

A common activity for a news writing seminar is for the facilitator to write up notes from a fictitious news story, or take the notes of a story the paper has recently written, and distribute them among working groups of three or four people.

Each group will come up with their own stories using the notes, discarding others and assemble them in an or-

der they prefer. After this is done, with a timeline set for completion of the task, each version can be read aloud and compared with the others.

Obvious gaffes, interesting problems, and brilliant solutions invariably arise out of this process.

This basic procedure can be applied and adapted to any topic. New angles, ideas, activities, and extra information can be plugged in wherever you see fit.

The best thing about facilitating a seminar is that you get to teach people about an area in which you are the expert — revisiting and funneling all of your accrued knowledge into participants' eager brains.

Even if you're not an expert, information and ideas that pop out of each seminar are always enlightening. It is guaranteed you will learn something new about your subject, and about seminars, with each presentation.

### Make sure you:

- Keep lecturing to a minimum. Outline points to be dealt with in the semi-

nar at the beginning. Consult with the assembled seminar participants about the issues in the topic they would like to deal with.

- Break down the subject matter into short, digestible chunks. If a subject has too many chunks, it is likely that the seminar topic is too broad. A simple way to break down a seminar entitled “The News Story” would be something like: the idea, the lede, the guts, transitions, the quote, order of information, the ending.

- Always set time limits for each activity, lecture, and break. It's best to define these at the beginning, with an agenda written on a board, flip-chart, or handout.

- Give your seminar a quick litmus test before you run with it. Ask yourself: “Would this interest me?” If not, not many other people are likely to be interested.

- When you go back to the drawing board, remember to do your best to inject creativity. A little theatre, for example, rarely hurts in a seminar. Take a small group of the paper's staff before-

## Tips for designing an effective training session

- 1• Prepare and state the PPPR (Purpose, Profit, Procedure, Roles).
- 2• Be prepared and believe in your material. If you don't believe it, then why would someone want to learn from you? At the end of the session participants will be able to do what?
- 3• Ensure everyone speaks in the first 15 minutes. People are more engaged in the material if they are actively speaking early on.
- 4• Relate the material to the larger goal/need of the group. Being able to relate the material to the objectives of the participants.
- 5• Encourage and structure time for questions. Allow people to clarify and assess the material.
- 6• Use a variety of instruction methods. Roleplay, lecturettes, discussion, handouts, analysis, etc.
- 7• Contextualize the material. Understand the audience and put the material in a context that they can understand and relate to.
- 8• Be observant of reactions. Watch the group for signs of confusion, disinterest, or questions.
- 9• Have a few back-up plans. Keep ideas for instructions in case time goes shorter or media requirements are not available.
- 10• Be yourself. Bring yourself to everything, including examples and style.



## 2 Giving seminars

hand and conspire with them to act out roles to illustrate a point or to purposefully heckle you at key times. Take it even further and have the actors play as participants in an unfolding hot campus news story, then have the rest of the participants interview the actors who create the story as they go along with only basic information being agreed upon beforehand. Then have the participants write the story.

- Always throw some red herrings into the mix. It's a good way to see if anyone is awake.
- At least try to look like you're interested in the seminar, too. If you're not animated and interesting, why would anyone think for a moment the information you're offering might be?
- Remember that the seminar participants aren't idiots, so don't treat them like they are. With respect offered may come respect in return.
- Be creative and organized.

like kindergarteners.

Panels have a moderator and focus on discussion. Panels are great when people have varied and extensive opinions on the topic at hand. The moderator need not even know much about the subject, but it's good if they know enough to curtail the one person who always wants to talk too much.

Planning seminars and panel discussions for your paper's staff can be a fun and entertaining way to make everyone feel more involved, while learning more about their craft. Use them wisely and efficiently early in the semesters, before people get too busy, and you'll notice the change in the quality of the paper almost immediately. ◀

*Donne Flanagan was Prairie region fieldworker for CUP in 1988, and held too many titles to list at the Manitoban (University of Manitoba) and Fulcrum (University of Ottawa) in the mid-eighties.*

### LECTURE IN MODERATION

Lectures are boring and we sit through them all day in class. They're best when the speaker is starting with all of the information and the crowd has little idea of what's going on. This is not always the case, though.

Seminars use expertise in a different way: seminars are hands-on, using projects or examples to facilitate learning — but you're still learning what the facilitator wants. This is best for very technical topics, and it is often good for intermediate crowds who aren't likely to be bored or complain that they feel



# Dealing with difficult staff

BY CHRISTIE ADAMS

- ▶ Every paper has the writer who has yet to make a deadline but constantly begs for another chance, the editor who thinks your paper is a dating service and hits on everything alive, and the prima donna who can't bear to have their marvellous creations touched, demanding to see each round of edits. We all know the staffer who has yet to do much at the paper but has informed all of his friends to use the photocopier whenever they please.

As a purveyor of freedom of speech, student papers, more than anybody else, should have all kinds of personality types on staff. But no paper can function properly if someone on staff is causing enough of a disruption to seriously damage the way a paper operates.

## FIRST THINGS FIRST

While it's most important to be as democratic as possible, keep in mind that every democracy still has people to ensure the laws of the land are properly carried out. At a student paper, those people are the editors.

The editors of the paper are there to select the best articles for publication and to work with writers to improve their writing as much as possible. They aren't there to print every article that they receive or to print something as they receive it. You're doing your paper a disservice if you do a weak editing job on a piece just because you don't want to hurt a writer's feelings. This kind of work cheapens the paper as a whole and makes you look like a bad editor. In the end, it's damaging to the writer

— how can they excel if weak writing habits aren't corrected?

## WITH FREEDOM COMES RESPONSIBILITY

Let new writers know right away that editing is part of your job and that by the time it's published, their piece probably won't look the same as it did when they submitted it. Undoubtedly, at this point you'll have some writers say, "But those are my words and my thoughts! You're just going to change them?" Stick to your proverbial guns at this point, even if you're worried about losing a new writer. Most volunteers will get over their disappointment soon. Those who don't and walk away from the paper probably weren't worth the trouble.

The best way to kill two birds with one stone is to have your writer sit down with you while you edit a piece. Your writer will see that your intent isn't to ruthlessly mangle all their hard work. Explain what you're changing and why. So that the next time the writer can make those changes as they write.

## STOP THE FREELoadERS

The student body will eventually discover your free Internet connection, phone, fax machine, fridge and photocopier. While you might not like kicking strangers out of your office when you catch them making 50 copies of their psych presentation notes, it's good to remember that it just isn't in your budget to provide free services to everyone in your building.

When you do catch a stranger checking Facebook or MySpace on your news-

room computer, tell them you're sorry nobody on staff has introduced themselves yet, hand them a volunteer package and launch into your new-writer-speech. Get all the editors to shake hands with them and give them an assignment to do. Either you'll have a new writer or they'll be so embarrassed they'll make excuses and leave.

If you don't feel like being that passive aggressive, just tell them equipment is for contributors only. Finish it off by saying they're more than welcome to join the paper. You may just find a new staff member.

Trickier are the people who have done random work for you before, but are more inclined to make use of all your office's perks. It's not really easy to create a gauge for how much work someone has to do before being allowed to use everything. A good rule of thumb is that every time a writer is in the office, it's to do some sort of work — even if it's just dropping off a finished article — and therefore should be allowed to use anything in the office that day. If this starts to become a problem, though, tell the staffer that the equipment is for official paper business.

Some papers avoid this altogether by installing editors-only codes on all their computers, fax machines and copiers. This is a little like being back in high school, but if abuse of your equipment becomes a chronic problem, you might want to consider it.

## GET IT IN WRITING

It can't be stressed enough: your paper should establish a code of conduct or policy manual so all of this is in writing.



## 2 Dealing with difficult staff

If everything that goes into your paper should have a reliable source backing it up, so too should all of your paper's operating policies be supported by a reliable source.

An editing policy should be in your constitution or policy manual, as should job descriptions. If someone claims you've committed censorship by editing his or her article, you'll have something in writing to prove you've acted appropriately.

Make sure the policy also clearly states that your paper will not tolerate harassment of any kind. This might help you gracefully deal with inappropriate jokes or the person who tells every staffer that he or she wants to see them in shorts.

When your constitution and policies are updated, make sure these things are in them.

### DEALING WITH ISSUES

Despite your best efforts to be proactive, problems will develop. People deserve a chance to improve so sit down, alone, and let them know your concerns. Have specific examples ready and don't be vague. Don't blame the problem on other staff members — let the writer know that you're the one who's concerned.

This should hopefully bring him or her around, but you may need to talk to someone a few times. On the second warning, it should be made clear that action will have to be taken if the problem continues. Document all warnings, and put any serious concerns on paper. Your policy should have this outlined as well.

### WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS

If, after repeated talks and warnings, you have a staff member who still takes equipment without permission, continues to raise hell if any words are changed in their stories or egregiously misses deadlines, you may have to consider removing them from the paper altogether.

Different provinces, newspapers and universities have different policies on when and how staff members may be let go. Note that volunteers are covered by many of these policies. Before firing anyone, check your policy manual and/or constitution, and any applicable student union (for non-autonomous papers), university and provincial labour policies.

•[See: Ch 11. Hiring and firing]

The overarching theme of most of these, however, is that employers should be clear, precise and firm in attempts to improve staff behaviour. Each of these should be documented. While it is a lot of effort at the time, it is fairer for the staff member involved and all other staff members. ◀



# Open forums: letters, op/eds, events

BY JAMES MACKINNON

- ▶ People love to stand on their soapboxes. This probably explains the emergence of both politics and media.

It also means a paper without sections open to the public is doing something seriously wrong. A letters column, for example, isn't just the showroom for ignorance that bitter editors think it is. A letters column serves many purposes, and provides valuable information.

People that never read articles on tuition hikes, civil disobedience, or even two-headed dogs, will read letters on the same subject because letters come from other readers and are more unpredictable and personal. Letters are usually charged with emotion — fear and loathing in one form or another — which lends greater dynamism to a paper as a whole.

Letters are also reflective of a newspaper's success. Is the paper interesting and challenging to the intellect? Is it pissing off too many people? Too few? The information pouring into the paper through the letters section should be able to give an open-minded journalist pause at least a few times a year.

## LETTERS POLICIES

Running a letters column is easy. The best editors hold only one hard and fast rule over letters — they must be legal (read: non-libelous) because the newspaper holds legal responsibility for everything printed.

Aside from the obvious, there are a few additional guidelines to keep in mind. Some papers refuse to publish letters

they find sexist, racist, homophobic, classist or discriminatory in any way. Others run such letters with a reply or commentary to indicate to readers that they are printing the letter in question in order to indicate that bigoted attitudes persist in their community. A hardy few print everything they receive and let readers make their own judgment.

Letters writers should sign their letters and include their phone number, even when you agree to print them anonymously. A word limit should be imposed to keep letters interesting and to make sure there's space for everyone. Letters can be edited for content, length and clarity. This should be indicated publicly.

Editing letters should not change the nature of the letter. It's usually best to call the writer if any major changes are going to be made. Headlines for letters should be simple and expressive of the content. Try and run them in the order received or organized thematically.

Letter wars (when two people from opposing sides decide to fight their battles through the pages of your paper) sometimes require different treatment. Hot ones are fine, but when a war goes on too long, it may be time to contact the opposing sides and explain, in polite terms, that their argument might have become more personal than is appropriate for the public sphere.

Finally, there are cases where replying to a letter in print may be appropriate, but these are few and far between. The fact that someone is a drooling idiot does not justify an editorial reply. Not only do letter writers hate to be broadsided without a chance for immediate

response, but other readers often find editorial replies masturbatory and irritating.

An effective policy practiced in several student papers is to allow replies only when the letter-writer has made an error of fact which should be corrected lest it misguide the readers. The reply should be brief, backed-up and non-rhetorical. Often a staff plebiscite or editorial approval is a good retaining wall against self-indulgent 'eds. notes.'

Print a message regularly in the paper encouraging student letters and outlining the requirements. As they come in, write down the writer's name, date submitted, phone number, whether the letter has been typed into the computer and by whom, letter topic and other relevant info, on a special copy list just for letters.

This not only helps keep letters from being lost or printed out of order, but if the names and phone numbers of letter writers' are kept on file, the paper soon develops a list of the more outspoken and concerned students on campus. These people can be telephoned and encouraged to join the paper, bring their complaints to a staff meeting, help out in a crisis, or be asked to write opinion pieces on a slow week.

## OPINE, IF YOU DARE

Because opinion pieces are similar to letters they often run on the same page or a facing page. Some papers accept opinion pieces from virtually anyone. Some solicit pieces directly from specific people.

Some papers only accept opinion piec-



## 2 Open forums: letters, op/eds, events



es in the rarest of circumstances. Op\ ed is sometimes dangerously close to ignorant sensationalism. The best candidates for such work are people whose work, research or life experience lends them a high degree of automatic credibility on the subject.

Either way, develop a clear set of guidelines for accepting op/eds. Don't play favourites. The whole point of allowing an op/ed section is to let opinions other than the newspaper staff's into the paper. Censoring people you disagree with is a way of manipulating the reader. All it really demonstrates is that you don't have any faith in your own convictions.

### EVENT LISTINGS

Some material needs to be passed off to the community billboard or events listings. A reasonable deadline for submissions to each section should be established and made known. Otherwise, many disappointed people will accuse staffers of bias or censorship.

It is a good idea to have a staffer whose job is handling the input. That way, when peeved readers come in screaming that the notice they wanted run about their lost cat failed to materialize, there'll be a person to point to.

You should have policies on whether you'll accept for-profit notices here (don't they belong in the classifieds?), how far in advance you'll print notices, and (as in all these sections) whether you'll print non-student material.

Again, material should be concise and typed. Overly wordy bits should be snipped by cruel editors. If you have a lot of contributors arguing that their

promotional pieces need to be much longer, you might consider the solution some papers have implemented — a “Highlights” feature, where one or two special events are featured in a couple of paragraphs alongside the regular events. ◀

*James MacKinnon is a former editor of the Martlet (University of Victoria).*



# Promoting your paper

BY SIMON ROTHEISLER

- ▶ I was hired in 2005 as the managing editor for the Cap Courier. That meant promotion, recruitment and lapdog for the big boss. At the time, the paper was about to boost its circulation from 2,000 every two weeks to 2,500 a week. For a campus of 8,000 students, that meant getting one copy into the hands of one in three students.

Students are not easily entertained. Aside from having to cater to each sub group of stereotypical students (nerds, jocks, preppies, hippies, angry politicals, etc.), I also had to deal with the general underlying qualities that make students so special: the rainbow of apathy, cynicism, intelligence, insecurity, and tiny attention spans. Of course, not all students maintain those traits, but chances are that the ones who don't read your paper maintains something of the melange.

First of all, you have to like the product you're selling. I was fairly devoted to our little college paper and believed that every student would enjoy reading it (you have to want to believe that kind of thing, because it's usually never true). If you want to do good business, you're going to have to be selling some high-grade material, otherwise you won't get any repeated sales.

To successfully promote your paper, you have to know that a student who reads it once will likely read it again, hopefully the next week.

It may go without saying, but your image is tied to how people see your paper. It's insanely easy for a student to dismiss your paper as trashy, too serious, pretentious, boring, or stupid based

on one article. In order to make people think they will enjoy reading your paper, you have to be charismatic, smart and not condescending

Also, you can never act as though you take yourself too seriously, because chances are that students barely take you seriously at all. Ad campaigns have to be flashy but not gaudy. Never underestimate the intelligence of a student. Always try to act as though you're letting the student in on some inside joke or idea that only they understand. It sounds complicated, and it is, just remember that if something seems clichéd, old, or too trendy, students will pick up on that right away.

Get them intrigued, get them curious, get them to feel special. For the Cap Courier, a lot of our material didn't even refer to the paper, it just had our logo and some unique concept or idea.

You have to recognize that a significant chunk of the student body doesn't read the paper because it simply never occurred to them to do so. There will even be students who didn't know that there was a student paper. This is your target audience. If you can get these students to give your publication a chance, you're in.

So how do you get people to pick it up? Here is a list of tactics:

## Sticker campaign.

You can buy cheap sheets of stickers from Staples Business Depot. Then your layout person can align them on a file and put the sheets through the printer. Make sure that the message on your sticker is simple, clear, and interesting. Then start printing off sheets and vandalizing the halls.

## Word of mouth

This one's obvious. Tell everyone who writes for the paper to tell everyone they know to read the paper. Use their ego's desire for publicity to entice them to plug, plug, plug.

## Classroom presentations

This can be a little scary, but it always works like a charm. Arrange with some teachers to give you five minutes of classroom time to tell the students that the paper is always looking for new writers, and then list off some of the more interesting stories to look out for. Even if nobody chooses to write for you, at least they have it in their heads that there is a school paper. Get your most charismatic employees on this one and then students have a face to attach to the paper.

## Buttoneering

Get, or rent, a button maker and print off a bunch of little black and white designs. Add a little highlighted color and then start handing them out. If they are nice, you can get many, many people to wear them. They spur many "Oh nice button. What's it for?" conversations.

## My Space / Facebook

These sites are all about status, self promotion, and narcissism. That is why it is perfect to use to seek people out and make them your "friends" for promotional purposes. Using MySpace or Facebook has almost become a cliché for promoting musicians, and the same can work for your paper. Just add a little art, include a link to your paper's website, throw in some pullquotes and the names of some writers, artists and staff. Top it off with a clever mission statement and start collecting friends like they were Pogs.



## 2 Promoting your paper

### Distribution

Physically handing the papers to students always seems to work. We took a cue from 24 and Dose and started handing out papers to students lined up at the bus stop. It's easy to get rid of more than 100 papers in an hour. Nobody wants to seem rude, so they instinctively reach for them and since they already have time to kill, they feel that they might as well read through it. If they like it, hopefully they will continue to read it on the bus ride home. Set up a schedule for employees to rotate this job and then each person doing it once a month.

Look into getting off-campus distribution. Most coffee shops and bars are open to having a paper delivered there, especially when you lay the "youth produced" card. Then, as more people become aware of your paper, you can list the venues in the paper and use it to hook up more advertisements and expect more hits on your paper's website.

You can also deliver your paper to other campuses. The local papers there might not be too keen on the idea, but forget about them. Remember, you have a better product than they do (that might not be true, but it's kind of thing you should believe anyway). Because of the small number of papers you'll be delivering there, you can pretty much assume that all the papers will get picked up. If possible, bring back some of the competition's papers to leave around your campus.

Try not to go buck wild on off-campus distribution. Keep most of the copies focused on your students and on their campus. Remember that your prime obligation is to the stockholders who are forced to pay your bills.

### Sensationalism

This one is very tricky. Although we did publish one issue a couple years back that had cleavage on the cover and was gone in a flash. Sex is usually the lowest common denominator to attract a reader's attention. Not that you shouldn't cover sexual issues in the paper, but keep in mind that many students will see through it. True sensationalism should be done by being unique; taking an original idea and blowing it up to attract attention.

Almost anything can be sensationalized, just act as though the issue at hand was the most exciting, crazy, intriguing subject ever. This can be done through design, clever headlines, and flashy pulldquotes. It works best if you understand your target audience, and understand what they think they want most.

Careful though. Although every paper is a little guilty of this sin, too much hype can always disappoint a reader with high expectations. Too much catering to the masses means you are on your way to working for Access Hollywood.

### Events

These work best if you have a committed staff who are willing to risk a little self-respect. We put on a couple of events with a clever spin to boost the name of the Courier. Taking pictures with Santa Claus and a gorilla (Christmas versus evolution) and a campus stalker (who shouted about how much he hated the paper) were cool manufactured events.

If you know people in bands, you can always organize a show and post notices in the paper and around campus. Events are great because they help to create a culture on campus. Students will take notice if they think that there

are events singled out for them.

The idea behind all of this is to make students think of your paper when they think of your school. If you are active on campus, promoting, researching, making students laugh and take notice, then they will feel as though they belong to something. Some kind of special club where your paper is the newsletter. And really, that's what it is. They just might not know it yet. ◀

*Simon Rotheisler was EIC of the Cap Courier in 2006-07, and CUP 69 national conference coordinator.*



# Avoiding burnout

BY LYNN MARCHILDON

- ▶ You glance around the office, your shoulders sag and your brain clouds over with dark irritation.

The letters to the editor are filling your inbox and the arts editor has just told you she can only fill one of her three pages. Exams have depleted your staff by half and the printers have already warned you they won't print the paper if you miss another deadline.

You turn back to your computer and dream about the day when the paper, and all of the stupid people associated with it, will be a thing of the past.

Burnout. It's not a healthy frame of mind. It stimulates an angry, unproductive view of the world and you become so negative, you feel that you might as well go home.

Chances are good that you should have taken that much-needed break days ago. As a member of a student newspaper, you're working in an environment that could transform every day into an exhausting, inescapable grind. The best way to make yourself immune to burnout disease is to get it under control at its onset.

With that in mind, here are a few ways to get burnout under control.

Make yourself dispensable. This shouldn't be too difficult if your paper is democratically run and you've learned to share your skills and responsibilities so others can take over in your absence. When you take breaks try to get some exercise (even if it's just a little bit). Don't make it painful or a chore. An easy walk around the block is often enough.

Learn not to feel guilty when you take some time off, providing you've kept up with your commitments. Don't make a virtue of workaholism. This is especially hard for student paper people who have a strange habit of believing they can fuel a string of 16-hour days with a steady intake of Red Bull and chocolate bars and somehow never get tired.

On that note, don't turn every night at the paper into an endurance competition either. A paper's staff can subconsciously battle to see who can work the longest and the latest. When you sense this happening, grow up and go home.

Be healthy. While it's tempting when you get to university to ignore all the healthy hints your parents drilled into your head, there are some parental naggings you might want to keep in mind. For example, suggestions to get enough sleep, eat well and occasionally exercise are actually good pieces of advice.

Schedule some solitary time. Working for the student press means you are usually surrounded by people from morning until midnight. Don't feel strange about being alone, or wanting to be alone. You need time to take stock of where you're at and, because life in the student press doesn't last forever, to think about where you're headed.

If you do become burned out, recognize that you're no good to anyone if you're exhausted and miserable at work. A key element of your contribution to the paper is a good attitude. If all you can contribute is sarcasm and complaints at a staff meeting, go home. Your cynicism will turn off new students who are still enthusiastic.

Finally, avoiding burnout means you'll be better able to appreciate the time you spend working for the student press. Student journalism provides most of us with a rare opportunity to set our own schedules and freely say what we want to say. For that reason, you should try to make your memories as good as possible. ◀



# Democracy in the office

- ▶ There are dozens of ways to run a student newspaper, but one of them is the collective, characterized by a concerted move toward staff democracy.

Staff democracy involves making collective decisions about the content, philosophy, operations and future of the paper. Though it can be both burdensome and painful, staff democracy means that those who do the work control the work.

While some contributors couldn't care less about how the paper is managed, many of them do. Unless they can help direct the paper, the end product is adversely affected. After all, what other reward does a student journalist earn but the right to participate fully in the paper?

Democracy means the paper is not just a business or a publication, but a social institution.

Democratic decision-making assumes people must have knowledge and background on which to base their decisions, so it is the responsibility of the senior members of the group to give newcomers background and detail on confusing issues. This improves the continuity of the paper as more information is handed down from one generation to the next.

In establishing democracy or renewing it at a paper, the staff must consider three points: who makes the decisions, what the structure is, and where the lines of communications are.

## THREE STEPS TO DEMOCRACY

One of staff democracy's first prereq-

uisites is that everyone on the paper knows how the paper operates. If the operations of the paper are a mystery, they can't realistically be expected to offer creative proposals or to make intelligent decisions.

The first thing a paper must do is create its own constitution. This sets in writing how the paper will operate through explicit policies and procedures. The constitution should be considered a living document and knowledge of it cannot be concentrated among a few people. The work that went into it, and its meaning, become moot when the staff is unaware of its existence.

In addition, the constitution must be up for review at the beginning or end of every term. Copies of the current constitution should be made available to all staff so that they can submit motions to add or remove articles. Have a neutral and knowledgeable person chair meetings, such as an old editor. This keeps your constitution in working order year after year.

### •[See: Ch 10. Maintaining proper documents]

Continuity is the second reason why it's important for everyone to have as much a knowledge of how the paper operates as possible. When only one or two people have a given skill their departure from the paper results in poor operations until new staff figure out how to do it well.

Ideally, a reporter should learn to lay out and photograph their story, a photographer should be able to write, and a designer to manage. The only way this will happen is if people actually do jobs other than their own once in a

while. This also helps break down the compartmentalization of some papers, in which news, photo, arts, and sports staff may rarely talk to each other.

Training sessions for the new editorial board are a good idea, as are seminars in September for new volunteers. At the end of each year, every editor should write a quick summary of everything they've learned, complete with any advice, suggestions, and things to avoid that they can pass along. Then put them all in a binder for the next year's editorial board to find. As the years go by, you'll have a whole volume of first hand advice from editors long gone.

These transition reports are not only good at maintaining a sense of history and continuity, but also invaluable for staff training.

Remember that knowledge is power, and if it's spread thinly, it can spell disaster. Obviously not everyone on your paper will need to know everything, but each should have access to whatever they want to know. Your paper should have its own style guide or staff manual that new staffers can use for orientation to the paper.

Staff should also be informed of the specifics: the production schedule, the editors and editorial structure, job descriptions, deadlines, elections, meeting schedules and other relevant items, including the paper's general history.

To make this information truly useful, you also need people willing to pass information along in seminars, meetings, brainstorming sessions or post mortems (group discussions to review the previous issue). The idea is to spur current debate on an issue while keep-



## 2 Democracy in the office

ing track of past information.

General staff meetings must be held on a regular basis to ensure direct input from staff into ongoing issues. They're also important to give the staff the time to meet one another and spend time learning about the paper.

### MAKING STAFF DEMOCRACY WORK

Your constitution should clearly state the criteria a volunteer must meet before they become a staff member and entitled to full staff rights. Usually a minimum number of contributions to the paper and a minimum attendance at meetings is enough. Keep a list of who is staff on a bulletin board, and be sure to let the lucky person know when they've reached staff status.

All of your most important decisions should be made at staff meetings. Beyond just voting on motions, your staff should have the chance to discuss them. Make sure that enough time is allocated in these meetings for new ideas to be presented, as well.

Hold meetings at the same time each week. Remember that meetings are open to anyone who has a stake in the paper, not just staff. This means that if you're an autonomous paper operating on a student levy, any student may attend. Only staff members, however, should be allowed to partake in official decisions.

An agenda should be prepared at least a day or two in advance of a weekly meeting. Any changes should be ready before meeting time and the necessary documentation and information to ac-

company the changes provided. For the meeting itself, an informal atmosphere usually works best, however, relaxation doesn't mean chaos. It's important to adopt a set of rules so that things get done quickly and efficiently.

Meetings are a good place for brainstorming as well as business. Deal with the motions on hand first, and then move on to new topics and future ideas. Holding a post mortem (reviewing the last newspaper) during weekly staff meetings gets the creative ball rolling. As much as possible, decisions should be made by consensus. This ensures that issues are discussed fully and, hopefully, everyone gets a chance to speak.

Sometimes it's a good idea to go around one by one until every staff member has expressed an opinion, especially if it's a difficult and important issue. Otherwise, a very slight majority may end up dictating policy to a voiceless minority when voting occurs.

However, for points of greater controversy, the rules of order found in various union or parliamentary bodies are helpful (buying a copy of Robert's Rules of Order might be a good idea.) Depending on how feisty a staff you have, you may wish to use such rules all the time.

In cases of close votes, staff members should be prepared to re-examine the issues. In the end, once a vote or consensus has been reached, every staffer is responsible for seeing that a policy or action is carried out.

### EDITORS AND ELECTIONS

Perhaps the strongest distinguishing

## Staff democracy checklist

At your paper . . .

- 1• Does the staff get to vote on all major financial and administrative decisions?
- 2• Are staff meetings well-attended and interesting?
- 3• Does staff establish its own advertising boycott list each year?
- 4• Do you have an established quorum for meetings?
- 5• Are meetings held regularly?
- 6• Is the time and place of meetings well-advertised?
- 7• Does staff get adequate information and time to make decisions?
- 8• Are minutes taken and posted for all staff to read after meetings?
- 9• Do chairs facilitate firmly and positively, keeping equitable speaker's lists when necessary?
- 10• Do non-editors sometimes get to coordinate projects and special issues?
- 11• Are new staff given information on the day-to-day operations of the paper?
- 12• Are new staff trained quickly in a variety of tasks?
- 13• Is the news department open to new ideas for coverage?
- 14• Do you have a procedure for dealing with production night disputes?
- 15• Are all editors elected?
- 16• Do you have a review process in place for staff positions?
- 17• Can the staff impeach editors?
- 18• Is participation balanced, so quieter members have a say?
- 19• Do new staff tend to stick with the paper instead of drifting off?
- 20• Are editors responsive to staff complaints and concerns?



## 3 Democracy in the office

feature of a democratic newspaper is that all of its editors are elected by, and answer directly to, staff. You should announce editorial elections well ahead of the meeting in question. A committee should be struck to create screening questions for the candidates. Where a position is uncontested, the vote should be a 'yes/no' vote.

Just as important, consider having structures in place to ensure the elected editor remains responsible to mandates from staff. An annual editorial board review, for example, gives staff a chance to review job descriptions, the editors' achievements and failures and provide constructive criticism partway through the year.

Staff members should also be able to grieve an editor for breaching staff mandates (see below), or to impeach editors if the offense is serious enough. Democracy thrives where personal feuds are kept to the sidelines. The more formal these structures are, the better.

### WHAT ABOUT PRODUCTION NIGHTS?

Regular staff meetings for policy decisions should ensure that important decisions are made when all staffers are present. On production night, however, there is no time to consult the entire staff if an important change must be made. Last minute decisions, though often unavoidable, can alienate the staff

Your paper should establish its own policy for such situations where a last-minute call needs to be made on whether to run a particular story, letter or graphic. Some papers believe these

questions should be discussed among as many people as possible. Others believe that the responsibility for making the decision should rest with one group or individual.

Other papers have emergency measures in place for production night votes, which can then be reviewed by staff.

### MENIAL TASKS

Menial tasks are only menial when the same people have to do them over and over again. Usually it's work that has to be done regularly, does not change much, and isn't very exciting. But it's usually as essential as it can be boring.

Make sure that jobs like typing correspondence, filing and putting together events calendars are done by everyone on a rotating basis. If one person is constantly stuck with these jobs, the paper will lose that person's ideas and energy. That person won't get as much out of the paper as they could and you might lose them.

### GRIEVANCES

Participatory democracy on a newspaper staff doesn't mean everyone will always be harmonious. Problems will arise in almost any setting. The structure of your paper should be prepared to deal with any problem that may divide the staff.

Your paper should have a strict policy against harassment of any kind. There should also be a firm policy against vicious gossip. When staff members become competitive these policies and procedures can help to fight the devel-

opment of an antagonistic atmosphere in the office.

Grievance procedures should be established to allow staff recourse if they believe that they've been done a disservice. Due process is important if the paper genuinely cares about volunteers who've been abused, alienated or ignored. Serious concerns should be addressed promptly and not permitted to fester.

A sexual harassment (or general grievance) committee should be formed at the beginning of the year, and be readily available to hear a complaint. Your constitution should lay guidelines for hearing a complaint and dealing with the people involved. Appropriate measures could range from reconciliation to apology to impeachment, depending on the incident.

### IN THE END

Staff democracy is a serious matter, but dealing with it is not that difficult. People appreciate the interest others show in their concerns and opinions, and enjoy the contributions they make to an organization because of it.

Staff democracy keeps a newspaper alive. ◀



# Continuity

BY CATHERINE MONK

- ▶ Everyone knows that the constant staff turnover that plagues most student organizations is one of the biggest impediments to reliable growth. While a paper might be excellent one year, there is nothing guaranteeing that it will continue to be once the current staff graduates. Luckily, there are a few basic tips that can help ease the rapid transition from one year to another.

## KNOW YOUR NEWSPAPER'S HISTORY

This is one of the most fundamental concepts in continuity. The paper has a context and a history complete with past editors, staffers, takeovers, policy changes, autonomy drives, paper seizures and news campaigns. This context makes the paper what it is now and sets its direction for the future.

Know your paper's history and communicate it to new staffers. This will:

- Reassure everyone that you are not alone and that there is a continuum from one year to the next.
- It will limit the inevitable ego-tripping that takes place when people assume the reigns of power. The paper has momentum, and will continue with or without one or two people. People who give a year or two to the paper are fodder for the large newspaper beast. It will hopefully eat you up and spit you out transformed for the better. But knowing the newspaper's history forces us to realize that the newspaper is bigger than any of us.

- It will make new staffers happy that they are a part of some kind of family. The feeling of belonging is one of the things that keeps people coming back for another year.

If you don't know your paper's history, look into the back issues, bound volumes and filing cabinets. Talk to ex-staffers, wherever you can find them. Newspaper history can even be a topic for an article on occasions like first issues of the year or anniversaries. Your university could also have more thorough archives that you can sort through and get a rough idea of how the paper has progressed. Check out past transition reports or board minutes and see what the big internal arguments were.

## CREATING POTENTIAL SUCCESSORS

For the paper to continue one year to the next, it needs new genes: new staff, new editors, new bodies. These new bodies need to be aware that one day, they too could be senior staff, editorial collective members, or editors. They need to know they have the potential to let their ideas attach themselves to the paper. Communicate what people do on the paper, and who does it, so that ambition breeds and their attachment to the paper strengthens.

## SNAGGING SUCCESSORS

Outgoing editors and staffers should be on the lookout for people who have the talent and the drive to carry on in their place. Pay special attention to these people. Take them into your confidence and let them know that their work is appreciated.

This can go hand in hand with training as you point out small areas of improvement along with compliments on areas of strength. Encourage other staff members to be on the lookout for strong contributors who might also be encouraged to move up the ladder.

## STAFF ELECTIONS

This is the link that holds the successive years together. Continuity of the paper rests in well-held and democratic elections and well-run hiring procedures. Talk about these events and make sure everyone understands how they work.

Each editorial posting should include a job description. They provide candidates with an idea of what is expected. Misconceptions here will have a negative impact on the collective. Be clear, up front and passionate about what is happening.

## COMING TOGETHER

With the elections over, new editors and outgoing editors should get together and talk about what problems they faced or foresee. Talk about what was discussed at the previous meeting of that type and go over the minutes from that meeting if there are any. How far back can you go? Can you develop some kind of idea of the flow of ideas across multiple years?

Election dates should be timed so that one or two issues of the paper can be done with new staff in place, but with old editors on hand to help out.

Old hacks should introduce the incoming staff to people they had to deal with





## 2 Continuity

on a professional level: business managers, printing contacts, supplies personnel, secretaries, advertising people, runners and bands that played at paper parties.

Old editors should write transition reports on what they did during their last year and how they did it. This can be a part of a bigger training manual, or an informal contact list and cheat sheet for new editors. Outgoing staffers should really exhaust themselves on this, so they aren't harassed late at night with questions. Write down everything you can think of, including how to turn on the computers and replacing ink ribbons, if you think there's the slightest chance the new staff doesn't know it.

### THE NEW COLLECTIVE

This new staff should be full of potential and ideas for a new year of publication. Outgoing people can often help distill new ideas into policy by asking the incoming types what they plan to do, and how they plan to do it.

Ask questions like: What are you going to do differently? What do you want the paper to be this year? Are you going to add another edition, change the design, print more pages, get a new ad-rep, get an ad-rep? How do you apply for grant money? How did you sell ads for summer publication? Where are the budgets kept, and how do you read one?" Through this simple ritual, outgoing staff members can force new staffers to think about making an outline for what they hope to achieve before they, too, are out the door.

Procrastination on tough issues is the plague of all student organizations, but

thinking about them early will make things smoother. New collective types should grab as much as they can before the old-timers disappear.

### THE (NEW) FIRST ISSUE

When a new staff and editorial collective produce their first issue of the year, they should be proud even if it doesn't look fantastic yet.

Have a party on the first publication day with old and new staff members. It will inspire a new generation of campus journalism. Continue to have parties, and continue to invite paper alumni. They will bring even older alumni, and soon it will be like a family gathering. Ask questions, share stories.

People are your family, your support network and your living library. Use them in whatever way seems appropriate to your purposes. After the parties, the new collective could even invite old hacks to rip apart the first issue, if they haven't already done so. But then, party more. Make more staffers, more editors — more fodder for the big newspaper beastie. ◀

*Catherine Monk was a Ubysses (University of British Columbia) editor in 1988-89.*



# Boards and bylaws

## THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- ▶ The board of directors is at the top of the hierarchy of the corporation which is your autonomous newspaper. Directors generally ratify the editors elected by the staff, they are responsible for upholding the by-laws of the corporation and they are the final authority in the complaints process. They can also suspend editors and direct the paper to print apologies and/or retractions in the event of libel.

The board of directors exists to ensure that the levy paid by students is administered responsibly and that the editorial integrity of the paper remains intact. They will approve and perhaps change the budget drawn up by the staff, and they'll set a limit on the size of expenditures the staff can make without board approval.

Although your paper may boast of freedom from editorial control from external forces, beware the board of directors. On occasion people who disagree with the views of the newspaper staff see a position on the board as an opportunity to flex some muscle. If the staff isn't familiar with the powers of the board, there's a possibility that they could succeed.

Try to fill the student positions on the board with reasonable people who know the meaning of editorial autonomy. Don't go for puppets — the paper isn't above criticism and you'll need thoughtful people to speak up when the time comes.

Encourage staff members to take an interest in the board. For the potential editors among themselves, it is an excellent way to familiarize them with

the business and institutional side of the operation. It also makes it easier for staff reps to the board, since it means all the information doesn't have to flow from them.

At a staff meeting prior to a board meeting, staff members should discuss issues they would like presented to the directors. Following every board meeting, the staff should be briefed on the business that transpired.

If things get out of control and directors try to debate editorial issues that have nothing to do with the board (the paper's stand on the death penalty, for example), tell them you are willing to discuss it, but not within the confines of a board meeting. Do not concede on this point.

Choose the composition of the board carefully. If you are negotiating autonomy, including one councilor may be necessary, though perhaps in a non-voting capacity. The board should include representatives of the newspaper staff, but do not stack the board with them. That strips the board of the objectivity and independence it needs to fulfill its duties. It also creates the appearance, if not the fact, of a conflict of interest, which erodes an autonomous newspaper's credibility.

Some opt to have the board consist of elected students at large. You may also want to include appointed community members on staggered two or three year terms to bring continuity. Possible choices include a professor, a professional journalist from the community or a member of the campus staff. The editor-in-chief and the business manager of the paper also attend board meetings to provide updates on their

respective responsibilities.

The BoD should be forbidden in the by-laws from interfering with editorial content (except in the case of libel), but it must still have the right to sack the editor-in-chief if the staff does not have the power of impeachment. The EiC is so powerful in some newspapers that the board offers the only counterweight. The staff may one day be grateful for the board's power.

The board's directors must legally include a chairperson, treasurer and secretary. Other positions are up to you.

## THE PUBLISHING BOARD OR EDITORIAL BOARD

A publishing board provides a buffer between the paper and Council (non-autonomous papers) or the BoD (autonomous papers) while keeping financial administration under council or the BoD.

Publishing, or editorial, boards allow editorial direction to be discussed among the editors of the paper. In many cases, this is where special events are planned, editorials discussed and coverage ideas proposed before they are brought to the rest of the staff. These boards meet with varying frequency depending on the publication. Some papers choose to have them meet weekly to plan each issue while others have them meet monthly for long-term planning and summarizing rather than issue-by-issue work.

## BY-LAWS

All corporations must have by-laws,



## 2 Boards and bylaws

however brief. They are summarized on its letters patent. The by-laws say how the corporation is run. Legally, they must state at least three things: the corporation's name, location of head office, and purpose. Other things they can include, in the case of student newspapers, would be appointment, composition and responsibilities of the board of directors, definition of member of the corporation and staff member, explanation of staff's powers, process of calling annual and special general meetings, and a by-law amending formula.

Some papers have expanded their by-laws to include hiring and firing procedures, electoral and referendum procedures, and progressive discipline policies. ◀

•[See: Ch 10. Maintaining proper documents]

# When bad things happen to good papers



BY JOHN MONTESANO

- ▶ Student papers don't need to look for trouble. Rest assured that in your newspaper's sordid past, trouble has found you.

Threats to pull paper funding, damaged equipment, space re-allocation, pulled issues off the stand, physical assault and lawsuits have all reared their ugly heads against student publications.

Limited resources and experience make student journalists ideal targets. It is imperative that staff members learn to anticipate disaster. A good newspaper staff won't let a disaster occur. It's one thing to be the victim of a nasty anti-paper campaign and another to be sloppy and unprepared. Sadly, in many cases, the two go hand-in-hand.

The more irrational, out-of-control and inconsistent your approach to newspaper production, the more likely it is that you'll come under attack. An organized, democratic and informed staff will deter challengers. The harder you work, the more work it should take to get in your way.

This is not to deter papers from taking risks or stirring things up. Instead, it should help you anticipate the attacks papers most commonly face.

This list should help you deal with some of the crises you might face.

## Never panic

Most people are just venting frustration when they attack your paper. Chances are that if you let them say their piece, they'll then get on with their lives. Don't respond in an overly emotional or irrational manner. Don't

waste your energy. Listen carefully to all their charges and note any hints of a plan of action against you. Also, listen for any legitimate complaints. If they have a legitimate point, you should follow up on it.

## Do your homework

Spend some time looking through old bound volumes and talk to former editors. Certain campus groups will have a history of conflict with the student press. Find out which groups your paper has clashed with in the past and see where it went and what the issues were.

## Build contacts

Never stop building contacts and a support network throughout your community. Sympathetic students, professors, clubs, student government members and university staff should be sought out and informed about any serious threat to your paper.

## Don't respond negatively

Never respond to attacks in a petty or personal way. If people are taking personal shots at you, don't lower yourself to their standards. Take a deep breath. Some student journalists exhaust more energy despising people than investigating and writing about them.

Break that nasty habit of wasting all your time battling with your student council/government. Most council/paper fights are stupid. If papers and councils have nothing better to do than spend their time fighting with one another, then they should both pack it in. Get away from the evil council/good paper mentality. A much healthier one is: not that important council/not that important paper. Keep things in perspective.

Remember that a disorganized and non-communicative staff is also more open to external attacks. Need some motivation? Once under attack, you'll have to pull together and spend much more time with each other than you would ever want.

Same goes for fighting with other student papers or insulting the whole student press. If your paper is better, great. Consider helping out mediocre papers instead of tearing them down. If you have a 'rival' paper, you'll win the battle by being a better newspaper, not by making trouble for people who joined that paper instead of yours.

Get ready to spread the word in case of crisis. Keep contact info for local media on hand in case of attack. When the pressure is really on, slap together a hot press release and fax it to everyone you know. Getting the first word out is half the battle. It gets you on the offense instead of the defense.

## Be as self-sufficient as possible

This could be difficult for smaller papers but not impossible. Consider yourself cut off from university and student support. What would you need to keep publishing? Could you do it? If not, examine where the gaps are and see if you can fill them.

## Get over the libel chill

Everyone threatens to sue student papers, but few, if any, ever do it successfully. That shouldn't make you lazy, just be prepared for a threat. Student papers tend to have very little cash and therefore don't make lucrative targets in a libel case. Double-check all your stories for libel, have a lawyer vet the more contentious pieces, but don't shy away from important stories.

## 2 When bad things happen to good papers



### Stay in touch

Stay in regular contact with other student papers and CUP's regional and national offices. People at other papers and CUP staff tend to be a great pool of people from which to draw advice. They have a lot of resources at their disposal. Sometimes a letter from the national office can go a long way.

Send as many delegates as possible to regional and national CUP conferences. It is the best and often only, time to share stories and compare notes on different ways to fend off attackers and realize how many papers are in the same boat as you.

### Review all your legal agreements

Keep them all in a big binder on your desk. Whether they're verbal or written, contracts must be made to protect the paper in case of conflict. Look into space allocation agreements, by-laws, equipment leases and compare them with other papers' agreements.

The staff must be in a strong legal position in case of attack. Most papers tend to give most of these situations the benefit of the doubt — "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." That type of attitude could cost you. Don't wait for a problem or conflict to arise to sign an agreement. Figure out and safeguard the legal position of your internal operations. This could include acquiring insurance, writing down previously verbal contracts, renegotiating a lease agreement or revising your by-laws.

Try to get some dirt on everyone who might someday attack the paper. Most of it should not go in the paper, but you can intimidate people if they think you have something on them. It might just as easily piss them off, though, so don't

brag about it. Just keep it under wrap in case of a blow-out and then spring it on them. It's nasty but could be an effective tool if used properly.

### FINDING SOLUTIONS

The following guide was prepared by a working group at Canadian University Press' 54th National Conference in Ottawa responding to attacks made against student newspapers. It contains both cautionary tales and self-defence tips. Some of the problems described have no solution but, hopefully, you can be forewarned and take steps to keep them from ever happening.

*NOTE: Autonomy prevents many but not all these hazards. Some in fact are unique to autonomous papers. Also, student councils, student governments and student unions are the same thing — a group of elected student administrators.*

**Problem:** Student Union calls in loan/freezes budget/threatens bankruptcy to incorporated newspaper over contract dispute (e.g. the Peak, 1991).

**Responses:** Check through the constitutions of both the paper and student society for contradictory by-laws that may be of legal aid.

- Check through the provincial society/incorporation act.
- Consult a media lawyer, or a book on provincial/Canadian law for added loopholes.
- Show that the action taken was the exclusive jurisdiction of the board, not of the student council.
- If possible try to prove that the contract dispute was the reason for the action taken, not necessarily an above-board action.

**Problem:** Distributed newspapers are destroyed/thrown in the garbage over offensive article (e.g. the Cadre over Muslim cartoons, 2006).

**Responses:** Anticipate when this might be an issue and watch your distribution.

- If possible, talk people out of such action; if not, attempt to get photographs, names, times, places and dates on some sort of permanent record. Witnesses will also help.
- Check with local RCMP or your lawyer for possible destruction of private/public property charges.
- Tell people! Especially other interested groups on campus (e.g. friendly student societies, college boards, other student associations).

**Problem:** Newspaper banned from student council premises or other part of campus (e.g. Other Press, 1991).

**Responses:** Find sympathetic insider who will distribute them on own initiative.

- Deliberately violate ban to trigger confrontation and unwanted publicity to council.
- Again, check with lawyer or RCMP about legality of actions (a student newspaper is owned by the students, as is the student council, did the students pass the motions to accomplish this?).
- Time permitting, post notices/articles around campus to inform students of the situation.

**Problem:** External groups (e.g. campus clubs, off-campus morality squads) launch censorship/shutdown cam-

## 3 When bad things happen to good papers



paign over allegedly obscene material published in newspaper (e.g. Dalhousie Gazette, Muse over safe-sex article, 1991).

**Responses:** Argue the principle on freedom of the press grounds to the administration, student council and other influential bodies.

- Go to sympathetic feminist, gay/lesbian, journalists', artists' groups for help.
- Check into legality of the situation.
- Begin a paper-support campaign to counterbalance the negative publicity.

**Problem:** Council dramatically hikes rent on office space/evicts autonomous newspaper/moves paper to smaller premises (e.g. McGill Daily, 1991.) Threatens to charge rent after years of donating space (Ronde / Fulcrum, 2007).

**Responses:** Try to obtain a long-term or self-renewal lease with pre-established rent levels and increases. You may have to swap free/cut rate advertisements for this privilege.

- Have a contingency plan — another CUP newspaper office or a nearby staffer's home where equipment and production can be moved in a pinch.
- Inform students of the situation, bring strong student pressure on renegotiation process.
- Appeal to judicial board, university administration, anyone who will listen. Push for general policy on treatment of autonomous student groups.
- Go to other autonomous student groups (graduate council, radio

station) for help.

**Problem:** Council threatens shutdown over unfavourable coverage or other factors (Lance, 1991 over unfavourable article and editorial, Dalhousie Gazette over safe-sex article, Manitoban, Cord Weekly, Lexicon)

**Responses:**

- Obtain outside media coverage of the event; generally professional reporters will be sympathetic to newspapers threatened with closure (but not always, witness Muse's situation in St. John's over original safe-sex article) and this will be hugely embarrassing to council and the university: CBC Television coverage helped the Dalhousie Gazette nip council closure motion in the bud after council got angry over safe-sex article.
- Find friends in high places to put pressure on council perpetrators (e.g. the Lance appealed to sympathetic director of student centre who in turn appealed to a university vice-president to lean on the hostile student council president).

**Problem:** Administration tries to shut down distribution, pulls copies, stops funding over controversial coverage (Cadre, 2006. UWO Gazette, 2007).

**Responses:** Check legal jurisdiction and agreements with administration on paper;

- Go to mainstream press.
- Appeal to students and other student papers.
- When CEGEP's director of student services yanked copies of the Vanier Phoenix from teachers' mailboxes in 1991 for safe sex article,

massive protest from angry teachers forced him to recant and apologize.

**Problem:** Autonomous newspaper in danger of letting society/incorporation status lapse over failure to make annual submissions/hold annual general meeting/have regular board of directors meetings (e.g. Concordian, Other Press, 2007).

**Responses:** Ensure previous Board of Directors trains replacements in all aspects of job requirements; familiarity with constitutions, by-laws and society/incorporation acts should be mandatory and strongly stressed.

- Ensure that the president/chair double-checks fulfillments of all requirements for incorporation.

**Problem:** Hostile groups plan to stack annual general meeting of autonomous newspaper to alter by-laws, fire staff or transform board of directors meeting. This is especially dangerous because it is perfectly legal, Annual General Meetings are normally quite poorly attended and BoD election turnout quite low.

**Responses:** There is normally a two-week waiting period between the announcement of the Annual General Meeting contents and the actual general meeting. Use this time to campaign for the newspaper, write articles, recruit and, if necessary, counter-stack the meeting with friends and other sympathetic parties.

- Talk to the Registrar of Companies for options if you are not familiar with the ins and outs of the Society/Incorporation Act.
- If possible, try to get a delay in the

## 4 When bad things happen to good papers



AGM date to give time to organize a response to the source of dissatisfaction with the newspaper.

**Problem:** Council staff refuses/delays signing of cheques, purchase orders or other requisitions needed by the newspaper over personal/political vendetta or other reasons.

**Responses:** This is a fairly common occurrence. Lobby as soon as possible to have funds handed over as soon as they are collected.

- If there is a publishing board or some entity of council with responsibility for overseeing newspaper's financial affairs, point out that it is outside the council's jurisdiction to interfere with finances.
- If the problem appears to be personalities, consider hiring/establishing a business manager position. This person can act as the newspaper's own bureaucrat, separate from editorial policies and functions, to deal exclusively with student council bureaucrats on administrative matters. This keeps the personality politics from interfering with normal administrative relations. Your business manager should, of course, be on your side, but their professional detachment should keep non-editorial and non-political affairs on a more even-tempered and predictable footing.
- Try to obtain your own signing authority for these items; this should not be a problem if you're legally incorporated.

**Problem:** Council demands free ads or preferential rates (Uniter's council demands free full page ad.).

**Response:** Negotiate a specific rate card for council and for council-affiliated societies and organizations. Free or preferential rates for ads that are for student-oriented promotions, full rates for student government campaigns.

- If this seems unpalatable, publicize the council's demand for preferential treatment. Political pressure could make them back down.

**Problem:** Council seizes equipment or forces newspaper to allow other clubs to use it at will/charges rental for equipment use. This is especially dangerous for newly autonomous newspapers.

**Responses:** If you are going to be autonomous, get council to sign ownership of your equipment over to the new corporation.

- Buy or lease own equipment.
- Put together package detailing why sole and unobstructed use of equipment is necessary. If need be, get students to help in requesting equipment back from council.

**Problem:** Libel suit launched or threatened. These can come from anyone. Note that almost always these suits name the reporter as well as the publisher, so being non-autonomous does not let the newspaper off the hook. If you are autonomous, both the reporters and the newspaper are liable.

**Responses:**  
•[See: Ch 9. Libel]

**Problem:** Student councillor or other aggrieved party rips offending story off flats or tries other form of restraint to publication (e.g. The Fulcrum, U. of

Ottawa had that problem when they tried to publish a story detailing how a council exec had paid another student to take an exam for him). This is less of an issue now that most papers layout electronically and back up their files, but if someone were to delete the pages from the server, the effect would be the same.

**Responses:** If you are warned, stand guard over office or shift layout to safe location.

- Take offender to court or have them charged if grounds can be found for trespass, vandalism or destruction of property.
- Get mainstream media attention.
- Have council pass censure motion against offending individual. ◀

*John Montesano helped papers ward off nasty people as CUP president in 1991-92, spent years fighting for autonomy at the council-funded Lexicon (York University) and later worked at York's fully-autonomous Excalibur.*



# Obtaining autonomy

BY GREG IP

- ▶ Autonomy for a student newspaper allows the publication to act without threat of interference in its editorial, financial or legal affairs by any outside organization, including a student council or university.

Secondly, it necessitates a responsible press. Ultimately, a student newspaper worthy of autonomy must be able to justify editorial, legal and financial decisions to its readers, who, for autonomous papers, are usually its owners.

Most student newspapers began life as an operation of the student council. The student council, however, has an inherent conflict of interest when dealing with the student paper. Even the most sincere councilor, when dealing with the newspaper's internal affairs, will be influenced by how they have been or could be treated in the newspaper's articles.

Autonomy does away with the conflict of interest, and usually leaves the newspaper free from fear of reprisal or harassment for the way it reports on council, or anything else.

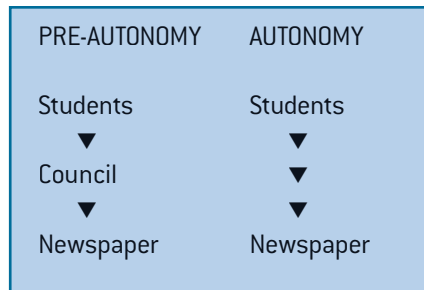
Autonomy usually requires becoming a separately incorporated legal entity, with a board of directors, on which student council does not have a significant presence. The essential difference between pre- and post-autonomy is shown in the diagram in the bottom left center of this page.

Being autonomous, you must still care what students think. But you get to care without the council running interference.

Both council and newspaper win with

autonomy. But while the newspaper wins new freedom for its editorial line, it inherits from council considerable financial and legal burdens.

Autonomy enables you to write what you want. It also lets you be sued for it. The liability of non-autonomous newspapers is assumed by its owner, the council. Concordia's Student Union, for instance, was subjected to a lawsuit in the mid-1980s for a story about a coach. If the story had appeared after the newspaper had become autonomous, the newspaper, not the council, would have faced the suit.



Autonomy gives you freedom to run your financial affairs in what you see as the newspaper's best interest. But it also gives you the freedom to go bankrupt, as many autonomous newspapers very nearly have. Non-autonomous newspapers will always be bailed out and its bills paid by council.

Autonomy frees you from the heavy hand of student council, but replaces it with the unpredictable hand of your own board of directors. Some newspapers have found their board more difficult to deal with than their student council. But good boards of directors put no pressure on a newspaper except to deliver a quality product that the student readers and funders deserve.

## IS AUTONOMY FOR YOU?

*We believe student publications should be free from the implicit editorial control that results from financial control of the publication by student governments or administrators.*

— CUP Statement of Principles

All student newspapers have the moral right to be autonomous. But that doesn't mean all student newspapers should be autonomous.

Papers considering autonomy need to have several things in place, most importantly student support and a business plan. Without the first, you have bigger problems — not to mention difficulty winning a referendum.

The first step for many papers is to pursue semi-autonomy, which helps to smooth the transition to complete fiscal responsibility and the headaches that entails, especially for small papers. The newspaper can even be separately incorporated, giving it certain legal rights, such as signing your own cheques.

## IS NOW THE TIME TO GO FOR AUTONOMY?

Autonomy is a long, drawn-out process. You are not doing anyone, least of all your newspaper, a favour by going for autonomy unprepared.

A lost referendum is not only humiliating, but can be used by council as moral authority to run roughshod over the newspaper for years. Winning a referendum without a clue of how to run the autonomous paper though can be equally disastrous.





## 2 Obtaining autonomy

Autonomy is most easily achieved when it appears most unnecessary — when relations with council are at their most cordial.

A council that sincerely believes autonomy is best for both it and the newspaper will help make it work. It will try to make the break as smooth and trouble-free as possible and resolve as many potential disputes in advance as possible.

Talk to the university administration before you begin, as well — even if they won't support you, it's good to know what they think. Some papers have worked out deals where the university collects fees rather than the student council. Some papers have found this easier and more reliable while others prefer to keep the finances in the student sphere.

Still think autonomy might be for you? Let's go.

### 1• DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Before you approach council or start publicizing the referendum, you should be completely prepared to answer their questions and address any concerns:

Build a file on autonomy with all the background material you can find: resource papers, articles and clippings on freedom and responsibilities of the press and autonomy, and examples of constitutions and separation agreements from other autonomous papers.

Talk to professors and campus groups who are sympathetic to the paper and may offer their support.

Talk to other autonomous papers: many have been where you are going and can

save you a lot of grief. Learn from their mistakes and successes. Get letters of support from other papers.

Get a copy of the student council constitution and by-laws, especially those pertaining to elections and referenda and references to the paper. Read the fine print.

### 2• GET THE WHOLE STAFF INVOLVED

During the autonomy campaign, the staff will have to eat, drink, sleep, and breathe autonomy if you want it to be successful.

Everyone must be involved, and there's plenty to do: financial planning, poster-ing, handing out buttons, handing out pamphlets, speeches, schmoozing, talking to your classes and professors, writing editorials, and, oh yeah, preparing your paper for structural independence.

### 3• PLOT THE TIMELINE

You should not start later than October, assuming the referendum will be held with student union elections in the spring. Establish the referendum date and work backwards from your date. Assuming all maximum delays occur, establish interim dates, going to council for approval, having incorporation papers approved by federal/provincial government.

### 4• DRAFT A CONSTITUTION

The constitution is the heart and soul of an autonomous paper because it defines the internal workings of the paper

and outlines the relationship between the paper and council and students. Your best bet is to base yours on an autonomous paper's constitution. Your constitution should include by-laws and provisions for a board of directors.

### 5• RETAIN A LEGAL ADVISOR

A progressive law professor (if your university has a law department) would be good. A paralegal costs less and may know more than a lawyer. This person should conduct your incorporation and draw up your council-newspaper separation agreement (see below).

### 6• PLAN YOUR AUTONOMOUS FINANCES

Before council or the student body will take you seriously, you have to present them with a financial plan ensuring fiscal responsibility. Retain a business advisor (an interested business professor or student) to help you put together a plan. You need a professional advisor to help you create separate (and working) books, produce realistic revenue and expense forecasts, and learn the essential details of starting a small business.

How much will your levy be? The only way you'll find out is through . . .

### 7• NEGOTIATIONS WITH YOUR STUDENT COUNCIL

Are you going to negotiate the newspaper's autonomous structure with the student council, or decide it for yourselves and put it directly to a referendum?

Also, there are a lot of loose ends to tidy up when you break away from student



## 3 Obtaining autonomy

council. Pre-autonomy, many of your dealings that had simply been between different departments of council will become transactions between corporations.

You should sign a legal separation agreement with your council to make clear what your relationship post-autonomy will be. Bring a friendly councilor on to your team for tips on dealing with council.

### 8• P.R. CAMPAIGN

Posters, house ads, pamphlets, buttons, t-shirts, speeches, letters of supports, personal letters to campus groups and professors all help.

Lobby influential people, tell your friends, mention the word autonomy to everyone.

Remember, referenda are decided more by how much students like the paper than the merits of autonomy. Prove you deserve autonomy by publishing a quality product.

### 9• REFERENDUM

If you've done your homework, then you should have your council's referendum procedure. Pay close attention to the details and make sure you do everything by the book. Some renegade councilors may try to nullify a victorious referendum on a technicality.

Once you've won the referendum the real work begins.

### 10• INCORPORATION

Incorporation establishes the newspaper as a legal entity with most of the rights, responsibilities and liabilities of a person.

Again, consult your legal advisor. Most libraries have a copy of the corporations manual which describes the features and requirements of various types of incorporation (as a company, club, a charity or a non-profit.)

### 11• THE DOCUMENTS OF AUTONOMY

#### The fee agreement

Some student newspapers are already funded according to a per-student levy. Autonomy will simply entail having that levy remitted directly to the newspaper by administration instead of via council.

If the pre-autonomous paper received block funding from council which was renegotiated each year, a fee agreement will require you to calculate what that block (or the amount you decide you will need to survive autonomously) is per full-time equivalent student. That amount would then be deducted from what students pay council and remitted directly to the paper.

For example, suppose your current annual allotment is \$40,000 and there are 10,000 full-time equivalent students at your university, each paying \$30 to the council. Your portion of that fee would be \$4. In a referendum, you ask students to break their fee into a \$4 portion to go directly to the newspaper and a \$26 portion to go to council.

You both get what you normally did and students pay the same amount. The fee is simply broken into two packets that go directly to their users.

That scenario may be hard to achieve for several reasons, though. Council will likely resist having their fee broken up, first because they would rather keep the money, and second because allowing it might encourage other organizations to seek autonomy and their own levies.

If council gets its way, you may find yourselves asking students to cough up a new levy above and beyond what they already pay, which will make a referendum much harder to win. You should not let that happen. Take it straight to the students if necessary.

A second possible snag is your university administration may not co-operate. In *The Charlatan's* case, Carleton refused to remit fees to anyone but their student council. How you get around this is up to you, but negotiating and a common understanding of motives and concerns is a good place to start.

If you can't get a separately-collected levy, there are alternatives. One is to have the student council continue to collect your levy on your behalf, and then remit it to you. Another is to continue being block-funded by council with that block somehow indexed to inflation or enrolment. *The Charlatan*, for example, received an enrolment-indexed block payment from their student association upon their separation.

Either of these alternatives must be entrenched in a legally binding contract between the autonomous newspaper and council to compel it to hand over



## 4 Obtaining autonomy

your money without delay each year. Otherwise your situation is no different than before autonomy.

I consider this inferior because it means you must still deal with council to get your money. Even supposedly binding contracts can be renegotiated or disputed. The best arrangement is often one that leaves student council out of the money picture entirely.

This leads into the third snag: cash shortages. Most student newspapers begin their publishing year in May, but the bulk of student fees aren't collected until September or later. That leaves you with four months worth of large expenses and little revenue immediately upon your becoming autonomous. The only way around this is to obtain a line of credit, either with a bank or other lending institution, or with the university or student council itself. Or pray you have very understanding creditors.

It is absolutely essential that the calculation, timing and hand-over of the fees owed to you is entrenched in a legal contract with the student council or administration if at all possible. One of the biggest and most common disasters befalling autonomous newspapers is refusal by council to hand over the newspaper's money for various reasons. A contract will force them to hand it over or face a lawsuit.

### The Separation Agreement

Among the things the agreement should address are:

1• Your lease. How much rent will you pay council or the university (depending on who owns your office space)? How much space will you be assured of? Under what, if any, circumstances

can you be evicted? What are your responsibilities as tenant? How will improvements be paid for? Some benefits can be worked into this section, such as with the University of Calgary Gauntlet who received free rent in return for giving council a set amount of free ads each year.

2• Your equipment. Currently, everything in your office belongs to council. Have them hand it over to the newspaper for a nominal amount. The University of Toronto Scarborough College Underground went autonomous only to have council take away their typesetter, which was somewhat problematic to their continued operations.

3• Your fee agreement. (See previous page.)

4• Your old liabilities. You should start autonomy with clean books. That means council should clearly assume all liabilities incurred by the newspaper before it was autonomous: unpaid bills, outstanding or pending lawsuits, etc. By the same token, council is entitled to collect all outstanding credits owed to the old newspaper.

5• Contracts signed on the newspaper's behalf. If you have contracts you wish to maintain, eg. with Campus Plus, you must sign a novation making the autonomous newspaper the second party, replacing council. If there are contracts you wish to abandon, e.g. with old suppliers, note that. Council, however, is not likely to want to get stuck with contracts for things it no longer needs. ◀

*Greg Ip is a reporter at the Financial Post. He edited The Charlatan (Carleton University) during its successful autonomy drive in 1987-88 and was Ontario Campus Plus board director in 1988-89.*

# Steal these ideas!

BY DOUG SAUNDERS AND CARL WILSON

## WHO ARE OUR READERS?

- ▶ Most of us never ask this question. Instead, we assume that our readers are either: (a) a lot like ourselves, with roughly the same interests and political leanings; (b) political innocents just waiting to see the light through our deathless prose; or (c) assholes who are never going to agree with us anyway. And the people who don't read the paper at all? They (d) may as well not exist.

As a result, our publications fail to reach their full potential audience because they don't see who they're reaching for.

A lot of readers are either annoyed by our "Which side are you on?" rhetoric or bored by stories which seem to have nothing to do with their world. Then we wonder why they aren't lining up to join our volunteer staff or attend the events we organize.

The assumptions we make might not be so damaging if we were living in a print-oriented culture, where a large audience was eager to read and debate the issues targeted by the local press. But in fact, we're competing with CNN, MTV and the behemoth of the internet.

It would be foolish to think we can blow out such a hurricane. Instead, we need to find ways to harness some of the energies of mass media and channel them into the alternative press. In short, we have to draw people away from the tube and into our pages, offices and websites.

To do that, we have to understand the nature of our medium. We know our

weaknesses. We also have an untapped strength: our ability to make personal contact with our audiences. We need a set of methods to bridge that gap, both in the pages of our publications and in our daily practice as writers, editors and administrators. In the end, these outreach strategies could make our papers less predictable, more relevant and more fun for everybody involved.

## THE MESSAGE: SUBJECT MATTER THAT MATTERS

We can't expect people to read what we write just because we wrote it. They're looking for useful information, pertinent ideas, human contact and pleasurable diversions. Most readers don't even care what the paper's "politics" are, as long as it's lively, informative and open to many points of view.

We can only provide this kind of journalism if we understand who our readers are and what they need from a publication. Everything we print should attempt to address the needs of our audience, particularly if those needs are not being fulfilled by other media outlets.

## NEWSPAPER AS TOOLBOX

Tell people things they need to know. If it's exam time, print the exam schedule. If there's an election, research and profile each of the candidates. Choose a community service and list the places you can get it. Provide alternative consumer information, with an eye to quick, cheap and quality products that are of interest to students. Write about other alternative media with a lot of different perspectives. Announce upcoming meetings, lectures, events, demon-

strations, free deals and cheap entertainment in your area. Do so far enough in advance that people can plan around them.

Give do-it-yourself help. Tell people how to rent an apartment, bake bread, exterminate bugs (without Raid), build furniture, rig up radio stations, appeal their grades, mix up home remedies, grow plants, alter perceptions without snorting Drano, and do the funky chicken.

Be reliable. If you know that something is news to your readers, make sure it gets in the paper as soon as possible. Know that immediacy and analysis aren't mutually exclusive. Be consistent — don't make a big deal out of one fee increase and then ignore the next one.

Make sure that what you print is true. If information you've presented in the paper becomes out-of-date, do a follow-up. If you make an error, correct it. Allow for a diversity of opinions.

Fill holes in mass and local media coverage. News that matters on a neighbourhood, community or local level rarely makes it into major dailies. Similarly, aside from high-profile conflicts, few stories from marginalized groups like people of colour or gay and lesbian subcultures are ever covered by mainstream news outlets.

Reprint information that's been buried either in the back pages of mainstream news outlets or in fringe publications. Don't be afraid to repeat things you've read elsewhere but haven't uncovered yourself, as long as you verify what you're printing and cite your sources. Most people don't have time to pore over section E of the New York Times or



## 2 Steal these ideas!

root around in the stockroom of your local libertarian bookstore.

Supplement stories with contacts for more information or action such as phone numbers, book or magazine titles and dates of events or demonstrations.

### RALLY 'ROUND THE RAG

Admit that news stories don't appear out of thin air. You choose the issues you cover. These issues sometimes don't even exist until you define them.

Have regular meetings with all of your contributors to plan coverage around common goals. Pick your issues carefully according to upcoming events and ongoing conflicts, and plan out a news campaign, which introduces the problem and examines it from a variety of angles over an extended period. Choose issues that lend themselves to direct action on a local level.

•[See: Ch 3. Managing news campaigns]

The paper itself can be an issue of community concern. You probably deal regularly with questions involving autonomy, funding, coverage, staff democracy, and rival publications which would be interesting to readers and help them to understand how their paper works. Don't shy away from covering these things as news, printing direct messages from your editorial collective or including amusing graphics that portray your situation. Just make sure that it's intelligible to outsiders and not self-congratulatory. If you give readers information about the processes and goals of your publication,

some of them might be willing to take action in your defence if the paper's existence is ever threatened or it could bring in some extra volunteers.

### THE HUMAN ELEMENT

Make sure stories focus not only on events and issues, but on people. Profile interesting people in the community, use 'person-in-the-street' interviews and photos, distinguish personality conflicts from ideological ones and write about individual troubles and successes.

Seek out stories, opinions and reactions to stories and events from a variety of people and places. Make sure readers can see their community reflected in the paper at least now and then. If some of your readers are immigrants, or science students, and you aren't, ask yourself how their concerns might dovetail with yours — or better yet, ask them.

Recognize that lifestyle issues deserve space. People spend a lot of time worrying about their sex lives, the food they eat, the way they dress, their health, their privacy, their family dynamics, school or workplace stress, career choices, traveling or child-raising. They spend less time thinking about student societies and the CIA. At least some of your coverage should reflect these everyday concerns.

Such pieces have intrinsic interest and will generate conversation about the paper. Try to examine these issues outside their usual pop-psychology frames and encourage readers to see personal problems as a part of social patterns and structures, not just as the products of their own bad luck.

Recognize your readers: they have thoughts and concerns that may be quite different than those of your usual contributors. Your paper shouldn't convey a presumption that the reader has a lot of time or money to spare, a comfortable place to live, few obligations to family or community, perfect health or a straightforward relationship to mainstream culture and middle-class tastes.

Don't assume that identities are all-encompassing. Conservatives, moderates and radicals, Asians, Africans, gays, lesbians, private school kids, liberals, and evangelicals all come in every shape and colour. Most people also have some ideas that contradict other things they believe. Portray the complex and contingent realities of our experiences.

Make sure that no matter what you're writing about, the impact the issue has had or could have on real people's daily lives is the main impression you leave with the reader.

### WE'VE SEEN THE ENEMY AND IT IS YOU

Choose your enemies carefully. Good journalism is bound to upset and divide some people, make enemies for the paper and generally mess up your social life. It's better to do this deliberately than by accident, and it's important to keep this process under your control.

Realize that injustices are perpetrated by individuals as well as by systems. Reducing issues to abstractions only helps obscure their specific manifestations. Decide who occupies key positions in the local power structure, remember that this is not necessarily congruent



## 3 Steal these ideas!

with their titles, and investigate their activities and connections.

Hold people accountable in print for their actions. If an administrator makes an error in negligence, point it out calmly. If they're incompetent, inform the community why. Putting a face on the problem helps people focus their anger and does justice a concrete service. Similarly, give credit where credit is due for positive community actions and successes.

Mock, satirize and ridicule sooner than spewing vitriol. Readers will take more pleasure in the attack if you seem good-natured than if you come across as sociopaths with an axe to grind. Play upon your targets' quirks and hypocrisies. Caricature them — both visually and rhetorically. Sponsor contests in which the readers join in on the fun.

Don't conceal your opponents' arguments. Interview them. Quote them. Print their letters. And give a full and fair account of their side of the story to your readers, even if you disagree with their ideas. Trust the readers to judge for themselves.

Don't abuse your power, especially to undertake personal vendettas. Make sure your targets deserve the barrage for real political or social reasons, and not just because they don't like you or the paper.

Learn to maintain enough distance from your sources and other people who have common ground with you so that you can still criticize them without turning them into villains.

Know libel laws, both to avoid prosecution and to know what you can get away with.

•[See: Ch 9. Libel]

Never decide that your readers are your enemy. If you think there's a general problem in your community, address it from within. Instead of scolding readers for their "wrongs," propose solutions the community as a whole can undertake.

Gain your readers' respect and balance your crusades by printing an occasional dose of self-criticism.

### THE LEGITIMIZATION OF DISSENT

Encourage readers to use the paper as their connection to the local culture. Yes, your university has a culture. Inform them of organizations, protests, actions, meetings and street dances. Drop hints frequently that these kinds of things are normal and happen all over the world, not just in your office. Print articles, photos and graphics that make dissent commonplace. Protest shouldn't look like a grim obligation or a demented hippie freak-out.

Make it clear that political activism, and particularly political journalism, is a serious pursuit that can be done well. Impress readers with solid research behind your coverage as well as the imagination you put into your writing and design.

Examine alternative lifestyles that are more sustainable than the North American status quo. Do an Alternative Careers supplement, profile a co-op, write about farming without pesticides or daycare without the government.

Emphasize links and differences between

the mainstream and the fringes. Point out the dissenting elements in popular culture phenomena: Thelma and Louise, Ice-T and Bart Simpson are popular figures whose identities are dependent on rebellion. Use their words and images to promote other forms of dissent.

### THE MEDIUM: NOT HOW MUCH YOU SAY, BUT HOW YOU SAY IT

Newspaper-making is as much an art form as a thought process. You're not just shooting facts in a barrel, you're seducing readers into your pages for a long-term engagement.

People will pick up any newspaper once. But the novelty wears off fast unless they come to see the paper as not just a thing but a place, with attractive landmarks, enjoyable encounters and useful furnishings. The newspaper's voice has to speak to them in language that's both familiar and fresh, and has to draw them into its folds.

### FROM NEWSROOM TO CAFE

Use language that sounds the way people really speak to each other. Favour concrete rather than abstract imagery, colloquial rather than formal diction, and funky rather than stilted rhythms. In particular, avoid jargon, theoretical terms, doublespeak, pretentious lingo and journalistic clichés. Your writing should sound like a street corner conversation rather than a textbook or a soapbox sermon.

Complement your hard news coverage and straight information with more personal voices. Use narrative, autobiography and storytelling from a diverse



## 4 Steal these ideas!

range of contributors to discuss issues that don't fall into your regular coverage or to humanize the issues you've been emphasizing.

Recognize that your stylistic tastes, prejudices and many of your opinions, like your interests, are partly set by your class, gender, culture, and sexuality. Make space in your paper for as many voices as possible.

Hold workshops, seminars and private meetings with writers to encourage clear, concise writing. Make editing a group process so people will understand the principles of good prose.

Don't abandon the familiar signs of quality journalism: multi-sourced information, quotes to reinforce facts and give reactions, in-depth research, short sentences and paragraphs, fair-handed representation or even the inverted pyramid news story. Ease people into unusual content by using recognizable styles in gradual rather than extreme leaps.

Avoid numbing your readers with constant outrage. If your usual tone is calmer and more removed, your anger will seem more legitimate when you use it. People in the community shouldn't imagine you all as self-righteous zealots.

### ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

Don't take yourself too seriously. Use cartoons, caricatures, sarcastic photo captions, embarrassing quotes, ironic 'Harper's Index' type statistics, clever headlines, amusing filler and anecdotes, self-effacing house ads, top-ten lists, and ledes or conclusions that use

plays on words or ironic twists. Make humour deliberate rather than inadvertent — some people are bound to laugh at you anyway.

### LENGTH, MASS AND DENSITY

Write for the reader in a hurry. Few readers will take your paper home and carefully study that 5,000-word diatribe — most will glance over it on the bus, during lunch or between classes, if ever. Every extra paragraph means lost readers.

Expose an issue through frequent, repeated short articles rather than voluminous exposés.

Don't be afraid to say the same thing over and over again as long as you find fresh ways to say it or news pegs to hang it on. Most of us can't retain information until we've heard it a few times.

Unwieldy subjects should be divided into multiple angles and multiple stories, and spread out over time and page space. Few people will read news stories longer than 500 words or features longer than 1,000.

If you're going to run a major investigative feature, create a sense of anticipation and context. Run several smaller stories in the run-up period, and make sure the subject of the feature is "in the news" in your readers' minds. Run teasers the issue before, banners on the front page directing people to the feature and follow-up stories afterwards.

Use news briefs, infographics, sidebars, maps, calendars, pull-quotes, pie charts, pyramid diagrams and bar graphs to communicate or reinforce

information in non-textual (or at least word-lite) ways. Some people are visual learners, and some things can come across graphically that would take many awkward, statistically-packed paragraphs to explain in words. The millions of people who read USA Today do so because it's a quick, low-stress way of getting the news. Turn those techniques to your own ends.

Design your covers to attract attention on the stand — use provocative graphics, clean cover design and high-visibility colours.

### FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONTENTEDNESS

Run regular features that readers will look for in each issue. Provide reliable services like schedules of meetings, actions, entertainment events and other local events.

Run a series of articles on important topics with familiar identifiers. Or have 'running joke' sections (quotes-of-the-day, public affairs indexes, mockeries of certain public figures, brief updates on ludicrous or shocking situations).

Use fixed and reliable distribution to attract readers. Hang a map in your offices and chart out the optimum high-pickup locations. Track your pickup from issue to issue and figure out where the maximum demand is.

Follow a journalistic stylebook rigorously. Use consistent spellings, short forms, acronyms, numbers and dates the same way all the time, standardize the way you write people's titles. Follow rules for gender-neutral language and non-offensive terminology.



## 5 Steal these ideas!

### •[See: Ch 9. Guide to CP Style]

Establish a reliable and regular publication schedule. Your readers should look forward to the day you publish, rather than being shocked by it. Let them know when you come out — print ‘every Thursday’ on the cover or put up posters at your distribution points.

Use regular design elements for comfortable and efficient reading. Design a simple and attractive banner and run it on the same part of the cover in each issue so people will know you instantly. Put the same sections and features in the same order in each issue. Use section identifiers, “inside” boxes, large-type excerpts (“pulls”) and “see also” advertisements for other sections (“reefers”) so people can find their way around the paper easily.

Use the same body and headline faces throughout, and standardize the way you flow your columns, continue your articles, place your photos, identify your contributors and separate news from opinions.

### •[See: Ch 6. Production]

#### THE PUBLIC-ACCESS PAPER

The point of all these attention-generating methods is to make your newspaper a welcome, even necessary, part of your readers’ lives. But that process is incomplete if people still feel like the paper is created by an elite group that has nothing to do with them. The paper should be known as a living institution that exists beyond its printed output.

Consider the mass media. Even large papers, television and radio stations create the impression that the journal-

ists who work there are familiar people who, the cliché goes, “come into your living room every night.” This adds an extra dimension of social contact and immediacy to “the news” — but because it’s an illusion created by highly paid anchors, the underlying message is paternalistic and unsatisfying.

As a community organ, this is one way you can out-do the mass media: you really can come into people’s living rooms, or at least to rooms nearby, and they can come into your newsroom. This exchange will bring greater relevance to your coverage, which people will understand as emerging from an atmosphere of exchange and mutual respect.

#### ACCESS POINTS

Create regular access points within the paper for community members. Every reader should feel like a real or potential contributor. Encourage letters and give them prominence (especially if you disagree with what they say); include free event listings; have open-access opinion sections or op-ed pages; solicit “point-counterpoint” contributions from local extremists; create advice columns or Q&A’s on practical dilemmas, lifestyle issues or amusing trivia.

Conduct polls, surveys, question-of-the-day sessions, creative-answer contests, photo-caption contests and so on to give people an idea of what their neighbours are thinking. Make sure the subject matter and terminology are accessible to the average citizen.

Hold public forums or debates on issues you’ve been covering or on controversies about the paper itself. Print ex-

cerpts from the proceedings. Illustrate them with photos of audience-panelist confrontations and other images that convey the two-way nature of the event.

Encourage other groups in the community to produce special sections, supplements or even issues.

From your local prison to the women’s centre to an urban geography class, there are people around with knowledge and ideas to share who can’t or won’t be regular contributors to your paper. Give them a preparatory seminar or two, be around to provide hands-on help, but give them creative control. Once you’ve done one or two such projects, you’ll be getting requests from other people who’d never imagined they’d be allowed so close to a printing press.

### •[See: Ch 2. Special issues and supplements]

#### GETTING YOUR NAME OUT THERE

Give people a chance to put a face to the bylines they see in your paper. The staff should be visible at events, hangouts and other key locales.

Rather than just dropping the paper off every week, distribute it personally once in a while. Send staff members to classes, street corners, workplaces, community group meetings, crowded cafes and anyplace else you can think of to hawk your wares. Set up information tables on a regular basis in high-traffic locations, where you can answer questions, pass out papers and recruit new staff.

Attach the paper’s name to spaces and





## 6 Steal these ideas!

events. Sponsor concerts, performances, speakers, forums, demonstrations, movies, debates, radio shows, raves, one-off publications, readings, strikes, after-hours clubs, bingo games, house parties, conferences, sporting events, scholarships, awards, dances, public art and other social interventions.

Make an effort to have the paper's name and logo displayed on the publicity materials or announced in broadcasts and at the event — not because you're looking for glory, but because it builds ties in the public mind of the paper as an institution. In the long run, this enhances the potential for recruitment, contact-building and other journalistic goals.

Send staff members to debates, political meetings and interesting lectures, not just to cover them but to participate. Join coalitions on important issues. Work on joint projects with community groups. Sponsor seminars as launching-pads for political organizing. Make it clear that your commitment to the paper's ideals goes beyond the editorial page.

Make your paper's name and identity a part of the scenery. Design a big yellow banner and wave it, hang it, wear it, burn it, writhe beneath it, adorn your office with it and fly it as a kite. Bring your banner to parties, demonstrations, national conferences and anywhere else you go as a group.

Design handbills, posters, stickers, bookmarks (stick 'em in all the library books), t-shirts, hang big signs outside your office, create press cards, letterhead, placards, boxer shorts, baseball caps, merit badges, buttons, decorations for your distribution boxes, spray-

paint stencils, keychains, safe sex packets, tattoos, sandwich boards, and balloons.

Hold open houses, potlucks, orientation events and other festivities to attract people into your office. Advertise them well in advance and with a blitz the day before. Be ready to follow up the contacts you make there.

Get spots in other local publications, radio stations or community TV to advertise the paper. Sometimes this can be done by trading ad-for-ad or through some other contra arrangement which will save you money.

Amuse your friends and confuse your enemies with outrageous acts of public absurdity and mischief. Dress up as the heads of corporations and other powerful local institutions and give mock speeches in character in a public place. Troop around campus singing a song satirizing the administration. Crash a frat party in drag and hand out the paper. Move your production equipment outdoors and put out the paper. Put out a mock version of the local mainstream paper and put it in that newspaper's boxes at 6 a.m.. Appear unexpectedly in a shopping mall and do street theatre about the hottest issue in your news pages.

Steal all these ideas or none of them — the world of the student press is unlimited. ◀

*In 1992, Doug Saunders was features editor of Excalibur at York University. Carl Wilson was the editor of the 1997 CUP styleguide.*



# 12 steps to publishing a better student newspaper

- ▶ 1• Practice visual journalism. There is a point of entry on a page that is usually a dominant picture. Photos have become increasingly important in newspapers so use them wisely.
- 2• Publish something important on page one. Put some enterprise reporting on the front page, and really get some analysis into it. People are interested in human-interest stories. These stories have the ability to broaden our expectations in a newspaper. Also, keep your eyes peeled for enterprise stories.
- 3• Cover campus first and do it better than anyone else. We should be scooping and topping the dailies. We should be the best at doing campus stories, and yes, they are important. Doing national and international political stuff should come secondary. Covering campus thoroughly and accurately should be the number one goal.
- 4• Break news. Make news. Present an issue, and then follow up. Make sure you do some original research.
- 5• Look ahead. Tell your readers what is going to happen. The readers need to know they are getting something special from your newspaper.
- 6• Be accurate, thorough and fair. Publish corrections and clarifications. Edit carefully. Use humans, not spell-check. This keeps up credibility with your readership. Fairness is a difficult thing to judge, but know the point at which you should allow opposing viewpoints and when you shouldn't.
- 7• Invite your readers to get involved. Set up a tip line. Publish a rant and rave readers' opinion column. Solicit one-time guest columnists.
- 8• Design boldly with ease of reading in mind. Don't be timid.
- 9• Tell good stories. Use the narrative form for some reporting. Try using this a bit more often instead of the inverted pyramid. It adds a level of entertainment to articles.
- 10• Diversify your content to meet readers' needs and wishes. Provide some content your readers can't get anywhere else. It's important to corner certain topics, while being able to write other things as well.
- 11• Put a fresh campus or student angle on national and international stories.
- 12• For facts and opinions, find the best available expert sources. Avoid anonymous sources. Don't go to the same sources all the time, it makes the newspaper look lazy.

Remember: Misspelling a name or misidentifying someone in a photo is bad.

Bonus Step: Sell more advertisements.

*Adopted from a seminar by Tom Rolnicki, Associated Collegiate Press*