



## BOOK REVIEWS: Dilemmas faced by student newspapers

Kaylene Dial Armstrong, **How Student Journalists Report Campus Unrest**. Lexington Books, 2017, 216 pages, hardcover, \$95.00. 978-1-4985-4115-2

Review by Tamara Zellars Buck

Although student newspapers have evolved in terms of content, design, delivery methods and business models, *How Student Journalists Report Campus Unrest* demonstrates the fact that the challenges of publishing – especially in the midst of crisis – have remained constant over time.

Author Kaylene Dial Armstrong turns her lens to the history of collegiate journalism in this seven-chapter exploration of covering campus unrest. She explores the goals, values, challenges and triumphs of student journalists from the mid-1800s, when the earliest campus newspapers debuted. As stated in the introduction, whether the goal was to promote the university, to advocate for change or just to offer something more to readers, students have maintained a consistent shared goal: to be successful students even as they worked to produce accurate stories that supported their perceived roles on campus.

The book reads like good long-form journalism, thanks to the dozens of interviews Armstrong conducted with former reporters, editors and photographers who balanced school and reporting duties during campus crises. Armstrong takes readers into the heat of such controversies as the integration of Ole Miss, the Free Speech Movement at the University of California at Berkeley, and the 2015 racial unrest at the University of Missouri at Columbia.

Each chapter begins with a historical overview of a dilemma faced by student journalists. What follows is a moment-by-moment retelling of each cri-

sis, interspersed with explanations of the emotional responses and professional activities of the students charged with writing the first drafts of history.

The point that student journalists face similar trials in reporting campus unrest is strengthened by Armstrong's intentional examination of diverse events and institutions. She explores the news coverage of schools noted for their student activism, like UC-Berkeley, as well as more conservative institutions like Brigham Young and the University of Utah.

She compares student coverage of similar events, such as the clashes between administrators and protesters that occurred in 1968 first at Howard University, a historically black institution in Washington, D.C., and weeks later at the New York-based Columbia University. In a different chapter she contrasts the overwhelming national coverage after the Ohio National Guard fired into a crowd of Kent State antiwar protesters, killing four and wounding nine students, with the non-coverage of a violent clash between law enforcement officers and students that left two dead and 12 wounded at Jackson State University, another historically black college.

The events occurred 10 days apart in May 1970.

*How Student Journalists Report Campus Unrest* explores the power and professionalism of collegiate journalism in a manner that is easy to read and understand. The rich details throughout the book should provide foreshadowing to budding student journalists and remind veterans of the parallelism between their

student and professional careers.

The book would have a good home in any journalism history course, and could also be a good supplement in ethics or media management courses. Additionally, it could be inspirational and aspirational for incoming newspaper staffs seeking to better understand their purpose or solidify their campus identity.

*Tamara Zellars Buck is an associate professor and multimedia journalism coordinator at Southeast Missouri State University. She serves as faculty adviser to the Arrow, the university's student-run newspaper.*

© Tamara Zellars Buck, 2018. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.

## Evidence of political objectivity among journalists

Lars Willnat, David Weaver, and Cleve Wilhoit, **The American Journalist in the Digital Age**. Peter Lang Publishing, 2018, 443 pages, hardcover, \$94.95. 978-1-4331-2828-8

Review by Catherine Strong



This book is indisputably the foremost resource on journalists this generation. It's the fourth book by these authors, spanning 50 years of turning the research lens onto those working in our journalism industry, with clear tables and narrative on the changing attitudes and demographics of US journalists.

One of the stunning findings from their surveys is that journalists are tending to be more political neutral. By tracking the political leanings of American journalists since 1971, the book indicates an increase in the percentage who consider themselves middle of the road or answered "don't know." This is about half of those surveyed (49%), compared to about one-third over previous decades.

Perhaps related to the increased political objectivity is the significant increase in journalists with higher education qualifications. In 1971 only 58% of journalists had graduated from college, compared to 92% in 2013, and an explosion of students studying journalism over 50 years, from 37,000 in 1971 to 213,000 recently.

Another fun fact is that over the decades there is an increase in the proportion of journalists with

no religious background (from 8% in 1971 to 23% in 2013), which is in keeping with the general population. Unlike the general population, however, there has been an increase in journalists with Catholic and Jewish background, while a decrease in Protestants.

This book is the fourth in a series that originally built on a 1971 study of 1,313 journalists (Johnstone, Slawski & Bowman), and continued with major surveys every decade. It is impressive that such renowned researchers have provided a half-century perspective on our industry, which is a foundation to democracy and an informed public.

Besides tracking attitudinal changes over the years of working journalists, it also explores current issues, such as that almost 80% journalists used social media in their work. More than half of this was microblogging such as tweets and only 20% audio/visual sharing such as YouTube.

More sober reading was the statistics showing that gender imbalance in newsrooms is not improving and men still dominate newsrooms despite the high proportion of women with journalism qualifications. Figures from all media types show less than

one-third supervisors are women – and this includes online, broadcasting, weeklies, magazines etc. Even in magazines only 42% of supervisors are women. And women still earn less than men, although those newly entering the industry tend to earn equal amounts compared to pay gaps for those with ten years of experience or more.

The chapter on minority journalists was even more depressing reading, with statistics indicating that over the last decade the increase in racial and ethnic minorities in US journalism has been miniscule, growing from 9.5% to 10.8%. The chapter explores which media are hiring and promoting minorities, as well as how minority journalists have less editorial freedom and supervising roles.

This 443-page research resource is invaluable for

anyone researching journalism practices or newsroom culture. The data is well documented and interpreted, although much of the data is only up to 2013, despite the book being published in 2018. Of course, that means I'm hanging out for the next update.

*Dr. Catherine Strong is on the journalism and public relations faculty at Massey University in New Zealand. She was a journalist for several decades in seven countries before joining academia. Her research focuses on newsroom culture and best practice.*

© Catherine Strong, 2018. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.