

The COMMUNICATOR

Annual Media Day Celebration a Hit

Journalism as a profession faces difficult times, but ultimately, the skills needed to gather and report news and information remain the same, panelists at the department's annual Media Day celebration said.

Bob Franklin, Nick Coleman, and Myron Medcalf took the stage in the Ostrander Auditorium April 29, facing a room packed with mass communications students, faculty, and guests. In introducing the theme of the panel, "The Changing Face of Journalism," Professor Ellen Mrja said the profession of journalism remains a touchstone for mass communications, even as the tools used for the trade continue to change.

It's hard to see the evolution of media history when it surrounds us, Mrja said.

The panelists represented a collective total of 70 years of journalism experience, and the three each addressed that experience in prepared remarks that spanned their history.

Franklin, a 40-year newspaper veteran, focused on the mission of the profession.



"Journalists are people who would not fit into normal society," Franklin said, to general laughter.

He discussed the need for journalists to be loyal to the story and the reader, even as publishers change and the need to make money in the newsroom grows. The voices of a free people and a free press still need to be heard, and that mission is almost a ministry, he said.

"Nobody knows what's going to happen," Franklin said. "But I see hope."

That hope, he said, relies on three things: a belief that newspapers will figure out how to make online presences profitable, the knowledge that most newspapers today still are profitable, and the certainty that newspapers are still the biggest players in journalism in terms of

stories and advertising. Enterprise reporting is on the rise, and there appears to be an appetite for those types of stories, he added.

"Newspapers are not quite dead yet," Franklin said.

Coleman, a four-time Pulitzer Prize nominee, agreed with Franklin's assessment of journalism as more than a job.

"Journalism was a vocation, a calling," Coleman said. "A higher calling."

The purpose of journalism, he said, once was to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." Now, however, the purpose seems to be making money, he added.

Loss of revenue because of poor business decisions in some newsrooms, such as the Pioneer Press and the StarTribune, had, and

NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

As the 2009-2010 school year came to a close, the mass communications department found itself scrambling to keep up with student demand.

Now, that in itself is nothing new. For at least the last 26 years (that's how long I've been on the MSU faculty), the department has always been blessed by an abundance of riches in the form of students wanting the major. But never in that quarter-century-plus have we had the resources to accommodate everyone wanting in, despite overloading our classes to the bursting point. The result, of course, is disappointed students turned away from their major of choice for lack of space.

The university is beginning to do some serious worrying about changing demographics -- namely, not enough college-age students in the population to keep university enrollment as strong as it should be. That demographic shift may end up affecting mass comm numbers, but fewer customers would actually make the chair's job a bit easier -- fewer students to turn away from the major when the space runs out. For fall 2010, more than 70 students applied for the major -- you do remember, don't you, the process that includes the diabolical Diagnostic Exam? Even maxing out our computer-lab space with three sections of Media Writing I, we've still had to put about a dozen students on the wait-and-see list for fall. As

chair, I cringe each time I have to tell someone, "Sorry, there's no room for you."

Yes, it's nice to be popular, but popularity does come with a price.

And speaking of price, it's getting harder and harder to pay the price of doing the department's business. The state budget problems that have clobbered the MnSCU budget have, of course, managed to trickle down to the department level. The cuts we've already taken and face in the near future are substantial. By the end of spring 2011, our ability to offer course credits will have declined by more than one-third from our peak capacity in the mid-2000s. With those student numbers I mentioned earlier not showing any signs of declining, the budget cuts and resulting credit losses mean we're facing some serious revamping of the curriculum to try to do more with less. We've been granted the funds to support a week-long workshop for faculty to huddle up, hunker down and do some heavy-duty curriculum redesign later in the summer. Although the workshop will reduce our summer break by a week, it should be worth it to produce a curriculum that may help us weather the budget storm that continues to blow all around us.

Kind regards,

Dr. Marshel Rossow



UPCOMING NEWS

UPDATE FOR STUDENTS:

Classes available for Spring 2014 can be viewed on E-services.

Career and Internship Fair is October 23rd and 24th.

Scholarships available for next fall. Apply in the spring.

UPDATE FOR ALUMNI:

Mass Media at Minnesota State University, Mankato has a Facebook page. "Like" us for more updates.

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Budget Cuts and the Future of Journalism

The Department of Mass Communications will lose its unfilled faculty line and all of its adjunct instructors as a result of projected shortfalls at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

The college also explored the phasing out of the journalism option for mass communication students. Mass Communications Chairperson Marshel Rossow said that all of these cuts will be major hits to the program.

"There's not going to be nearly as many credits offered," Rossow said.

Rossow said that the rationale for the possible removal of the journalism option is seen as part of a larger trend. Many school administrators feel that some years down the road, journalism will not be a major in demand in the professional world. Rossow likened this perception to a self-fulfilling prophecy if these kinds of cuts are to occur.

"News is not going away,"

The COMMUNICATOR

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Rossow said. "There will still be a need for journalists to record the news and gather it accurately."

In April, the mass communications department was given permission to alter the journalism option as opposed to removing it from the course catalog. The program is in the process of being renamed and redesigned to reflect the changing media and to adhere to professional journalistic standards.

"While it will no longer be called "journalism," it will continue to serve the needs of students wanting news-type careers," Rossow said. "We'll be adding more emphasis to the "new media" angle, but it will still teach the basics of good old-fashioned news writing."

Ashley Wall will be completing a degree in the journalism option after finishing up some classes this summer. Wall said that while print journalism may be in a tough position, the profession as a whole is learning how to adapt.

"Print journalism may be dying, but even print journalism is finding a way to recreate themselves and move online," Wall said. "That's all that's happening. It's (journalism) not dying, it's just changing."

"Writing is a gift a lot of human beings don't have. And to write well is something employers look for, no matter what major students are in," Wall said. "It's just sad to think that many people don't think there is a need for writers, and there is."

Mavis Richardson, a mass communications professor, echoed

Wall's statements about the changing nature of journalism as a profession.

"Journalism has been under fire from the public for many years because of a lack of understanding as to what a journalist and subsequently journalism is and the critical role the profession plays in a democracy," Richardson said. "There also is a lack of understanding that journalism is an evolving, ever changing profession. As new technologies are developed, new means of delivering the message develop. Hence, journalism is not dying. It is evolving to fit the needs of its intended audience."

Richardson said the remedy to public perception about journalism is simply a matter of education.

"Journalists need to educate the public on the basic functions and purposes of the profession," Richardson said. "What is news? I believe this question is at the heart of the debate. We, as a department, need to get the message out about the current status and role of media."

The cuts at Minnesota State came about as a result of a \$6-10 million projected deficit for 2012. The college responded by instituting an early retirement program that 20 faculty members have taken an advantage of. While that has shaved

"I'm glad they decided not to cut the program, rather alter it." Wall said. Though she feels it will be difficult for

AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Certificates of Excellence Awards

Students that have junior status and have a GPA of 3.8 or higher:

Lucas Bauer, junior, Public Relations, Verona, WI

Dan Boettcher, junior, Journalism, North Mankato, MN

Rebecca Cole, senior, Public Relations, Fergus Falls, MN

Avery Cropp, junior, Journalism, Plymouth, MN

Molly Nelson, junior, Public Relations, Eagan, MN

Robert Ringer, junior, Journalism, Bloomington, MN

Shaina Seih, junior, Journalism, Cortland, MN

Elena Shufelt, senior, Journalism, Phillips, WI

Derek Wehrwein, senior, Journalism, New Ulm, MN

Outstanding Sophomore Award

The outstanding Sophomore Award

is given annually to a sophomore majoring in mass communications who in the judgment of the faculty demonstrates outstanding potential for accomplishing the major and for the professional practice of mass media:

Allison Matthews, sophomore, Journalism, Burnsville, MN

Outstanding Senior Award

The Faculty Award is given annually to a student whose scholarship, character and performance in the judgment of the faculty exemplify the standards of the mass communications department:

Jacob Bohrod, senior, Journalism, North Mankato, MN

Emily Richardson, senior, Public Relations, North St. Paul, MN

Department of Mass Communications Scholarships (\$300 each)

Be an MSU major in mass communications and have a 3.0 or higher cumulative MSU GPA. The student must reflect the qualities the full-time faculty of the department deem requisite in a competent and respected media communicator:

Whitney Fabro, junior, Public Relations, Eagan, MN

Jennifer Kipischke, senior, Public Relations, Waldorf, MN

Molly Nelson, junior, Public Relations, Eagan, MN

Samantha Schommer, sophomore, Public Relations, Winsted, MN

Denise Tietz, senior, Public Relations, Walnut Grove, MN

McConnell Writing Excellence Scholarship (\$300)

MURDER MYSTERY

“I’m Getting Murdered in the Morning” a murder mystery dinner theatre



PRSSA members worked with Minnesota State University, Mankato’s, Mankato Young Performing Artist Association to sponsor a murder mystery to raise money for Haitian relief.

Members spent the semester divided into committees to work on various publicity aspects of the show. There were many publicity tactics that were used throughout the advertising, but some went above

and beyond posters and fliers.

One tactic that was used included the actors that played the bride and groom. Tom Bennett and Emma Ottoson, both theater majors, staged a flash scene in the Centennial Student Union where the groom proposed to the bride and then they handed out mini-fliers and asked fellow students to attend their wedding reception.

Unlike other fundraisers PRSSA has hosted, tickets were sold at downtown Hy-Vee and the AmericInn Hotel to allow convenience for community members when purchasing