## Objectivity & Balance: Today's Best Practices in American Journalism

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Section 396(g)(1)(A) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, authorizes CPB to "facilitate the full development of public telecommunications in which programs of high quality, diversity, creativity, excellence, and innovation, which are obtained from diverse sources, will be made available to public telecommunications entities, with strict adherence to objectivity and balance in all programs or series of programs of a controversial nature". As part of its efforts to carry out these duties, CPB commissioned several white papers to independently examine CPB's objectivity and balance mandate and provide feedback on its efforts to meet those obligations. This document is one of those white papers. The views expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) of this paper and not of CPB. CPB did not contribute to the contents of this paper, does not express an opinion about the views presented herein, and does not endorse its findings.

#### Introduction

The purpose of this White Paper is to examine contemporary standards when it comes to the basic journalistic principles of balance and objectivity. Because the Corporation for Public Broadcasting commissioned this White Paper, the primary focus will be on how public media (e.g. NPR, PBS, APM and PRI) are fulfilling their statutory charge to strictly adhere to standards of objectivity and balance as well as to enumerate the type of "best practices" that will allow public media to meet these standards. In dealing with the issues of objectivity and balance, the principle examination will center on the years 2000 through 2007. However, because best practices in this area may also extend to commercial media outlets, they and their practices will also be examined here.

One major mechanism for this examination was to survey news directors and general managers of the various public media throughout the country. A similar survey was taken of commercial broadcasting outlets. The results of these surveys will be detailed and analyzed in this Paper. In addition to the survey, several dozen personal interviews were conducted. Those interviewed include critics of public media for a perceived lack of objectivity and balance; news directors from both public and commercial media; the various ombudsmen for the public media, past and present; and other experts in the field.

From those interviews, the author of this Paper has culled a list of "best practices" that are now being used by both public and commercial media to insure objectivity and balance in programming. Those best practices will be detailed. In addition, this Paper will make several suggestions about what public media should do going forward to ensure that it meets its statutory obligation.

Nevertheless, while the major focus of this White Paper centers on how various media outlets are currently dealing with the issue of objectivity and balance and suggestions for the future, it would be inappropriate to proceed without explaining how and why this research paper came to be written.

This paper was commissioned because of serious external and internal criticism of and by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting about the various programming that pubic media has run over the past several years. Specifically, PBS and NPR have been attacked by a host of outside critics as being liberally biased as well as biased in favor of certain causes. In recent years, the two most vociferous critics of public media and its lack of objectivity and balance have been CAMERA (the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America) and Kenneth Tomlinson, the former chair of CPB. Each of these criticisms will be incorporated into this White Paper, as will criticisms from other outside entities that have accused public media of violating their statutory charter.

CPB has been trying to deal with these criticisms for some time. However, to a great extent, CPB is in a classic catch-22. On the one hand, when the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was created in 1967, its charter specifically stated that it will "facilitate the full development of public telecommunications in which programs of high quality, diversity, creativity, excellence, and innovation, which are obtained from diverse sources,

will be made available to public telecommunications entities, with strict adherence to objectivity and balance in all programs or series of programs of a controversial nature" (emphasis added). On the other hand, the charter also states that CPB will "carry out its purposes and functions and engage in its activities in ways that will most effectively assure the maximum freedom of the public telecommunications entities and systems from interference with, or control of, program content or other activities." It is also worth noting that CPB itself produces no programming or any public affairs or news shows. Thus, CPB was in the position of having to enforce standards of objectivity and fairness without any real mechanism to make sure that it is done. During the first 25 years of its existence, CPB would occasionally be criticized for failing to enforce the objectivity and balance requirement and ultimately, Congress became involved and attempted to give CPB a roadmap as to how it could enforce those provisions while at the same time allowing public media to maintain editorial independence.

When Congress passed the Public Telecommunications Act of 1992, among the provisions of that Act were the following requirements involving objectivity and balance:

- (2) after soliciting the views of the public, establish a comprehensive policy and set of procedures to--
  - (A) provide reasonable opportunity for members of the public to present comments to the Board regarding the quality, diversity, creativity, excellence, innovation, objectivity, and balance of public broadcasting services, including all public broadcasting programming of a controversial nature, as well as any needs not met by those services:
  - (B) review, on a regular basis, national public broadcasting programming for quality, diversity, creativity, excellence, innovation, objectivity, and balance, as well as for any needs not met by such programming;
  - (C) on the basis of information received through such comment and review, take such steps in awarding programming grants pursuant to clauses (ii)(II), (iii)(II), and (iii)(III) of section 396(k)(3)(A) of the Communications Act of 1934 (47 U.S.C. 396(k)(3)(A)) that it finds necessary to meet the Corporation's responsibility under 23section 396(g)(1)(A), including facilitating objectivity and balance in programming of a controversial nature; and
  - (D) disseminate among public broadcasting entities information about its efforts to address concerns about objectivity and balance relating to programming of a controversial nature so that such entities can utilize the Corporation's experience in addressing such concerns within their own operations; and
- (3) starting in 1993, by January 31 of each year, prepare and submit to the President for transmittal to the Congress a report summarizing its efforts pursuant to paragraphs (1) and (2).

In response to the 1992 law, CPB adopted a resolution on Jan. 23, 1993 that said CPB would conduct a general review of national programming for quality, diversity, creativity, excellence and innovation. The resolution did not specifically address a review for objectivity and balance.

As CPB continued to come under fire for promoting public broadcasting that was not balanced or objective, it passed another resolution on November 19, 2002 where it said it recognized the need to treat controversial subjects in a fair and balanced manner. While CPB did provide annual reports, called "Open to the Public" reports, critics charged that again, CPB was only providing lip service to the provision. As Eric Rozenman, the Washington director of CAMERA wrote, "The Corporation's annual 'Open to the Public' report to Congress has been little more than a pass-through of NPR and PBS's laudatory self-examinations."

CAMERA insisted that CPB had violated both the letter and the spirit of the 1967 law creating it. Kenneth Tomlinson, who as the chair of the CPB Board of Directors was in a unique position to insure that the objectivity and balance provision was enforced, also echoed that criticism. Mr. Tomlinson had been a long-time critic of what he perceived as not only the liberal bias of public television broadcasting but political favoritism. Mr. Tomlinson was particularly disturbed with the content of *NOW with Bill Moyers*, which he viewed as neither objective nor balanced. Using the language of the federal statutes and CPBs own resolutions, Mr. Tomlinson initiated actions to evaluate the program content of *NOW with Bill Moyers*. As the CPB Inspector General's (IG) 2005 Report of Review (Report) points out, a previous attempt to conduct such a content analysis of public broadcasting programs in 1986 was abandoned because of a furor within the public broadcasting community and because of the difficulty in assessing what exactly is meant by the terms objectivity and balance and hence, the difficulty in measuring them when there is no broad consensus in what the terms means.

While Mr. Tomlinson certainly had the authority to conduct such evaluation, the means in which he attempted to achieve it came under withering criticism. As the CPB Inspector General reported: "While CPB had the authority to conduct such reviews, the manner in which they were conducted created problems because the former Chairman did not get appropriate authorization from the Board to conduct such a review, did not establish agreed upon criteria to conduct such a review, did not communicate his plans to review public affairs programs with the public broadcasting community, and did not obtain appropriate authorization to sign the consulting contract."

Briefly stated, while CPB certainly had the ability and authority to conduct a review of balance and objectivity of any of its programming, the way Mr. Tomlinson went about doing it was exactly the reason why CPB has had such a tough road to begin with. The fear that CPB executives would be interfering in independent editorial decisions was on full display. Any cursory examination of Mr. Tomlinson's methods would indicate that he was acting in a partisan, political manner, without transparency and in secrecy, violating rules and regulations in order to justify his opinion. As the Inspector General's

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> From Aug. 6, 2007 *Honolulu Advertiser*; Camera Op-Ed: Public Broadcasting Must Meet Balance Test

Report of Review states, Mr. Tomlinson hired the consultant upon the recommendation of the founder of the National Journalism Center, where the consultant had worked for more than 20 years. But the National Journalism Center is neither a non-partisan, nor objective journalism entity. The National Journalism Center operates under the umbrella of the Young America's Foundation (slogan: "The Conservative Movement Starts Here.") Beyond that, the IG report found that the consultant was not a full time journalist and his job at the Center simply helped students find employment. The notion that someone with a conservative pedigree without journalistic *bona fides* should conduct such an analysis was a mistake. It would have been akin to hiring a consultant with Media Matters for America to conduct such a review of the *Journal Editorial Report*. Media Matters calls itself a "progressive research and information center dedicated to comprehensively monitoring, analyzing, and correcting conservative misinformation in the U.S. media." Certainly this organization could find ample evidence of bias, misinformation and a lack of objectivity or balance in that show. But to what end?

Having dueling partisan media monitors with little or no journalistic credentials is anathema to the notion of a free and independent press. Likewise, it seems that hiring dueling ombudsmen – one conservative and the other liberal – to insure balance and objectivity also defeats the purpose if the aim is to make sure public media produces quality journalism. For his part, Ken Bode, one of the two ombudsmen hired by Mr. Tomlinson, completely rejects the notion that he was asked to be an ombudsman from a liberal point of view. "People suspend their ideology when they have a job to do," he says.

The Inspector General's Report also concluded that the methodology used by the consultant to conduct the report was not sophisticated and simply used a rudimentary analysis to determine whether guests on a show expressed liberal or conservative viewpoints.

"In our judgment CPB's lack of definitive policies and procedures for reviewing national programming for objectivity and balance, the lack of a public debate to define agreeable criteria to measure objectivity and balance, and the secrecy over conducting the review contributed to the controversy that ensued over evaluating the content of *NOW with Bill Moyers*," the Inspector General's Report concluded.

The Inspector General's Report also detailed other elements of what it considered Mr. Tomlinson's violating the statutory prohibitions against board members becoming involved in programming decisions as well as other conflict of interest problems and made several recommendations to the Board of Directors to improve its governance processes. (Mr. Tomlinson vehemently disputed the Inspector General's Report, declaring "My lawful and sincere objective from the outset in my role at CPB was to help bring balance and objectivity in public broadcasting." Additionally, the CPB Board, in accepting Mr. Tomlinson's resignation, commended him "for his legitimate efforts to achieve balance and objectivity in public broadcasting.")

Nevertheless, one of the Inspector General's recommendations was to "establish formal

policies and procedures for conducting regular reviews of national programming for objectivity and balance. This policy should be developed in conjunction with all significant stakeholders in the public broadcasting community to ensure transparency and agreement on the criteria to be used to evaluate objectivity and balance."

Following the report, CPB consulted with a group of deans from the nation's top journalism schools as well as with NPR and PBS broadcasters. The outgrowth of that meeting was to commission a series of seven White Papers that deal with one way or another with the issue of objectivity and balance. (See Appendix A for background of the principal author of this White Paper; more information is also provided on the other writers and researchers involved.)

#### Overview

While this Paper will examine "best practices" when it comes to how media organizations deal with the concept of objectivity and balance, to some degree the question will be whether this research paper will actually be providing solutions in search of a problem. Specifically, is there a genuine problem of a lack of objectivity and balance in the programming put forth by public media outlets? Furthermore, if there is a lack of objectivity and balance, what can be done about it absent inappropriate interference in the editorial process? One other glaring issue is the subjective nature of objectivity and balance. How does one measure objectivity? How does one measure balance beyond counting words or using a stopwatch? Is the media, including public media, liberally biased? Or is big media, including big public media, biased in favor of conservative institutions?

Previous attempts at measuring objectivity and balance have failed because of disagreements both on the definitions of the terms and how such concepts can be measured. This was clearly pointed out in the Inspector General's Report that discussed the failed attempt in 1986 to conduct a content analysis of public broadcasting programs. The project was abandoned "after considerable discussion and CPB research" because, among other things, "Many people have tried, but no one has yet determined how to measure objectivity and balance properly."

As the Report goes on to say, "while most people would agree that objectivity and balance are desirable norms, they would not agree on the terms' meaning. Without broad consensus on the meaning of objectivity and balance, it is impossible to measure whether it was being achieved."

To paraphrase political scientist Graham Allison, any person's stance on objectivity depends on where one sits. Bill Marimow, a former NPR executive and ombudsman, now executive editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* says that the vast majority of the complaints he received about bias was directly related to the bias of those making the complaint. "I concluded that 90% of the time, your readers or audience react to stories based not on accuracy, thoroughness and balance, but on their own predisposition or opinion on the issue," he says. "If someone is avidly pro-Israel and you produce a story

that advocates Israel's point of view, they will love the story and if it raises questions about Israel vis-a-vis the Palestinians, they will be upset."

All journalists are trained to report and present stories in an objective and balanced way. Balance means that all sides to a controversy are presented in such a way that the reader, viewer or listener will at least understand and be exposed to more than one side of the story. Objectivity means that the journalist will not approach a story with a pre-set bias. Yet, human nature being what it is, no one can approach a story or any information about a story with total objectivity. One always brings pre-set biases into any situation, whether that it due to religious upbringing, education or exposure to societal norms. Because of that, most journalists say that they cannot be objective, but that they can be fair. Being fair means they can give all sides to a story—even those sides that they do not agree with or understand.

It is because of this that Michael Getler, the current ombudsman for PBS, would like to get rid of the whole objectivity and balance standard that is at the heart of public media regulation and this White Paper. According to Getler, the best solution to the objectivity and balance dilemma is simply to get rid of legislation requiring it. "Balance is used as a club to subdue really hard-nosed unpopular reporting," he says. "Especially as the public has gotten so polarized, they use these things to just batter you. They use it to try to remove hard-nosed reporting from television."

Most of the other ombudsmen are in general agreement on this issue. But that is not to say that they agree with everything produced or broadcast on public media. In fact, their columns are filled with examples of poor or unfair journalism. But they see this as part of the risk associated with marketplace of ideas. There will be mistakes and the test of a solid news organization is whether they correctly deal with those mistakes. According to Mr. Getler, his column "is really an in-house catalog of things that go wrong at a good place, primarily viewer detected missteps." He adds that since he took over as PBS's first ombudsman, there have been fewer issues.

Despite this debate over the value of having an objectivity and balance standard and the difficulty of measuring those values, one can still come up with a set of "best practices" that would allow a news organization or other programming to attempt to achieve this goal. That is what this paper will attempt to do with a list of 13 such "best practices" that public media can put in place that will help in terms of objectivity and balance.

The notion of objectivity and balance in journalism is actually a relatively recent phenomenon, an outgrowth of the development of the profession of journalism over the past century. Even though there is a separate White Paper on conceptual and practical history of objectivity and balance in American journalism, any discussion of best practices must also include a brief history.

This White Paper will focus on the following areas:

• The history of the notion of objectivity and balance in American journalism

including how notions of objectivity and balance extended to broadcast journalism through the Fairness Doctrine. And how standards of objectivity and balance were incorporated in public broadcasting through the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 and the Telecommunications Act of 1992.

- What is "objectivity" and "balance"?
- Results of a comprehensive survey sent to program directors and news directors
  of public broadcasting outlets including PBS, NPR, APM and PRI relating to their
  policies on objectivity and balance focusing on the years 2000 through 2007. A
  similar survey was also sent to commercial broadcasters and those results will be
  analyzed as well.
- A discussion of how new media channels like blogs, podcasting and other Internet-delivery of news and information have impacted editorial standards.
- Best practices when it comes to objectivity and balance.
- Recommendations to CPB as to how to deal with the issue of objectivity and balance as well as to how to systematically deal with criticisms as to any failures in that area.

### A Brief History of Objectivity and Balance in American Journalism

Much of the criticism of American journalism in 2008 (including that which led to the Inspector General's Report) stems from political partisans who strongly believe that the press is biased in a way that is contrary to their own political beliefs. Thus conservatives insist that the mainstream news media, including public broadcasting, has a strong, liberal bias. Those critiques cite a myriad of "evidence" to bolster their contention, from the fact that a survey of journalists show that a vast majority of them have voted for the Democratic candidates in recent elections to the contention that most journalists are supportive of social issues considered to be liberal—from being pro-choice to favoring gay marriage and gun control.

Meanwhile, criticisms from the left tend to focus on the corporate ownership of American media to similar surveys that show the owners of commercial media have contributed to and voted overwhelmingly for Republican candidates. Scott McClellan's recent book about his tenure as White House press secretary bolsters that critique when he says that the mainstream media was complicit in what he calls the propaganda that sold the war in Iraq to the American public.

The modern-day criticisms of the mainstream media really began to take shape during the late 1960s over the coverage of the Vietnam War and shortly after public broadcasting was created. The major vehicle for that criticism was Vice President Spiro Agnew (whose harsh attacks on the press were mostly written by William Safire, later a Pulitzer

Prize winning columnist for *The New York Times*). As press critic Ben Bagdikian wrote in the March/April 1972 edition of the *Columbia Journalism Review*: "Vice President Agnew has succeeded in impressing on a large part of the American public and publishers that the news media of this country are biased in favor of liberalism."

In order to accomplish the goal of this White Paper by examining the role objectivity and balance plays in public media as well as detailing best practices in that regard, it is crucial to briefly examine the history of journalism in America, particularly when it deals with the notion of objectivity and balance.

During the formative years of the United States, the press was staunchly partisan, with newspapers taking the sides of their political patrons. In those days, there was no distinguishing between the news and editorial pages of the newspaper with Republican papers taking aim at the Federalists and Federalist newspapers defending their representatives and attaching the Republicans.

The rhetoric was so harsh that in 1798, less than seven years after the First Amendment was ratified guaranteeing freedom of the press, the Federalist-controlled Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Act aimed directly at newspaper editors. Among the provisions of the Act was jail time for those who defamed Congress or the President.

Twenty-five newspaper editors, mostly Jeffersonian Republicans, were arrested under provisions of the law; 17 were prosecuted and 10 were convicted. The constitutionality of the law was never addressed in court though Thomas Jefferson, assuming the presidency in 1800, pardoned those editors who had been convicted and Congress refunded all the fines.<sup>2</sup> It wasn't until 1964 that the U.S. Supreme Court, in the landmark *New York Times v. Sullivan* case declared, "Although the Sedition Act was never tested in this Court, the attack upon its validity has carried the day in the court of history. These views reflect a broad consensus that the Act, because of the restraint it imposed upon criticism of government and public officials, was inconsistent with the First Amendment."

Following this period of coverage, the press remained relentlessly partisan. President Jefferson, who uttered the famous quote about rather having newspapers without government than a government without newspapers, actually found himself the subject of some withering criticisms. For example, *Richmond Examiner* editor James Callender "charged Jefferson with dishonesty, cowardice and even having sexual relations with a slave woman."

Jefferson's response to the criticism: "Were I to undertake to answer the calumnies of the newspapers, it would be more than all my own time & that of 20 aids could effect. For while I should be answering one, twenty new ones would be invented."

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See Wagman, The First Amendment Book, pg. 45

Even President Andrew Jackson blamed his wife's early death on the press, because of what he called unfounded accusations of their marriage as illegal and sinful.<sup>3</sup>

While the press during those days was a valuable tool as a political weapon, the real change in the way the press approached the news occurred in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the owners of the printing presses decided they would rather make money than score political points. From that came the creation of the "penny press" so named because the newspaper owners decided to sell their product for one cent. The first penny press was the *New York Sun*. Such newspapers were flashy and provocative, the goal being to attract as broad an audience as possible; the notion of alienating half the reading public by favoring one party or candidate over another went by the wayside.

Instead, most of the newspapers took an apolitical approach to the news and focused on working men to give them news and information that they could use. It was during this time where the first notions of objectivity and balance took hold. The evolution of the press as a less partisan forum led to the creation of the "yellow press" where newspapers focused on scandal and sensationalism to drive up circulation. The two major proponents of yellow journalism were Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. The yellow journalism of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century eventually evolved into today's tabloid journalism. Another offshoot of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century journalism was the creation of a group of journalists called muckrakers, who investigated a number of social and economic ills from child labor and sweatshops to unsanitary and dangerous food processing plants. The muckrakers ultimately evolved into today's investigative reporters.

The important element of the press is those days were that the more objective news organizations were the more successful they became. They sold more newspapers, which attracted advertisers. At this time, many colleges and universities began to create journalism programs, starting with the University of Missouri in 1908. The purpose of these journalism programs was to turn journalism from a craft to a profession and teach journalistic standards as well as skills.

Out of this were created the basic watchwords of journalism: accuracy, fairness, balance and objectivity. Journalism schools taught this and newspapers (later radio and television) insisted that these professional standards be met. What this meant was that professional journalists had to be accurate: all the information used in a story was factual and the source of the information was clearly stated; balanced: all sides to a story, issue or controversy was offered to the reader; fair: each of those sides was presented in a light equally fair; and objective: the reporter's personal feelings or beliefs were not interjected in their reporting about the topic.

At the same time, these professional journalistic standards were developing, a new type of media was emerging: radio, followed by television. Unlike print, however, there was not an unlimited spectrum for broadcast media, the federal government decided it had to get involved to determine who should receive broadcast licenses and how those licensees

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See Kees & Phillips, *Nothing Sacred*, pg. 8

should be regulated. The result was that those given a broadcasting license were required to provide access for opposing views as well as equal access to the airways for those running for public office. From the time the Federal Radio Commission was created in the 1920s, (which later turned into the Federal Communications Commission), the major concern was on this notion of equal access and the broadcasting of opposing points of view. Following World War II, this concept eventually morphed into what became known as the Fairness Doctrine.

And it was around the time of the creation of public broadcasting that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Fairness Doctrine was constitutional. Thus, it made perfect sense that the primary requirement of the Fairness Doctrine – that broadcasters be required to grant equal access and all points of view – be codified into the formation of public broadcasting in the form of its objectivity and balance requirements. For it was these notions of objectivity and balance that the Fairness Doctrine attempted to force on commercial broadcasters.

Nevertheless, one of the most interesting developments in the past 20 years when it comes to commercial broadcasting is the eventual disappearance of the Fairness Doctrine. So, at the same time when CPB has been under attack for not enforcing its objectivity and balance standards, those standards have all but disappeared as a requirement for commercial broadcasters. The U.S. Supreme Court first decided in 1984 that the scarcity rationale for requiring the Fairness Doctrine was dissipating as alternate forms of communications technology were developing (at the time, such alternative forms meant cable television; today it would certainly mean the Internet). The Supreme Court said that the Fairness Doctrine would actually serve to squelch the marketplace of ideas and serve to limit rather than enhance speech. The FCC picked up on that, and subsequent court decision and voted 4-0 in 1987 to abolish most of the Fairness Doctrine. The only two provisions left: the personal attack rule that forced individuals or groups that were attacked during a broadcast the opportunity to respond to the attack on the air; and the political editorial rule that allowed a candidate not endorsed by a broadcast station to respond, were repealed in 2000.

Though there have been periodic attempts to reinstate the Fairness Doctrine, primarily from Democrats who see talk radio dominated by conservative voices, so far those efforts have not gone anywhere. The result has been a return in some parts of the mass media to the partisan political attacks of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. For example, in one corner there is Fox News. And in the other corner, there is MSNBC, which discovered that being a counter to Fox News is a lucrative strategy.

Despite the increasing partisanship of a variety of media outlets, particularly talk radio; the FCC was correct in the assessment about the growth of media outlets leading to a proliferation of viewpoints. If one adds in the thousands of Internet sites and bloggers to the mainstream media, it can be said with a fair amount of certainty that there are diverse voices that give rise to all sides of a controversy.

### What is "objectivity" and "balance"?

Most journalists believe that they are under professional obligations to be objective and balanced. Many journalists concede that it is near impossible to be truly objective since everyone comes with their own sets of experiences and biases. These journalists prefer to say that they are fair. In other words, even though they may personally believe in the theory of evolution, they promise to be fair by presenting the opposing viewpoint or viewpoints in a non-pejorative way.

But this objectivity—or fairness—oftentimes proved frustrating. Why, for example, should journalists give equal time and space to global warming deniers if 99% of scientists believe that global warming is a scientific phenomena?

This was the very point made by Forrest Carr, the news director of WFTX-TV Fox 4 in Cape Coral, Florida:

One of the problems you face in assuming that "balance" is a virtue is that the very notion of 'balance' is misleading and, in fact, dishonest.

"Balance" conjures up the image of a scale with two pans suspended in equal weight. Some newsrooms – the "fair and balanced" Fox News Channel, for instance – would have you believe they cover "both sides" and give each side equal weight. But virtually no one believes Fox News is "balanced" in that traditional sense. In point of fact, there are almost always more than two sides to any story. It's a journalist's duty to be diverse in our coverage and that means presenting multiple voices, not just two for any given issue. And journalists seldom if ever give equal time to even two sides, much less several. Newsrooms make editorial decisions about what weight to give the multiple voices we cover, and proceed accordingly.

In fact, this notion of objectivity and balance is often misunderstood. As Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel point out in their seminal book, *The Elements of Journalism*, the original notion of objectivity was to apply a sort of scientific method to the art of journalism because journalists, like anyone else, were filled with preconceived biases:

When the concept originally evolved, it was not meant to imply that journalists were free of bias. Quite the contrary. The term began to appear as part of journalism early in the last century, . . .out of a growing recognition that journalists were full of bias, often unconsciously. Objectivity called for journalists to develop a consistent method of testing information – a transparent approach to evidence – precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*, pg. 72

It is this scientific method that informs the work of great journalists. For example, Mr. Marimow, the Pulitzer Prize winning editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, who served for some time as a top executive at NPR including a brief stint as its ombudsman, says the best investigative reporters spend as much time reporting the defenses of the subjects of their stories as they do the allegations. "If you work as hard at mastering the defense, one of three things will happen," he says. "First, the defense is so anemic and incredible that it strengthens your story. Second, after mastering the defense that has strengths, you will produce a much more nuances nuanced and sophisticated story that will be more credible to your readers. Or finally, the defense is so credible that it turns out you either have no story or a completely different story that you first thought you had."

But according to Mr. Kovach and Mr. Rosenstiel, this original notion of objectivity has been lost into a formulaic approach that tends to measure "balance" by how many words or minutes are devoted to each side. "Balance, for instance, can lead to distortion," they write,

If an overwhelming percentage of scientists, as an example, believe that global warming is a scientific fact, or that some medical treatment is clearly the safest, it is a disservice to citizens and truthfulness to create the impression that the scientific debate is equally split. Unfortunately, all too often journalistic balance is misconstrued to have this kind of almost mathematical meaning, as if a good story is one that has an equal number of quotes from two sides. As journalists know, often there are more than two sides to a story. And sometimes balancing them equally is not a true reflection of reality.

Fairness, in turn, can also be misunderstood if it is seen to be a goal unto itself. Fairness should mean the journalist is being fair to the facts and to a citizen's understanding of them. It should not mean, 'Am I being fair to my sources, so that none of them will be unhappy?' Nor should it mean that journalist asking, "does my story seem fair?' These are subjective judgments that may steer the journalists away from the need to do more to verify her work.<sup>5</sup>

While objectivity, balance and fairness are goals for most professional news organizations, it is simply that, goals as opposed to a mandate. Most professional media organizations believe it is good business and good journalism to try to present news and information is a fair, objective and balanced way. While objectivity and balance is mandated for public broadcasting, there is no such mandate for commercial media outlets. Yet many non-public news organizations have ombudsmen, or standards editors. Many also have training programs that emphasize journalistic values and ethics, including the obligation to be balanced and objective. In fact, almost all the best practices mentioned later in this report stem from activities undertaken by commercial media outlets in order to prove to the public that they are attempting to be as free from bias as possible when presenting news and information.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*, pg. 77

Despite those promises, each year there are always complaints about both commercial and public media that they are biased or unfair. Most of those complaints center on partisan electoral politics. It goes without saying that losing candidates notoriously blame the media for their electoral loss. When newspapers endorse candidates for election, critics often assume that the journalists who work on those newspapers' news sections are biased in favor of the endorsee.

Several elections ago a Vanderbilt University student, wanting to discuss the issue of alleged liberal bias in the news media, approached John Seigenthaler about his newspaper's coverage of a U.S. Senate election. Mr. Seigenthaler, who had served as a top aid to U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy, had returned to The Tennessean in the mid-1960s as the youngest editor in the country. For years afterwards, Republicans in the state had accused Mr. Seigenthaler of running a newspaper that favored Democrats. The Vanderbilt student confronted Mr. Seigenthaler with those charges and the editor brought the student down to the newspaper library where they spent several hours going over the recent Senate election coverage. The result of that analysis: virtually the same amount of inches was devoted to each candidate during the campaign. Most days there was either one story about both candidates or two separate stories about each candidate. When there were two separate stories, they usually ran side-by-side. Now critics would say that the tone of the stories were different – that the Democratic candidate was treated more gently – and that was true to a certain extent. But one reason for that was that the Democratic challenger was not the incumbent and the Republican incumbent was facing allegations of an improper real estate deal.

Was *The Tennessean* objective and balanced? Mr. Seigenthaler believed it was. Certainly it was balanced in terms of play and inches. But was it really objective? Such a determination is difficult to make without examining the context in which all the articles were written.

While *The Tennessean* case is a typical example of where bias is alleged, not all claims about lack of objectivity or fairness revolve around political disputes. In fact, much of the recent claims about such lack of balance involve diversity issues, particularly issues of racial, ethnic and gender balance.

Such was the case involving a major dispute at the *Los Angeles Times* in 2007. The crux of the controversy centered on an article written by *Los Angeles Times* staff writer Mark Arax on the U.S. Congressional resolution concerning the Armenian genocide. The notion of an Armenian genocide had long been controversial among Armenians and Turks. The resolution referred to the targeting of the Armenian population during and after World War I when between one million and one and a half million Armenians were killed. But Turkey has refused to accept the idea that what happened was genocide and vigorously opposed any U.S. congressional resolution to recognize it as such.

Mr. Arax, who is of Armenian origin, had written an article about the battle between Turks and Armenians concerning the congressional resolution, as well as the rift in the

Jewish community between those who sympathized with victims of a holocaust and those who did not want to harm Israel's relationship with Turkey.

But Mr. Arax's article was killed by *Times* Managing Editor Douglas Frantz, a longtime investigative reporter at the *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times* who had spent several years in Turkey reporting for *The New York Times* before becoming managing editor at the *Los Angeles Times*. Mr. Frantz believed that Mr. Arax had a conflict of interest because in 2005, Mr. Arax and five other reporters had signed a joint letter to the editor saying that his newspaper had not complied with its own policy of calling the events in Armenia a "genocide".

According to *LA Observed*, an alternative weekly newspaper in Los Angeles, Mr. Frantz wrote to Mr. Arax saying he had "a conflict of interest that precludes you from writing about the Armenian genocide, and particularly about an ongoing congressional debate about it. Your personal stance on the issue, in my view, prohibits you from writing about the issue objectively."

Mr. Frantz then assigned the story to another member of the *Los Angeles Times* staff. In response, Mr. Arax filed a discrimination complaint against his newspaper and demanded an apology. A group of Armenian-American activists also called for Mr. Frantz' firing. Two months later, Mr. Frantz quit the *Los Angeles Times*. He said one of the main reasons was that the newspaper did not back his decision to block the story for ethical reasons. In an e-mail to *LA Observed*, Mr. Frantz wrote, "I put a hold on a story because of concerns that the reporter had expressed personal views about the topic in a public manner and therefore was not a disinterested party, which is required by our ethics guidelines. My actions were based solely on the journalistic ethics and standards that we follow to ensure that readers of *Times* news coverage are not affected by the personal views of our reporters and editors."

It is not unusual for a journalist's personal views or relationships to come into question when writing about controversial stories. Linda Greenhouse, the former Supreme Court reporter for *The New York Times*, was roundly criticized for marching in a pro-choice demonstration when she was covering a Court that often made abortion-related rulings. Judith Miller, another *New York Times* reporter who was the lead writer on many of the pre-Iraq War weapons of mass destruction stories, was found to have a close source relationship with Iraqi dissident Ahmed Chalabi. In those cases, the reporter's balance and objectivity is questioned because of their personal beliefs or because of the beliefs of their sources.

The Los Angeles Times example is also not unusual in that an aggrieved group took issue with how a media organization presented an issue or event that was meaningful to that group. PBS faced a similar complaint regarding the massive, 15-hour documentary series about World War II, called "The War" produced by famous documentarian Ken Burns.

Before the seven-night documentary even ran, there was a concerted campaign launched by several Hispanic-American groups who strongly criticized the fact that, of the 500

former soldiers who were interviewed (including the 40 who made it on air), none were of Hispanic origin. This involved several months of maneuvering and goes to the heart of the objectivity/balance problem for CPB—the battle between ensuring balance but not treading on artistic or creative expression. Ultimately, Mr. Burns agreed to add two new Hispanic voices and a new Native American voice to the final product lengthening the documentary by 28 minutes.

As Mr. Getler wrote in his ombudsman column after the series ran:

I thought Burns did the right thing in adding these veterans, even though it clearly appeared as though the segments were slapped on to something that sure looked as though it had ended 10 minutes earlier. But the real pity here is that these thoughts did not come earlier to Burns and PBS. Although Hispanics may have indeed been easy to overlook as part of the American war demographic in 1941, Burns set out on this project in 2001, six years ago in an America with a huge Hispanic population and culture. And that should have sent a signal to people, if they have their receptors in place, because it was World War II that also helped propel Hispanic Americans, even though a small group at the time, into a larger place in American society and into what is now a very prominent place.

In both the *Los Angeles Times* case and this PBS case, it was outside agitation from interest groups that forced the media operations to react. And they reacted not just because of that outside pressure, but because those making editorial decisions came to the conclusion that those outside groups had legitimate points of view.

One lesson here could be that rather than mandate objectivity and balance standards or serve as newsroom censors, allow the marketplace to take over. News organizations that bill themselves as following guidelines that insure objectivity and balance and then do not follow such guidelines often find themselves having to justify the decisions that they make.

With this as background, a survey of public and private media was conducted about how those organizations dealt with issues of objectivity and balance. Here are the results of those surveys.

Survey of Public Media Relating to Objectivity and Balance

# **CPB Study On Balance and Objectivity**

1. Does your station have editorial standards?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		93.3%	111
No		6.7%	8
	answere	ed question	119
	skipp	ed question	0

2. Are your editorial standards unique to your station?				
			Response Percent	Response Count
Yes			17.5%	18
No			82.5%	85
answered question		103		
		skippe	ed question	16

3. How are they unique?	
	Response Count
	13
answered question	13
skipped question	106

4. Does your station deal with the issue of balance and objectivity?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		94.2%	98
No		5.8%	6
answered question		104	
skipped question		15	

5. How does your station deal with the issue of balance and objectivity?		
	Response Count	
	77	
answered question	77	
skipped question	42	

6. Does your station do retraining or seminars to reinforce balance and objectivity?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		22.6%	21
No		77.4%	72
answered question		93	
skipped question		26	

7. How often?		
		Response Count
		21
	answered question	21
	skipped question	98

8. What do these training sessions focus on?	
	Response Count
	18
answered question	18
skipped question	101

9. Since the year 2000, have there been any serious objectivity or balance issues brought against your station?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		10.9%	10
No		89.1%	82
answered question		92	
skipped question		27	

10. Please describe these objectivity	or balance issues.	
		Response Count
		9
	answered question	9
	skipped question	110

11. Does your station broadcast online?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		87.8%	79
No		12.2%	11
answered question		90	
skipped question		29	

12. Do you offer any of your shows as podcasts or downloads?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		74.4%	67
No		25.6%	23
	answer	ed question	90
	skipp	ed question	29

13. Is the content you offer online the same as what is broadcast or is there additional or unique content?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Same as broadcast		59.3%	51
There is additional/unique content		40.7%	35
	answere	ed question	86
	skipp	ed question	33

14. What kinds of additional content of	lo you offer online?	
		Response Count
		32
	answered question	32
	skipped question	87

15. Do you offer blogs on your website?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		24.4%	22
No		75.6%	68
	ans	wered question	90
	s	kipped question	29

16. Is there a separate person who covers online content for your station?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		33.3%	30
No		66.7%	60
	answere	ed question	90
	skipp	ed question	29

17. Does this person report to you?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		36.7%	11
No		63.3%	19
	answere	ed question	30
	skippe	ed question	89

18. Who does this person report to?		
		Response Count
		19
	answered question	19
	skipped question	100

19. Are you using the same standards for objectivity and balance that you use for broadcast news when you post Web-only versions of your stories?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		95.6%	86
No		4.4%	4
	answere	ed question	90
	skipp	ed question	29

20. How are they different?		
		Response Count
		3
	answered question	3
	skipped question	116

21. Do you consider blogs to be a credible source of information?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		34.8%	31
No		65.2%	58
	answere	ed question	89
	skippe	ed question	30

22. Why/why not?		
		Response Count
		71
answered qu	estion	71
skipped qu	estion	48

23. Do you use online sources for info	ormation?		
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		92.1%	82
No		7.9%	7
	answere	ed question	89
	skippo	ed question	30

24. Which sources do you use?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Newspaper websites		92.6%	75
Cable news websites		40.7%	33
Government websites		91.4%	74
Organization websites		91.4%	74
Other		24.7%	20
	answere	ed question	81
	skippe	ed question	38

25. If Other, please describe	
	Response Count
	20
answered question	20
skipped question	99

26. What trade organizations do you belong to? (ex. Public Radio News Directors Inc., SPJ, RTNDA)	
	Response Count
	74
answered question	74
skipped question	45

27. What measures have these organizations taken, adopted, or pledged to raise standards or improve performance?		
		Response Count
		52
	answered question	52
	skipped question	67

28. How do you respond to listener criticism?	
	Response Count
	80
answered question	80
skipped question	39

29. Is there a mechanism for listeners to respond to your news or talk programming, such as a comment line or e-mail address?	
	Response Count
	80
answered question	80
skipped question	39

### **Analysis of Public Broadcasting Survey Results**

In order to conduct this survey a sample was created including data from NPR, PBS, and PRI affiliates across the United States. E-mail solicitations were sent to news directors or those with appropriate oversight of the news and public affairs programming at these stations. In all, 318 e-mails were sent, asking participants to click on a link to a survey created with SurveyMonkey. Responses were collected over a period of six weeks.

Of the 318 stations sent emails, 119 stations participated in the survey, and 80 stations completed it. When asked if their station had editorial standards, 111 stations said yes, while just eight said no. Only 18 percent of respondents said that their standards were unique to their station (N = 103). When asked how their standards were unique, seven respondents said that the standards they use were written specifically for their station, and three said that their standards were either written by or reflected their unique community.

One respondent explained, "We are very concerned about fairness and balance, and have applied standards on audio editing which we believe to be unique to our station. We will edit an elected official's remarks for length, but will NOT edit them to make the speaker sound better. The same standard applies to candidates running for office. With the emergence of software editing, it would be possible to make a particular official sound like a much better communicator than he or she might be. We want to be sure we haven't done that."

In terms of objectivity and balance, 94 percent of respondents said that their station dealt specifically with the issues of balance and objectivity (N = 104). When asked how they do this, there were a variety of different answers, but nearly half of the respondents (N = 77) said that they made sure to give all sides equal representation in their stories and programs. Additionally, 43 percent said that they enforced balance and objectivity through editorial guidelines and oversight. Seven respondents mentioned the need to keep personal bias out of reporting, while four others said they make sure that their reporters have no personal interest, financial or otherwise, in the stories that they cover.

Many respondents provided more than one of the above methods. One news director said, "If we cannot provide balance in a single program then we will look at offering a second episode to create a balanced view. Although we don't provide a local newscast, we do try to adhere to standards with our local public affairs programming. We also make sure that our program hosts identify any associations or conflicts with topics or guests. They must either resign to a fill-in host for the particular program or segment-or make their connection known to the audience via an announcement."

Another said, "This usually comes up with controversial stories and election coverage. Reporters are asked to admit their position and decline from doing the story. Most staff members volunteer that information or refuse to take on a story. The story is then

reassigned. All stories must contain prominent viewpoints as well as those more obscure points of view."

A third news director also covered many best practices at once: "We begin with selection of story ideas. Always they are evaluated first by how they serve listeners. When it comes to special projects, we explore whether funding is available for a project only AFTER we've settled on the topic, story and direction, and never is underwriting let in on more than the general topic. We keep reporters away from stories in which they may have a personal interest. But perhaps the most valuable tool to ensure balance is in the story coaching, in which the coach (usually news director) asks a reporter about the depth of the reporting and looks for a broad range of viewpoints to be represented."

Only 23 percent of respondents said that their staffs undergo retraining or seminars to reinforce notions of balance and objectivity (N = 93). Most of the stations that do retraining conduct these trainings annually. In some cases, the training deals specifically with bias and editorial standards, and in other cases these serve as general refresher courses.

Just 11 percent of respondents said that they have had any serious balance or objectivity issues brought against their stations since the year  $2000 \, (N=92)$ . These included a variety of topics, such as voices being excluded from coverage, reporters becoming too involved in a story, and complaints about a station's source of funding for a program or the distributor of the program in question.

As one respondent said, "We often hear from serious people with sincere concerns on all sorts of issues. Often, it seems, people want us to take more of an advocacy role with our news. In the last congressional election we faced what seemed to be an organized campaign, mostly e-mail claiming that we were ignoring a candidate who was challenging our many-term incumbent Republican congressman. It wasn't the case, but it was hard to convince the challengers' passionate supporters."

Another station had to deal with activists when carrying a documentary about water rights issues regarding the Navajo Nation. There were concerns that the station had received funding from the Navajos and state government.

In terms of new media, 88 percent of responding stations broadcast online (N = 90); and 75 percent offer programs as podcasts or downloads. In terms of online content, 59 percent of respondents (N = 86) said that the content that they offer online is the same as what is broadcast over the air, while 41 percent offered unique or additional content. Most of the stations offering unique content included extended versions of interviews that were edited for broadcast, while others posted links to various sites of interest, photos, Web-only features and stories, and streaming of local events that could not be carried by the station over the air.

Only 24 percent of respondents offer blogs on their stations' websites (N = 90).

Sixty of 90 respondents said there was a separate person who covers online content for the station. However, only thirty news directors indicated whether or not this person reported directly to them, and 19 said that this person reported to someone besides the news director. Nine of the 19 reported that the online worker answered to either the station manager or general manager; two said it was the program director; one said the person answered to the head of several departments including the news director, and one reported to the music director since the online content is a music blog. Other responses included the news director's boss, the station's vice-president, the administrative manager, and one person did not know.

Nearly all respondents (96%) said they were using the same standards for objectivity and balance for web-based content as for broadcast content. Only four said that they did not use the same standards, and three provided an explanation of how they differed. These responses included that they just try to post as much content as they can online, the content is not reviewed with these standards because it is raw material, and one station answered that they did not have online content.

When asked if they believed blogs were credible sources of information, 35% (31 of 89) said they thought they were. Most of the positive responses related to the fact that blogs are the voice of the people and provide information about what people want to hear about. These responses also pointed to the notion that blogs could be used as idea generators for stories to report on. On the other hand, 65% did not think blogs were credible sources of information. Reasons here mostly centered on the fact that blogs are opinions by definition. Many respondents said that they could not trust the information provided in blogs because of their opinionated nature and because they did not know who was actually posting. They pointed to the fact that bloggers tend to twist the facts and their sources of information are rarely if ever verified, and some act as reporters when they are not. As one respondent put it, there is a "problem of identifying interest, typically no editorial board or even peer group helping to hold individual bloggers accountable. In such an environment, no one's beliefs get questioned or challenged." However, some respondents acknowledged that not all blogs are bad and some can actually be credible sources of information, but those used must be very carefully chosen. "Besides the occasional unique idea, they also provide a measurement of public sentiment and identify issues of importance to our listeners which can generate follow-up stories," said one news director.

Even though many respondents said they would not use blogs as a source of information, nearly all (82 of the 89 who answered the question) said they used other online sources. These sources of information were newspaper websites (N=75), cable news websites (N=33), government and organization websites (N=74 for each), and other (N=20) which included blogs, Internet news sites, journalism websites, AP, Wikipedia, music sites, and "everything."

Respondents provided a good-sized list when asked what trade organizations they belonged to. The organizations listed most frequently were PRNDI, RTNDA, SPJ, PRPD, and state broadcast associations (N = 48, 24, 15, 13, and 13 respondents

respectively). Other organizations were AIR, NAB, DEI, NPR, AP, PTPA, and NABJ with 5 or less respondents being members of each. The members of these organizations were then asked what measures these organization have taken to raise standards and improve performance, and 52 provided useful responses. Twenty one said the organization provided in-person training with workshops and conferences, 14 said the organization provided codes or guidelines to work from, 7 said they are given ongoing support and information, 6 relied on an organizational manual with guidelines, and 4 relied on a website for guideline information. Many of the PRNDI members referenced the guidebook currently being put together by this organization.

Finally, respondents were asked how they handle feedback from listeners and how they communicate with them. Fifty-two reported that they give a direct response to each listener who has criticism, and 13 take action when required in response to feedback. One news director who covers a very small population remarked, "We do our best to listen to their concerns, and where possible we address them. We do consider whether the concern seems merely individual or is representative of broader community standards (which in our village of 3,000 is not hard to ascertain)." Many of the respondents made a point to say that they take listener criticism seriously and appreciate the listener's opinions, and then they take the appropriate steps to bring the criticism to the attention of the necessary parties to discuss the issue before taking any required action. As one of the respondents put it, "I try to respond to each listener's criticism with a thoughtful and deliberate answer. I take their complaints into consideration and assess whether we need to make changes or adjustments to our coverage." However, one news director admitted, "Many times listeners don't understand FCC rules and regulations, and want to push 'fairness' beyond required bounds." Seventy-seven respondents said they are available through phone and/or email for listeners to contact them with any comments or feedback they may have.

Survey of Commercial Media Relating to Objectivity and Balance

# **CPB Study On Balance and Objectivity**

1. Does your station have editorial sta	andards?		
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		97.8%	44
No		2.2%	1
	answere	ed question	45
	skipped question		0

2. Are your editorial standards unique	to your station?		
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		35.0%	14
No		65.0%	26
	answere	ed question	40
skipped question		5	

3. How are they unique?	
	Response Count
	13
answered question	13
skipped question	32

4. Does your station deal with the issu	ue of balance and objectivity?		
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		100.0%	42
No		0.0%	0
	answere	ed question	42
skipped question		3	

5. How does your station deal with the issue of balance and objectivity?	
	Response Count
	34
answered question	34
skipped question	11

6. Does your station do retraining or seminars to reinforce balance and objectivity?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		41.7%	15
No		58.3%	21
	answere	ed question	36
skipped question		9	

7. How often?	
	Response Count
	14
answered question	14
skipped question	31

8. What do these training sessions focus on?	
	Response Count
	14
answered question	14
skipped question	31

9. Since the year 2000, have there been any serious objectivity or balance issues brought against your station?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		14.3%	5
No		85.7%	30
	answered question		35
skipped question		10	

10. Please describe these objectivity	or balance issues.	
		Response Count
		6
	answered question	6
	skipped question	39

11. Does your station broadcast onlin	e?		
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		68.6%	24
No		31.4%	11
	answere	ed question	35
	skippo	ed question	10

12. Do you offer any of your shows as	s podcasts or downloads?		
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		28.6%	10
No		71.4%	25
	answere	ed question	35
	skipp	ed question	10

13. Is the content you offer online the same as what is broadcast or is there additional or unique content?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Same as broadcast		31.4%	11
There is additional/unique content		68.6%	24
	answered question		35
skipped question		10	

14. What kinds of additional content of	lo you offer online?	
		Response Count
		23
	answered question	23
	skipped question	22

15. Do you offer blogs on your websit	e?		
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		57.1%	20
No		42.9%	15
	answere	ed question	35
	skippe	ed question	10

16. Is there a separate person who covers online content for your station?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		57.1%	20
No		42.9%	15
	answere	ed question	35
	skipp	ed question	10

17. Does this person report to you?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		90.0%	18
No		10.0%	2
	answere	ed question	20
	skippe	ed question	25

18. Who does this person report to?		
		Response Count
		2
	answered question	2
	skipped question	43

19. Are you using the same standards for objectivity and balance that you use for broadcast news when you post Web-only versions of your stories?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		94.3%	33
No		5.7%	2
	answered question		35
skipped question		10	

20. How are they different?		
	Response Count	
	1	
answered question	1	
skipped question	1 44	

21. Do you consider blogs to be a cre	dible source of information?		
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		35.3%	12
No		64.7%	22
	answered question		34
	skippe	ed question	11

22. Why/why not?		
		Response Count
		30
answere	ed question	30
skippe	ed question	15

23. Do you use online sources for information?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		94.1%	32
No		5.9%	2
	answered question		34
skipped question		11	

24. Which sources do you use?			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Newspaper websites		84.4%	27
Cable news websites		71.9%	23
Government websites		87.5%	28
Organization websites		96.9%	31
Other		34.4%	11
	answered question		32
	skipped question		13

25. If Other, please describe	
	Response Count
	9
answered question	9
skipped question	36

26. What trade organizations do you belong to? (ex. Public Radio News Directors Inc., SPJ, RTNDA)		
		Response Count
		31
	answered question	31
	skipped question	14

27. What measures have these organizations taken, adopted, or pledged to raise standards or improve performance?		
		Response Count
		24
	answered question	24
	skipped question	21

28. How do you respond to listener criticism?		
	Response Count	
	31	
answered question	31	
skipped question	14	

29. Is there a mechanism for listeners to respond to your news or talk programming, such as a comment line or e-mail address?		
	Response Count	
	31	
answered question	31	
skipped question	14	

### **Analysis of Commercial Media Survey Results**

Participants in this survey were solicited via e-mail from a list of news directors at commercial television stations across the country. They were given the same type of link and survey that the public stations received. The e-mails went to 436 news directors and responses were collected over a two-week period. There were 45 respondents in all.

All but one of the respondents said that their stations have editorial standards. Of those, 65 percent said that their editorial standards were unique to their station (N = 40). The specific responses given most often dealt with crime coverage or said that their standards were more rigorous than those of other stations. Every respondent (N = 42) said that their station deals with balance and objectivity. When asked how they do this, nearly half of the respondents said that they do so through the editorial process, and just over half said that they make sure to present all sides in a story (N = 35). In terms of training, 42 percent of the news directors said that their station does retraining or seminars to reinforce balance and objectivity (N = 36). The answers were split as to how often training take place, with a slight edge to annual training. Most training dealt with ethics, accuracy, or balance.

Just five respondents said that their stations have had serious objectivity or balance issues since the year 2000 (N = 35). A couple of these issues involved lawsuits from subjects of stories. Of the commercial stations 69 percent broadcast online; 29 percent offer programs as podcasts or downloads; and 69 percent of respondents said that they offer additional or unique content on their websites. The specific answers given most often were Web-only stories or extended versions of interviews, cited by 12 news directors apiece. Others mentioned links, documents associated with on-air stories, photos, and streaming of events not broadcast, with 57 percent offering blogs (N = 35).

The responses for whether or not there was an online content reporter were fairly even with 57% saying that they did have a separate person to cover online-only content. Ninety percent of all respondents said this person reports directly to them, the news director. Of the two that did not report to the news director, one reported to the VP/General Manager and the other reported to the Internet director.

Nearly all respondents (94%) said they used the same standards of objectivity and balance for online content as they do for broadcast news. The only person to respond when asked how they differed explained that online content was considered third-party postings and were therefore not as restricted as broadcast content, but they were monitored for comments that could be offensive either with racial remarks or profanity.

Almost two-thirds of news directors did not believe blogs are a credible source of information for the same reasons the public stations felt they are not credible. Most respondents believed that blogs were mainly opinion, but the real test of credibility lay with the author. There seems to be a general consensus that bloggers do not fact check and so what they write cannot be accepted without further investigation. They also believe that most bloggers have an agenda to promote and their blogs are therefore

automatically biased, unless they know the person is a credible source such as a reporter. However, some still view blogs to be a good starting point to stories that they can then investigate on their own.

Even though respondents did not believe that blogs were always credible sources of information, 94% said they use some type of online sources for information. Of 32 respondents, 31 said they used organization websites, 28 used government websites, 27 used newspaper websites, 23 used cable news websites, and 11 indicated they used some other form of online source including television websites, social networking sites, AP wire service, and "anything and everything."

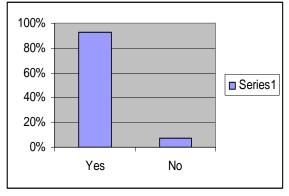
A little more than half of the 45 news directors said they belonged to RTNDA (N = 26), 5 belong to SPJ, 3 to IRE and state organizations, 2 to NPPA, ATAS, NTA, NAB, and 1 to BBB, First Amendment Coalition, APTRA, NATAS, MS AP, and NYSBA. Respondents explained that these organizations have codes of ethics to work by, offer resources for managers, and hold seminars and workshops to provide continuing guidance. When asked what they do to respond to viewer concerns, most news directors explained that they reply to everyone to address their feedback. Usually they will respond directly to the person via the channel through which they were reached, and a few said they address concerns in a weekly segment on their news broadcast. Nearly all respondents indicated that their stations are reachable through phone and/or email.

### **Comparison of Public and Commercial Station Survey Results**

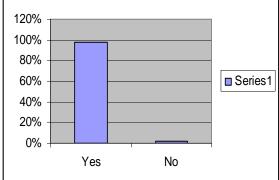
### **Comparison of Survey Answers**

Does your station have editorial standards?

#### **Public**

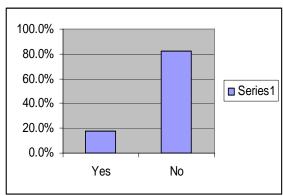


# **Commercial**

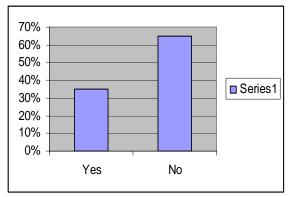


Are your editorial standards unique to your station?

# **Public**

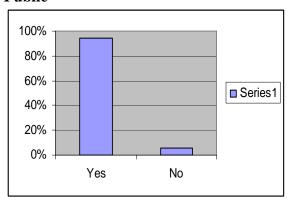


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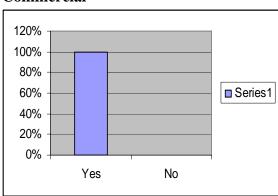


Does your station deal with the issue of balance and objectivity?

**Public** 

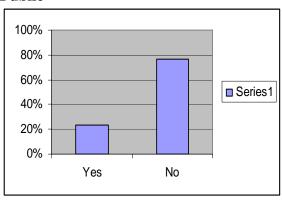


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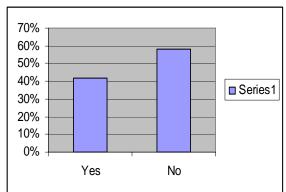


Does your station do retraining or seminars to reinforce balance and objectivity?

# **Public**

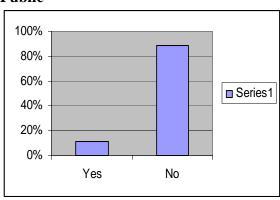


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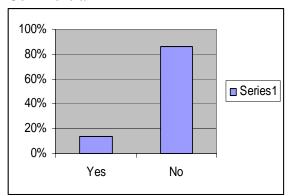


Since the year 2000, have there been any serious objectivity or balance issues brought against your station?

**Public** 

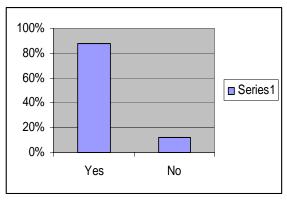


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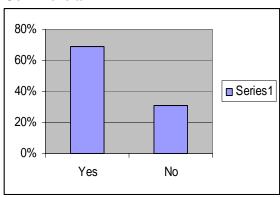


Does your station broadcast online?

**Public** 

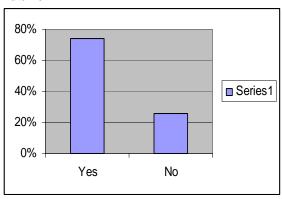


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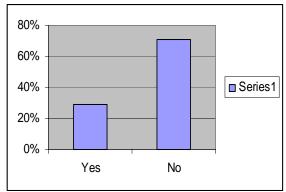


Do you offer any of your shows as podcasts or downloads?

**Public** 

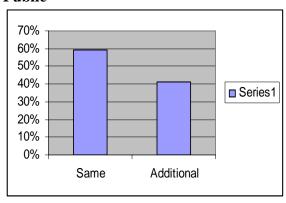


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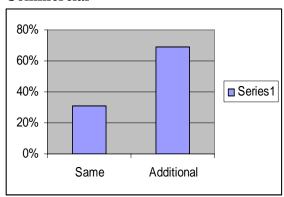


Is the content you offer online the same as what is broadcast or is there additional or unique content?

**Public** 

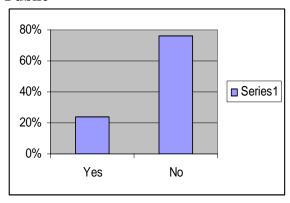


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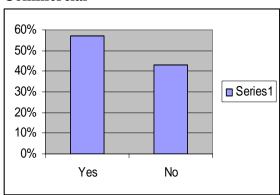


Do you offer blogs on your website?

**Public** 

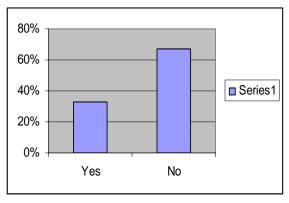


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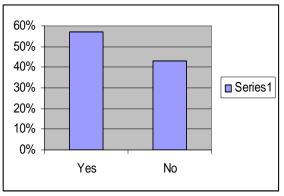


Is there a separate person who covers online content for your station?

**Public** 

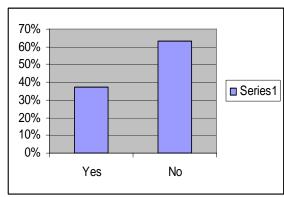


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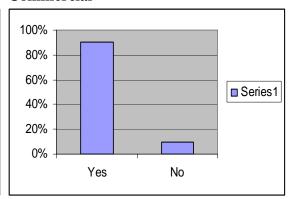


Does this person report to you?

# **Public**

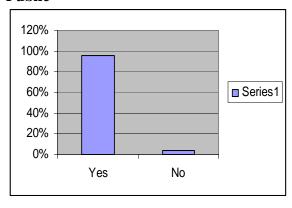


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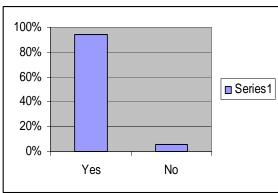


Are you using the same standards for objectivity and balance that you use for broadcast news when you post Web-only versions of your stories?

**Public** 

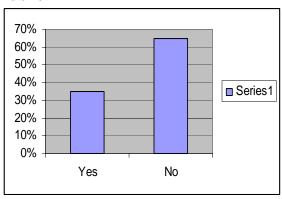


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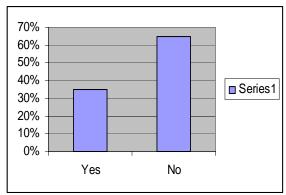


Do you consider blogs to be a credible source of information?

**Public** 

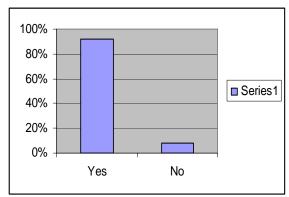


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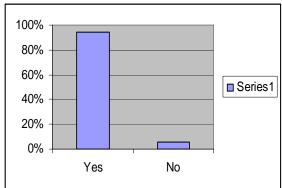


Do you use online sources for information?

**Public** 

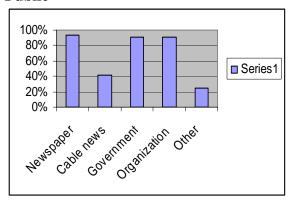


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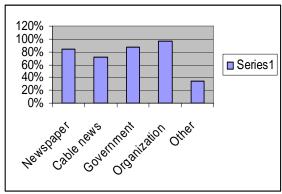


Which sources do you use?

**Public** 



Commercial



### **Analysis of Comparisons Between Public and Commercial Outlets**

Although a similar percentage of public and commercial stations reported having editorial standards, the share of commercial stations that said their standards were unique to their station doubled the share of public stations giving that response (35% to 17.5%). The commercial stations were unanimous in stating that they deal with the issue of balance and objectivity, but six public stations said they did not. However, the ways that both deal with this issue were similar and ranked in mostly the same order.

The percentage of commercial stations that do retraining and seminars was nearly double that of public stations (42% to 23%). Commercial stations also varied more in their training schedules, and most public stations said they ran annual trainings. A similar share of public and commercial stations mentioned specific serious objectivity or balance issues brought against them since the year 2000.

A smaller percentage of commercial stations said they broadcast online; however, this may be due to the fact that the public station sample included both television and radio, while the commercial stations sample included just television. Radio stations can offer online streams of live programming, while television stations do not. Also, sound files are smaller and easier to play and download than video files. Those reasons may also explain why the responses to the question on offering podcasts and downloads are mirror opposites; 74 percent of public stations said yes and 71 percent of commercial stations said no. However, just 40 percent of public stations said that they offer additional or unique content on their websites, while 69 percent of commercial stations do so. There were also differences in the individual responses to content offered; more commercial stations said that they offer Web-only content, and only the commercial stations noted that they post documents that have to do with the stories that they cover. A much higher percentage of commercial stations offer blogs on their websites (57% to just 24% of public stations).

The personnel structures of public and commercial stations also differ in regard to managing online content. Just a third of the public stations said that they have a separate person who covers online content, compared to 57 percent of commercial stations. Only 37 percent of public station news directors said that this online content manager reports to them, but a whopping 90 percent of commercial stations place the online content manager under the news director's authority.

Both commercial and public stations use the same objectivity and balance standards for online and broadcast content, with only a few of each saying no to that question. They also agreed on the credibility of blogs as sources of information, as 65 percent of each said they were not credible. Similar numbers of news directors for both commercial and public stations said that blogs lack accountability or tend to be opinion or agenda-based. However, the share of stations that use online sources for information were both over 90 percent for commercial and public stations. A higher percentage of commercial stations use cable news websites (72% to just 41% of public stations), but responses were similar for newspaper, government, and organization websites for both groups.

The responses for the trade organizations question were naturally different, as public stations have their own groups like Public Radio News Directors Incorporated (PRNDI) and Public Radio Program Directors Association (PRPD) in addition to the organizations to which both public and commercial stations belong. Most of the responding commercial news directors are members of Radio Television News Directors Association (RTNDA), while only a third of public station news directors mentioned that organization. Both groups included members of SPJ, state broadcast associations, and the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). Both groups also mentioned the trainings and codes used by the organizations of which they are members. Both commercial and public stations said that they prefer replying directly to listeners and viewers when they offer criticism, and they both said they are available by telephone and e-mail.

As far as commercial radio stations are concerned, the economic imperatives of the commercial radio business has completely changed the dynamics when it comes to radio news and hence, has also had a major impact on the principles objectivity and balance when it comes to local news. Where there once was a time when every large city had more than a dozen separately owned radio stations, including some all-news radio stations, now most cities are dominated by only a few owners. As the annual "The State of the News Media" Report from Journalism.org points out, "We have moved from a time when every station in a town was separately owned - and maintained its own news department - to a point where each station in a particular area may be owned by one of the large corporate entities," said the Report in 2005. "Even if each of those companies has a central newsroom in the area, all the news in a single market might be coming from a small handful of newsrooms. Assume, for instance, there were 16 stations in a city and they were owned by three companies with three centralized news departments. If each newsroom had two news people, six people would be generating all the news decisions for 16 stations. It's a situation that contributes to making radio increasingly less reliable as a source for local news."6

Prior to this consolidation, many non-public radio stations on the FM frequency carried a substantial amount of news. Now non-public news is carried almost exclusively on the AM dial while most of the programming on those stations comprises talk radio, with the news relegated to a few minutes at the top and bottom of the hour. There are still allnews commercial radio stations in some of the biggest cities, but even that has declined. Chicago used to have two all-news stations: WBBM and WMAQ. But WMAQ went to sports talk, leaving WBBM as the only all-news station in the city. WGN is a combination of news, talk and sport. Wes Bleed, the news director at WGN, says his radio station neither has editorial standards nor does training on issues of objectivity and balance. He says that is unnecessary because the station employs professional journalists. "We have a good caliber of journalists here who have a sense of what is fair," he says. "We talk about fairness in our meetings and we are aware that nobody is totally objective because we all have our built in biases, so we try to be as fair as we can."

Mr. Bleed says because the station does not have an editorial standards manual, it deals with complaints on a case-by-case basis. "Almost every campaign we get emails on both sides," he says. "Why are you guys favoring Bush? Why are you favoring Kerry? Why these fluff stories about Obama? The fact that we've gotten it from both sides indicates that we are doing a good job." However, Mr. Bleed adds that there is nothing he can point to that indicates any best practices the station does to insure objectivity and balance. He said that the interview has prompted him to consider actually putting together a manual.

WSYR radio is the major radio news outlet in Syracuse, New York. It is owned by Clear Channel so it also provides news and sports to the several other Clear Channel owned stations in Central New York. Chris Weidman, the news director at WSYR, says his journalists are trained to contact all sides of a controversial story for a response. In terms

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See The State of the News Media, An Annual Report on American Journalism at www.stateofthenewsmedia.com

of complaints about balance and objectivity, Weidman says, "I would say nothing to my knowledge in recent memory or even distant memory as far as our local news coverage is concerned. There have been citizens' groups that have made it known that they want balance in our talk programming – liberal talk shows – as opposed to us mostly having conservative talk hosts."

## How Digital Media Channels Affect Editorial Standards in Public Broadcasting

Digital media channels are reshaping the way people around the world receive their news and information. New technology has made it faster and easier than ever before to learn about politics, sports, entertainment, or any other type of information. Innovations like blogs, podcasts, audio slideshows, online video, and many others have changed the news business, both for the producer and for the consumer.

Because of this, media outlets must now gauge how much content they should put online, and whether or not to charge fees for that content. But most importantly, media outlets must cope with the challenge of the changing editorial standards brought on by the Internet. Innovations like blogging have evolved into a style all their own, and traditional media is often caught in the middle between their traditional standards and the new Internet standards.

So, how has digital media affected the editorial standards of public broadcasters, in particular National Public Radio (NPR) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)? Not unlike major news outlets around the United States and the world, public broadcasting faces issues of balance, accuracy and objectivity as it moves towards its digital future.

In order to fully gauge the affect of digital media on public broadcasting and its editorial standards, it's necessary to first have an idea of the scope of the digital media undertaking by public broadcasters.

PBS has undergone a large streaming video project, and its Web site now hosts video clips from 23 different shows. Nationally syndicated shows like *Frontline* and *NOW* also have Web sites that feature additional online-only content.

PBS also recently launched a Web site called PBS Engage, which describes itself as "a place for experiments and ideas on social change," where consumers can post feedback on PBS programming. PBS has also had previous ventures in social media over the years, said Mark Glaser, who writes PBS's MediaShift blog focusing on issues and trends within digital media.

Kevin Crane, the vice president of technology and programming for Nashville Public Television, said the PBS stations like his are often behind the curve as far as new media goes. When Crane first arrived at the station in 2000, he started spending \$8,000 a year to create a Web site and put videos for one of the station's shows, "Tennessee Crossroads," that hosted online video.

But what Crane quickly found out was that his audience, mainly adults aged 50 and older, did not embrace new media ventures as he had hoped. As a result, Crane scaled back his online presence at a time when most commercial media outlets were increasing theirs, because for him, it was not cost effective.

"We've been slow with some of our online ventures," Crane said. "But what we've done is in the areas where we were ahead of the curve, we eventually ended up not doing them anymore"

Now, Nashville Public Television is slowly bringing back some of that online content, like re-introducing video onto "Tennessee Crossroads," and adding videos to YouTube. The station will be launching a new Web site next month, and has started a blog to help promote its content. But Crane is still conscientious of overdoing it when it comes to new media. He consistently reminds his Web designer to ask himself, "Is my Mom looking for this?" when he goes about implementing new media. It's for this reason that Crane says his station is now behind the curve with online content.

On the radio side, NPR typically uses new media such as blogs and podcasts to report news. Many of the shows that NPR has been airing for years now have online, supplemental material. For instance, the show "Talk of the Nation" now has an online component, "Blog of the Nation," which encourages listeners to discuss topics from the show by reading and commenting on blog items.

New media is often more prevalent in radio as compared to TV, since radio does more reporting of local news. David Davies, the news director at Texas Public Radio, has used the Internet to expand the reach of his coverage; by offering his station's content streaming through his Web site. He has also started to create specialty online-only content that will utilize a number of new media.

"Right now we're developing a special online documentary project that's going to include things like Google maps and flash programs that you can click on and a movie will pop up and more information," Davies said. "So we realize that that's very important."

And, as opposed to Crane at PBS, Davies said his station is on par with other commercial radio stations in his area, which often have underdeveloped Web sites with little content.

In Detroit, however, WDET Program Director Jerome Vaughn said his station has some catching up to do in the field of online content. He said his station's online presence is minimal, and is often only small online snippets that preclude a story his staff is doing for the radio.

"We're behind the curve in terms of web content," Vaughn said in an e-mail. "I think that's a function of our smaller staff size -- and limited (read not corporate) resources. We are hoping to increase our web presence in the months ahead."

### **Adapting Editorial Standards**

In 2006, the CPB formed what it called a Digital Rights Working Group, to "explore the public television industry's digital right's strategies." The group started by looking at how public television had adapted to the previous technological advances, like radio and TV, and looked at how to adapt its content to serve the issues that other entities were failing to address.

The group then analyzed how the Internet was changing the way people received their information throughout the media landscape:

In our new media world, the audience is learning to create and distribute their own content, using online versions of newspapers (such as blogs), online versions of radio shows (such as podcasts), and, increasingly, online versions of television shows (such as vodcasts and uploaded videos)

It was then observed how new media changes the typical avenue of news producer to news consumer. New Web sites like YouTube have allowed regular people to post content, and interact with other consumers, while circumventing the traditional media outlets like PBS and NPR.

The Digital Rights Working Group has remarked: "As Public Broadcasting explores its public service mandate in the new media space, we can look to aggregators, blogs, and other new media phenomenon to understand how audience behaviors and expectations are changing as they use the Internet to serve their own needs."

The topic of new media was also addressed by the PBS Editorial Standards Review Committee in a June 2005 report. The report clarified that while PBS was extending its content to the Internet, cell phones, and other platforms, editorial standards would remain uniform throughout each one.

The committee did, however, make an addition in terms of digital media. One of the more popular features of new media is the function that allows readers or viewers to comment on material posted on the Internet. The policy stated for that is to enforce some editorial standards when editing user-posted material. "When public feedback is published by PBS, the proposed Standards and Policies instruct that it should be labeled as such and that standards for publication such as those relating to obscenity or personal attacks should be clearly communicated."

NPR has similar policies regarding its online content, in the sense that online content is held to the same editorial standards as traditional media. The beginning of its code of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> http://www.current.org/pbpb/documents/digital-rights-sept06.pdf

<sup>8</sup> www.pbs.org/aboutpbs/pbs\_esrc\_finalreport.pdf

<sup>9</sup> http://www.npr.org/about/ethics/

ethics states that editorial standards are universal across the board: "This code covers all NPR journalists – which for the purposes of this code includes all persons functioning in the News, Programming and Online Divisions as reporters, hosts, newscasters, writers, editors, directors, photographers and producers of news, music or other NPR programming."

# **Challenges to Editorial Standards**

As digital media changes the way information is delivered, it also challenges time-tested editorial standards that have been utilized by public broadcasting for decades. As journalism is often democratized by the Internet blurring the lines between producer and consumer, it is harder to maintain the same editorial standards.

To start, content produced for the Internet does not always have the same editing process as content for traditional media. Tom Scheck, a politics and state government reporter for Minnesota Public Radio, also writes a blog for the station's Web site called Polinaut. He admits that the standards for his blog, as far as editing, are quite different.

"I actually don't get edited for the blog," Scheck said. "Everything else that goes on the air or on the main home page is edited."

Scheck pointed out that if he is posting something that he thinks is questionable in any way, or if he just wants another set of eyes to look at it, he brings it to an editor before putting it on the blog. He said he has not run into any balance, accuracy or objectivity problems with the blog.

That's not to say, though, that blog content closely resembles on-the-air content. Scheck admits that one of the standards that his blog often does not conform to is newsworthiness. For the most part, the blog serves to present spillover content, which may not make it into a broadcast, but that Scheck still deems interesting.

"There's stuff that isn't news, but it's interesting," Scheck said. "And that's where I think the blog comes into play."

Scheck gave an example of a minor bill that was vetoed in April 2008 by Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty. While the vetoing of the bill itself was not considered news and did not make the airwaves, Scheck made a blog post about it for what he considered a quirky reason: the bill was vetoed because its endorsers had made an error drafting the it, and had thus requested that the governor veto the bill.

"That's kind of the thing is sometimes like 'OK, well I heard the governor say something that was interesting or a lawmaker do something that was interesting that I'd never write about and put on the air," Scheck said. "But at the same time it's like you know, people get interested in that kind of thing, and that's kind of an outlet for it."

While a discussion of a bill veto can be considered borderline newsworthy, there are places where it is clear the blog is used more as entertainment than as news. In one recent post, Scheck wrote about the preferred neckwear of politicians at the state capital, and did so by invoking the lyrics to an Outkast rap song.

Posts like that demonstrate the more informal nature of blog content. When he is discussing newsworthy items on the blog, Scheck said that his style is decidedly different than it is on the air, but that was a conscious decision.

"I think that the thing is we kind of just decided we were going to do some things that were a little more off the cuff a little bit more, and it's not like we were trying to say "Let's take a stand on something," Scheck said.

Scheck's blog also, admittedly, strays further from basic principles of only reporting news. While still maintaining objectivity, Scheck said he can draw connections on his blog that he would be more hesitant to do on the air. The example he gave was of a group the governor spoke of in a discussion of tax rankings. While in traditional media, he reported mostly what the governor said, on the blog he analyzed more the background of the group's board of directors, and found them to be very Republican leaning. Scheck said he found the blog more of an appropriate forum for that discussion.

One of the features of Scheck's blog that is more popular is his post called the Daily Digest, a collection of links to other reporting that is relevant to state and local politics. The daily post generally contains little or no original reporting, which is a departure from traditional media content. But it's a practice that NPR addresses in its editorial standards as an accepted one in the new media world: "Wire service material may be more appropriately used in online and other specialized content presentations where firsthand newsgathering is significantly more difficult."

Where Scheck has been careful is in the links section of his blog. While links mostly go to newspapers like the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and other prominent local outlets, there are occasions where Scheck may link to online-only content. That poses issues of balance and objectivity, as independent online-only content doesn't always have to conform to the same editorial standards of traditional media.

To help maintain NPR's editorial standards, Scheck makes an effort to link only to credible media sources that provide original reporting. There have been instances, however, when a non-objective blog provides relevant original reporting. In that case, he makes it clear on his blog that a link is going to a left-leaning or right-leaning source, so as to maintain his own objectivity.

Nonetheless, the trend in new media is toward a blending between journalism and commentary, whether it's in public broadcasting or commercial media. As blogs built a following based on using humor and commentary mixed with news, traditional media have tried to tap into that market, said Jon Glass, general manager of the Collaborative

Media Room at Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and an expert on new media.

"Traditional media wants to have the same kind of audience that bloggers have so they may have to make some decisions as to how their reporter should be able to blog, and discuss issues such as 'Well if we allow him or her to have sort of an opinion slant on their blog, what kind of impact will that have on their ability to be a reporter and cover their beat?" Glass said. "And just sort of balancing that, figuring out what's the best, what's for the best."

While Scheck recognizes the risks of blogs to balance and objectivity, he says he is careful that his blog maintains editorial standards.

Another issue raised by digital media is the depletion of the news cycle. As the Internet has allowed news to be reported at any time of the day or night, it has often pushed outlets to deliver news online faster than ever. As Davies puts it, a Web site does not have to serve a radio station. Both entities are equally important.

"We are thinking Web-first publishing in the sense that if a story is ready to go we'll put it online right now," Davies said. "Why wait? We're not thinking it has to air on the radio station first, it doesn't matter just get it up there."

It would be easy to foresee a situation where in a rush to be the first outlet to report news on the Internet, some editorial standards could be overlooked. Davies insists, though, that his station is careful to wait until a story is ready until it is reported in any of its platforms.

One of NPR's standards for its Web sites is also being challenged: the idea of selling advertisements. Davies said that while his station does not host ads on its site, he does know of numerous stations that do, which he said doesn't break any specific NPR rules, it just goes against standards.

"It's not fantastic, it's well trafficked and it's well promoted and it's got a lot of wealthy, smart people looking at it all the time," Davies said of his station's Web site. "So if we wanted to sell ads we could probably make pretty good money doing it. But we don't, because that's not NPR standards."

### Case Study: Primary Place, a Venture in Citizen Journalism

One of the new terms to make its way into the industry's lexicon through the advent of new media is citizen journalism, or participatory journalism. Numerous commercial media outlets have citizen journalism components: CNN has its iReport feature, where people can submit their own video of news. The Associated Press recently launched a site called nowpublic.com, with its slogan "crowd powered media," where people can post their own news.

Public broadcasting has made its own ventures into citizen journalism as well. One example of this is the Web site primaryplace.com. Jon Greenberg, the executive editor of New Hampshire Public Radio, started the site.

Primary Place was started in July, 2007, with the goal of providing the people of the town of Exeter, N.H., a forum to post and discuss their own news about the 2008 presidential primary. While numerous candidates spend months crossing and re-crossing the state of New Hampshire, average citizens tend to have quite a bit of contact with the campaigns. It was for this reason that Greenberg decided to give them their own forum, to post what they saw and their reactions to it.

New Hampshire Public Radio funds the site, and Greenberg moderates the public forum. Since the scope of the project was relatively small, Greenberg was able to edit every entry posted on the Web site for accuracy, and to make sure it used appropriate language.

While most posts are centered on a citizen's interaction with a candidate, usually through a speech, they also include a clear commentary on the situation. Many posters identify which candidate they support from the outset (or in the headline), and use the majority of the post as advocacy.

This sort of reporting is commonly referred to as citizen journalism, but whether it is deserving of the title "journalism" has been a popular debate in recent years. While people are reporting news of an event, in this case, they often lack some of the core journalistic principles, more notably objectivity.

"Here's what I think is a takeaway from the project," Greenberg said. "It is not objective journalism, and yet it has value in that it begins with the description that someone makes of something outside themselves."

Whether or not it should be deemed journalism, Greenberg did find value in the project for the purposes of his own reporting. By reading the posts on Primary Place and speaking to the site's users, Greenberg was able to inform his own reporting by using that information as background.

"I spent a lot of time in that town, I was there anywhere from one to two to four days a week," Greenberg said. "But still it didn't mean that I was having the right conversations with people at the right times."

Although a public broadcasting station hosts the content, and it is often labeled as journalism, Greenberg said that doesn't mean the site's contributors have to abide by every journalistic standard. Many who post write near the beginning what party they identify with, and if they have chosen who they are going to vote for. Featured on the site are posts with titles such as "A shameless plug for Obama" and "McCain doesn't get it on immigration".

For one particular post, titled "Mike Huckabee for president," an editor's note had to be appended to the beginning:

Editor's Note: This post has a little more opinion than reporting on what Huckabee said but if you understand that the writer favors lower taxes, sees value in continuing the fight in Iraq, and opposes abortion, you can fill in the blanks.

Posts like this that endorse one candidate are interspersed with objective posts, with titles like "Gov. Richardson urges citizen sacrifice". Other citizen media ventures, like the AP's NowPublic, more closely resemble traditional media, in terms of editorial standards.

Blurring the line between supporting a candidate and reporting on that candidate is something that makes his venture unique, Greenberg said. Not unlike blogs previously discussed, this form of digital media can often bring objectivity and commentary closer together than ever before.

Even if someone were to post libelous material, Greenberg and his station would not be held liable, Glaser said. The only way an outlet would be liable is if they were to edit a post and make it libelous in the process. He said in major media outlets, it's more common to see Greenberg's approach of moderating every comment, in comparison to having an open forum without any prior review of the material.

Glaser said that the standard in media has also been to publish disclaimers that separate the content of the citizens from that of the traditional journalists employed by the station. Primary Place has such a disclaimer on the bottom of the Web site: "All posts and comments copyright day of publication by the poster; all other content copyright (c) 2007 New Hampshire Public Radio."

For Greenberg, though, even if a post is a blend between reporting and commentary, it does not mean the content is not useful. "Effectively encouraging the citizens to reflect upon and run whatever they've described through the filter of their own values is useful content," he said.

### Case Study: Sunday Soapbox and the line between journalism and advocacy

For NPR's show "Weekend Edition Sunday," there is an accompanying blog on npr.org, entitled Sunday Soapbox. There, bloggers contribute content relevant to the shows topics to further inform listeners.

One of the blog's contributors, Jacob Soboroff, labels himself both as a "citizen journalist" and a "vlogger." The simpler title is that of "vlogger," since Soboroff generally contributes material in the form of video, often interviews with politicians or other prominent figures.

But the more complicated title he gives himself is "citizen journalist." As Soboroff describes, he took on the title because he has no formal training as a journalist, and began his journalistic career as a normal citizen shooting video in Los Angeles. "I suppose I could cross it out, but I kind of see it as kind of my identity as kind of the formative stage of me doing this kind of thing," he said.

Now, Soboroff contributes to the journalistic efforts of one of the most respected news outlets in the country. But before he was asked to contribute to the Sunday Soapbox blog, he became executive director of Why Tuesday? - a non-profit, non-partisan organization founded in 2005 to "raise awareness about the broken state of America's voting system and to find solutions to increase voter turnout and participation in elections."

Soboroff's dual participation in what he defines as an activist organization and a news organization challenges some long-held editorial standards. NPR's journalists "separate (their) personal opinions - such as an individual's religious beliefs or political ideology - from the subjects (they) are covering."

But he claims that since Why Tuesday? does not lobby for a particular political cause or candidate, that allows him to maintain his objectivity. He likens what he does to a series of articles that appear in *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* that might cause change based on their nature. Soboroff claims that he is objective because he is only pushing for a dialogue on the topic: "We aren't actually advocating for anything other than a dialogue about the state of the voting system."

But a traditional journalist for a major newspaper likely wouldn't be as open with his aspirations as Soboroff is. In his blog at whytuesday.org, he titled a post about *The New York Times* reporting high voter turnout as "Good News from *The New York Times*."

He also produces viral videos — videos that are meant to get people talking, but aren't necessarily journalism. The example Soboroff gave was a video in which he told citizens that the Super Bowl had been moved to Tuesday, to demonstrate the impracticality of holding the presidential election on a Tuesday.

For Soboroff, it may be activism. But that depends on the definition of the word: "If you define it as trying to be a megaphone, trying to facilitate a dialogue as being activist, yeah then that is activist, what we're doing is activism. But if you define activism as specifically pushing for fixes or legislative solutions or real concrete changes, that is not what we're doing."

### Digital Media: Not Always Journalism

In many outlets across public broadcasting, digital media is being utilized in ways other than simply reporting news.

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<sup>10</sup> http://www.whytuesday.org/about/

For Davies, the news director at Texas Public Radio, the Web site is often used to make money for the site. The station lacks the advertising dollars of a commercial radio station because its funding model is based on listeners purchasing subscriptions. But since subscriptions are not necessary to listen to the radio, the Texas Public Radio Web site often offers additional content to listeners in the hopes of generating additional money.

"We see our Web as a way to create an online community with our listeners, because our funding model is that we don't sell commercials," Davies said. "We ask people to become members and give us money."

In other cases, the Web is used more as a promotional tool for a station's traditional content. At Nashville Public Television, Crane hosts a blog that serves to publish information about the station's content. But, he said, it is done in a more vibrant way than typical press releases are. His blogger, who works in the promotions area of the station, tries to write posts that are more exciting than typical press releases, to drum up interests in the station's programs.

"He pretty much is letting people know what NPT is doing, but he's not doing the press releases, so much as behind the scenes," Crane said. "Our news area before was just press releases."

More common than producing original journalism for Web sites is the practice of adding bonus content from shows to the Web site. Crane said documentary producers generally finish their projects with hours of spare footage. In the past, that footage would have never seen the light of day. But now, the Web is allowing his station to not only air that footage, but also increase site traffic by promoting the Web content on the air.

### **Looking Elsewhere**

Aside from CPB-funded organizations, there are other public broadcasting outlets that are making ventures into digital media that could be setting precedents for CPB stations. At KSFR radio in New Mexico, which is affiliated with PRI, news director Bill Dupuy keeps his own personal blog where he often writes about media issues in his market.

Dupuy said he is able to act as both a commentator on his personal time and as an objective reporter when he is working, and that his personal blog has never interfered with his work.

"With the blog, it's independent of the station, although it is mine," Dupuy said. "It's the editor's blog, I state my personal opinion about things, which I don't do on the air. Because it's not official KSFR, I'm free to do that, and I only comment on things or post items that are relevant to my job or the news coverage that we do."

Glass said the issue of personal blogs has become a prevalent issue among commercial media. At the *Palm Beach Post*, where Glass worked prior to the Newhouse school, management put a policy in place for its reporters and personal blogging, which Glass said is becoming a trend in the industry.

"People wanted to write beyond what they were writing for work every day, so there had to be certain limits, or certain discussions as far as how much you could talk about work," Glass said.

# **Predicting Digital Media's Long-Term Effects?**

Overall, it's hard to completely gauge the effect that digital media has had on the editorial standards of public broadcasters. With hundreds of different stations around the country all producing content on a daily basis, having an idea of how editorial standards on the whole are being changed is a difficult task.

What should be considered is that some standards are being changed to the Internet across both public media and commercial media. With content like blogs, a writing style has emerged that is decidedly more candid, that can sometimes include wit and humor. While that's a departure from typical standards of a hard news story, it's done to build an audience on the Web that is used to reading that on independent blogs.

"There's usually a little bit more gray area online then there is in print," Glaser said. "So the standards are somewhat relaxed."

Glaser also said he has seen some of the editorial standards relaxed somewhat for online content in major commercial media outlets. For example, when ABC News broke the Mark Foley scandal in 2006, it did so by reporting on its blog first that it had obtained incriminating e-mails. But Glaser said the outlet was unsure how much it could trust the information, which could have led it to break the story on the blog.

"I don't know that they would have ever gone on TV with that," Glaser said. "But they put it on their blog and it ended up becoming, you know, a huge story."

Overall, digital media is not as prevalent in public media as it is in commercial media. This is due to a couple of reasons. First PBS stations generally have more documentary-style content, and very few have anything comparable to an evening newscast.

This eliminates a need of using new media to report breaking news for public television stations. While many PBS stations put video online, most of the time that video is of shows already aired.

Dawn DeAngelis, the executive producer of "NH Outlook" on New Hampshire Public Television, said her show has been airing online for all of the seven years it has been in

existence. But the show does not produce any additional Web-only content because of funding and priorities, DeAngelis said.

With limited resources, DeAngelis said people are reluctant to devote them to producing Web-only content. But her program is currently researching where its consumers want to receive content, so it can most appropriately allocate its resources.

"We don't know a lot about the browser, people that come in because they're curious about a topic, and those are the people we have to find out more about," DeAngelis said. "Because why build something if that's not what they're coming to us for."

DeAngelis also raised the possibility of taking content from syndicated shows like *Frontline* and linking them to her show's Web site, to add additional content at no extra cost.

Currently, at NPR, people are also skeptical of producing Web-only content. Greenberg said that he has often thought adding content to his radio broadcasts, but doesn't think it would be seen by enough people to make it worth his while. "It's not that the information is worthless," he said. "I just don't think a lot of people are going to see it.

For these reasons, Glaser said that public media, both radio and television, are often behind their commercial media counterparts: "I'd say in general they're a little bit behind there the commercial stations are in it. And that's probably due to having to get more funding to do things, just institutional inertia"

But there have been digital media undertakings at some stations that have caused a rethinking of editorial standards. Citizen media undertakings, like Primary Place at New Hampshire public radio, certainly are not always balanced. Even though that content is hosted by the station's site, and moderated by the station's personnel, it is separated from the content produced by the station's traditional journalists.

As far as standards of accuracy go, those seem to be the least affected. Most television stations aren't posting any breaking news, and therefore have time to give the same editing process towards new media as traditional media.

There is evidence, however, that new media for radio stations reporting news could have problems with it. Davies, the news director for Texas Public Radio, said that new media has meant that his content is going on the Web site before it would normally go on the air. But he said that the editing process is the same for any content

For Scheck, the blogger at Minnesota Public Radio, the editing process is much sparser for his blog than it is for traditional content. He said that can lead to blog content being stigmatized as not as reliable as traditional content. In fact, it has resulted in some of his colleagues in the radio industry shying away from writing blogs. But despite the decrease in editing, he said his standards have not changed. Scheck has also had to make

sure to show transparency when linking to reported material from sources that do not have the same editorial standards that his station does.

Of the eight people involved in producing news-based digital media for public broadcasting who commented for this paper, none said they have had any issues involving editorial standards based on digital media. Most have said any complaints of balance have been directed at the station's traditional content, or its content as a whole, but not because of any ventures in digital media.

Overall, as media outlets move toward ventures online, editorial standards are often in flux. But CPB-funded organizations have had few issues, because they admittedly are often behind the curve in terms of producing new media — whether that is due to lack of funding or a lack of a necessity to include it. And in its digital media ventures, managers of editorial content have been cognizant of the risks involved in digital media, and have taken careful steps to ensure that editorial standards stay intact.

# **Best Practices to Ensure Objectivity and Balance**

The following list of best practices were gleaned from a number of sources including the primary author's experiences in this field, interviews with various parties including ombudsmen and news directors; as well as critics of how public broadcasting has been dealing with the issue of balance and objectivity.

1. **Transparency**: This is the watchword of all great journalism, period. The readers and viewers deserve to know everything about how a story is reported and produced. As Kovach and Rosenstiel write, "If journalists are truth seekers, it must follow that they be honest and truthful with their audiences, too—that they be truth presenters. If nothing else, this responsibility requires that journalists be as open and honest with audiences as they can about what they know and what they don't. How can you claim to be seeking to convey the truth if you're not truthful with the audience in the first place?" <sup>11</sup>

The notion of transparency is particularly true when it comes to issues of balance and objectivity. Complaints in this area would be greatly diminished if journalists or documentary filmmakers explained to their viewers how and why they pursued certain information; how and why they chose the sources they used for the story; and how and why they included certain information and excluded other information. That is not to say there would not be disagreements about how stories were put together, but the transparency about the process is a necessary tool to inform the public about how and why a specific story came to be.

2. **Ombudsmen**: The single most effective tool that media organizations have developed to deal with issues of objectivity and balance has been to hire independent ombudsmen. These ombudsmen generally have a journalistic background and thus, understand journalistic values and principles. They also are able to incorporate journalistic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> From Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*, pg. 80.

techniques to investigate and examine the media organizations they represent. The most effective ombudsmen are those who are contractually independent from the media organization for which they work. Most of them are usually hired for a set term and leave when that term is over. Some can be renewed, but that can be problematic if the ombudsman would like to curry favor with the media organization with the media organization that will determine whether or not the contract will be renewed.

The hiring of ombudsmen at public media is a recent occurrence. Currently, CPB has its own ombudsman, as does PBS and NPR. In interviews with these various ombudsmen, they believe they have been quite effective in terms of spotlighting issues of objectivity and balance and say that the position should continue.

"I really think that having an ombudsman helped a lot," says Jeffrey Dvorkin, NPR's first ombudsman. "It was really good for the public radio system. Just the volume of traffic I received indicates the public wants their opinions heard and acknowledged." But while the umbrella organizations like NPR and PBS have ombudsman, few if any of the affiliate stations have such a person. Generally, that is due to the cost of hiring such a person.

- 3. **Staff to Monitor Complaints**: Mr. Dvorkin says that when he first became ombudsman at NPR he received 1,900 emails in the first six months. He says he received 5,000 emails during his second six months on the job. But in the year before he left, he received 82,000 emails. Obviously, one person cannot deal with that many emails, particularly if they contain complaints that need to be investigated. Most complaints about objectivity and balance or other journalistic misdeeds should first be handled by the staff at the station, which is the object of the complaint or criticism. Most news organizations should designate one staffer who would be responsible for those kinds of mistakes. Only if the viewer or listener is not satisfied with the response she receives, should she then be directed to the ombudsman. That way, the ombudsman would only be receiving complaints that cannot be resolved.
- 4. **Training, including Mid-career Training**: The basic way to deal with issues of objectivity and balance is through journalism education and training. These principles and the broader principles of journalism ethics are part of the backbone of all journalism education programs in the country. It is one of the core competencies required by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), which accredits more than 110 journalism schools in the U.S. and abroad. Among those competencies: graduates should be able to demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles necessary to work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity; and they should be able to critically evaluate their own work as well as others for accuracy, fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness. So, one best practice should be to require all hires to have a formal journalism education.

But such a requirement would be neither practical nor fair. And public media has a reputation for hiring people who do not have a formal journalism education. "NPR is a unique culture, which has its strengths and weaknesses," says Mr. Dvorkin. "Public radio has always treated journalism education and training as a waste of time and a waste of

resources so it becomes a closed shop." The result is that many NPR employees have neither formal journalistic training nor even radio backgrounds. The solution is to require all employees to undergo training, including training in the principles of objectivity and balance. Mr. Dvorkin says that the BBC sets aside two weeks a year where it will do general training for all BBC employees. Such a system could be set up for U.S. public media employees as well.

While journalism education is certainly a good way to inculcate objectivity and balance values to new and young employees, it never hurts to give a refresher course to those veteran employees who have been in a news organization for several years. Virtually all news organizations send their employees to mid-career training. Journalism organizations like Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), and Radio and Televisions News Directors Association (RTNDA) have national and regional conferences where they detail the latest best practices for the professional ranging from how to fill out Freedom of Information Requests to how to operate the latest and newest technologies. Some of that training goes directly to the point Kovach and Rosenstiel make about adopting the scientific method to reporting techniques. There are sessions on precision journalism as well as computer-assisted reporting. Many news organizations require mid-career training though they generally leave it up to the journalist to determine the type of training they can select to fulfill the commitment. It would seem reasonable for those involved in public media to require of their employees some mid-career training that involves issues or principles of objectivity and balance.

5. **Mentoring and Coaching**: Mentoring is the sister to training and many news organizations have formal programs where they assign a veteran journalist to a new hire. The mentor is responsible for inculcating the values of that organization as well as basic journalism values into the new hire. Such a program is particularly useful when new hires do not come from formal journalism programs at a college or university. "The problem with NPR is that it hires a lot of journalists of color and can't retain them," says Mr. Dvorkin. "Part of that is because there is a bad tradition of mentoring and training."

Another part of it, Dvorkin says, is because NPR is unique culture includes a unique combination of American idealism in the grand tradition of volunteerism. "It created a certain amount of 'we can do no wrong, snobbery and self-righteousness," he says. "There is tremendous resistance to change." What happens at an organization like NPR is a form of apprenticeship so it really needs a mentorship program to tell the new employee how the place works. Critics of both public and commercial broadcasting in the area of objectivity and balance often wonder how a biased or unbalanced story made its way on to the airwaves. As mentioned earlier, sometimes that is due to a lack of journalism education or training. But when a specific story gets aired, the more central question is: where were the editors? This is where the notion of coaching comes in.

Unlike training and mentoring, coaching involves going over each individual story with a reporter or producer. In this age of cutbacks, the notion of coaching every story that gets aired seems like an impossible drain on limited financial resources. Nevertheless, having

editors and reporters sit down together to go over a story before it airs might be the best avenue to prevent biased or error-ridden stories from seeing the light of day. "I'm a huge believer in story coaching," says M.L. Schultze, news director at radio station WKSU, an NPR affiliate at Western Kentucky University. "I believe in having good coaching on a story to challenge the reporter on some of the assumptions. Instead of having a one-dimension or two-dimension report we tell all sides to a story. Coaching really handles that." Ms. Schultze combines coaching with an automatic comment mechanism on its Web site that goes to her, the program director and the reporter who worked on the story. "We try to make sure that one of the three of us responds and that the complaint doesn't go into a black hole," she says. "I prefer to respond because I'm not as defensive as the reporter."

- 6. **Bring in the Stars**: As part of a mid-career training regiment, one technique would be to bring in accomplished journalists to lecture or work with the staff. Bill Marimow suggests a series of regional fly-ins. The idea behind fly-ins would be to send the experts to the public media outlets as opposed to sending public media journalists to outside training session. Thus, at least once a year one could bring in Pulitzer-prize winning or Peabody award winning journalists into public media newsrooms to talk about the craft. One could also bring in strong managers to talk about editing and values and how to deal with criticism, both justified and unjustified. More importantly, by developing and organizing such fly-ins or in-house training, public media outlets can guarantee that issues of objectivity and balance will be on the agenda.
- 7. Bring in the Cranks: At least twice a year, bring in your most vociferous critics for a discussion. Every community has a group or group of people who think what the public broadcasting station does is biased (as well as the commercial stations and the local newspaper). Sometimes they have a point; sometimes they don't. Every ombudsman has stories about constantly dealing with organized groups of critics. This is true on the local level as well as the national level. These critics are sometimes ignored, or dealt with when the executive producer engaging in several email or telephone exchanges. Sometimes the executive producer even agrees to meet with the critics. But such exchanges are usually unsatisfactory to both sides. The producer sees it as a waste of time because nothing she says seems to satisfy the critics. The critics don't like dealing with a middleman when they might have a complaint with a specific reporter. One solution is to have a regular roundtable discussion where any and all critics of programming can come in and voice their concerns. The journalists can listen to those concerns and respond accordingly. Such an exchange can go a long way towards ameliorating criticism and, at the least, generate good will as critics understand that the public media organizations is at least will to listen to those concerns.
- 8. **Public Outreach**: Similar to bringing in critics, it is always good practice to regularly bring in members of the public so that they can see how editorial decisions are made. Newspapers have found great success in periodically bringing in members of the public to sit in on the daily news meeting where they decide what stories will end up on the front page. Some news organizations also use those events to ask those members of the public what they like and don't like about the newspaper. It would not be a stretch to also ask

those citizens about objectivity and balance and whether they believe the news organizations is living up to those standards and if not, in what ways.

Another example of this type of public outreach was a tradition at *The Tennessean*, Nashville's morning newspaper. Each day the newspaper would give one of its letters to the editors "three stars" designating it as its most interesting or provocative letter of the day. Then, once a year it would have a "Three Star Letter banquet" at a local hotel and all the winners would be invited and be given an opportunity to comment on anything they wanted, including what they liked and did not like about the newspaper. Such outreach is important and useful to any news organization and lets the public know that their views and concerns are being taken seriously.

9. Monitor the news/programming: Despite Mr. Tomlinson's flawed and disastrous attempt to do a content analysis of Bill Moyers' show, he may have been on to something. A systematic content analysis or other type of research study of one show or a group of shows could provide important insights and information into how various news shows or other programming fare when it comes to all sorts of issues, including objectivity and balance. Ken Bode, CPB's ombudsman, said he proposed one such study to examine how public broadcasting performed in the run-up to the Iraq war. Interestingly, Mr. Bode points out that Mr. Moyers did an admirable job of looking at how media organizations did such a poor job in pre-war coverage but failed to examine public broadcasting's role in that endeavor. "What I thought probably was the biggest problem was 'The NewsHour'," he says. "They had a full-blown bias in favor of going to war. The other side was not presented at all. When Moyers did his piece on the run-up to the war, he did not mention 'The NewsHour' at all." Mr. Bode said he wanted to conduct a study on PBS's coverage of the run-up, but was not allowed to do so.

The reality is that there are schools of journalism and mass communication throughout the country that are well positioned to do such studies and can do them without the type of political agenda that poisoned Mr. Tomlinson's plan. The students who assisted in this White Paper are proof that such studies can be conducted fairly and equitably without any pre-set biases.

10. **Monitor/Disclose Conflicts of Interest**: One aspect of objectivity and balance that goes to the center of perceived problems is the belief that bias permeates news reports and stories because of the conflicts held by the journalists reporting or producing those reports. Those conflicts can be either direct or indirect. An example of a direct conflict of interest would be if a journalist has a financial interest in a company or entity that he or she reports on. An example of an indirect conflict might have to do with a reporter's belief system; perhaps a reporter who is pro-choice reporting on a pro-life demonstration. Virtually all of the journalistic ethics codes discuss such issues of conflict of interest and require that journalists avoid them or, if that is not possible, disclose them. (See Appendix C for copies of various codes of ethics.)

For example, the Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics states that:

#### Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
- Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

Hence, a best practice should be to adhere to the SPJ Code of Ethics by either avoiding such conflicts or disclosing them. So this goes hand and hand with the first best practice of transparency because the audience has the right to know about any and all conflicts that a journalist has and how those conflicts may influence the reporting on a particular topic.

11. **Viewers' Bill of Rights**: This is a concept that Forrest Carr says he created when he worked at the ABC affiliate in Tucson. Mr. Carr, now news director at WFTX-TV Fox 4 in Cape Coral, Florida, says that while he has used an ombudsman in the past, he sees such a role as a third-party go-between connecting consumers to management. Instead, he prefers that viewer complaints go directly to management. As a result, he created the Viewers Bill of Rights that is linked on the station's Web site. The preamble to this bill of rights:

Fox 4 understands that our nation's founders gave special protection to the press with the expectation that a free press would help uphold democracy. We believe this is a pact that gives you, the viewer, certain rights in return.

### Among those rights:

You Have a Right to Ethical Journalism: Fox 4 subscribes to the SPJ and RTNDA Codes of Ethics, which require journalists to seek the truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently and be accountable to the public.

You Have a Right to Be Heard: Fox 4 will seek not just 'both sides' but a wide variety of viewpoints. We will give voice to the voiceless. We will reflect the community in all its diversity.

You Have a Right to Hold Us Accountable: Fox 4 understands that we are among the powerful whom you must hold accountable. We will listen to our viewers, and will regularly and publicly explain our coverage decisions to you. If we make a mistake, we will correct it promptly and prominently.

Mr. Carr says the station takes the feedback, posts it on the Web site and explains itself. (*See Appendix D for copy of Viewers' Bill of Rights.*)

12. **Standards Editor**: Even with ombudsmen, staff to handle complaints, training, mentoring and coaching, the one thing missing to protect a news organization from making mistakes is an internal editor who has the power and authority to fix problem areas before they hit the air. Ombudsmen, for example, usually can only correct a problem after the fact, which means they cannot really correct a problem but simply shed light on it. Reporters and editors can sometimes be so caught up in a story that they miss some glaring problems. Or they are so personally invested in a piece that they fail to see some of the problems.

That is why Michael Getler, PBS' first and only ombudsman, believes that what public broadcasting needs is a standards editor similar to what *The New York Times* has employed for several years. "It might be good for PBS, and maybe even NPR, to have what is called a Standards Editor," he says.

A Standards Editor is one who is available inside a journalistic enterprise and someone you can go to get advice or use as a sounding board on some story that is being prepared, beyond the editors working on the story. He, or she, can give you an opinion, pre-publication, as to whether the story meets the organization's own standards.

This leaves the ombudsman to deal with the product put before readers or viewers, but provides another internal safeguard. This might be more appropriate for PBS, which doesn't produce any content but possibly could use some bolstering of its editorial influence with an internal resource available to the stations and independent documentary makers. This person may not have authority over producers but could be a force nevertheless. NPR has lots of editors but one more with this special role would always help.

13. **Online Resources**: One of the major complaints from organizations like CAMERA is that individual stories reported by NPR are not objective and balanced. "They do a story on conditions in a Palestinian refugee camp, says CAMERA's Eric Rozenman. "They talk to some refugees and they file a report. But they never check the *bona fides*. The report is one-sided. There is no Israeli side. There is no neutral side."

For its part, NPR responds by saying that overall it is objective and balanced and that it certainly provides the Israeli side. But all stories might not have all sides, particularly if one is reporting from a specific battle zone. But Mr. Rozenman rejects that, insisting that all reports should be objective and balanced and if not, NPR has violated its statutory obligations.

All the public broadcasting ombudsmen contacted for this White Paper seemed exasperated at CAMERA's constant criticism of a lack of balance. Though CAMERA often has legitimate points, as Michael Getler says, "My general view is that there are a lot of these groups that are essential pressure groups and lobbying groups and self-interest groups pressing to adopt their language of the Middle East.

In one of his columns, CPB ombudsman Ken Bode evaluated CAMERA's criticisms of two NPR reports and found the criticism lacking. "To suggest that every report from location in Lebanon is inherently unbalanced because it does not include some countervailing, first-hand statement from an Israeli source is a bizarre notion of 'balance.' Turned on its head, every NPR report from Israel involving any aspect of the Middle East conflict would require a similar rejoinder from a source from Lebanon, Syria, Iran, etc." Jeffrey Dvorkin points out that if one examines enough stories on NPR, then the network has been balanced and objective.

But the gist of this criticism is that because every story isn't balanced and objective in and of itself, then the public media outlet has failed in its statutory obligation. This is where the Internet and digital media should and will come to the rescue. Because the Web is immediate and unlimited, public broadcasting outlets can list all of the stories they have done on a particular topic and link those stories together. They can also post the complete scripts of all the stories as well as audio and video in its entirety. "Once we did that, the complaints started to drop," he said.

Another tool that NPR began using was to announce during a commentary that an opposing commentary would be broadcast the following day—or that an opposing commentary had been broadcast the previous week. It would then direct the listener to the Web site where both commentaries are easily accessible as is the transcript of both commentaries.

So online tools are a way to dissipate criticism of the lack of balance and objectivity by giving the listener or viewer an opportunity to themselves access both sides—or all sides—of a controversial story.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

In an ideal world, public media would decide to implement all of the best practices listed above, which would insure objectivity and balance. But given the economic and personnel restraints that govern most public media entities in the United States, such a recommendation is unrealistic. Therefore, here are several recommendations that could be implemented. These recommendations are not meant to be prescriptive, nor are they the only vehicles in which to encourage the values of objectivity and balance.

**1. Establish ombudsmen**. Certainly, PBS, NPR and CPB have all done this within the last decade and it is the single best move to ameliorate criticism that public broadcasting is not balanced or objective. As several ombudsmen have noted, they serve as a form of "safety valve" that insures the public's complaints are both taken seriously and are given an airing. But the ombudsmen are currently responsible for the national headquarters of PBS, NPR and CPB so rarely weigh in on what the affiliates are doing. "There is clearly local stuff I don't see," says PBS's Michael Getler.

The solution is to require that all local public media affiliates retain an independent ombudsman. But that move is not reasonable, given the size and financial constraints of many of the local affiliates.

An alternative would be for those smaller entities to designate a well-regarded faculty member from a local journalism school. Given that so many public media affiliates are already linked with universities, this should not be difficult to accomplish. In addition, many journalism professors would be willing to take on such an assignment for little or no compensation.

- 2. Encourage periodic training. All journalists should receive a variety of mid-career training on issues ranging from changes in technology to dealing with complicated stories. Media organizations like Investigative Reporters and Editors, Society of Professional Journalists and RTNDA have done a superb job of having annual and regional conferences to conduct such training and larger news organizations often bring in trainers. Regional fly-ins are an excellent suggest for public media. But part of all such training should deal with issues of objectivity and fairness.
- 3. **Provide funding for periodic studies.** Ken Bode says that he wanted to undertake a comprehensive study of PBS' coverage of the run-up to the war in Iraq and that he had planned to outsource the study to a university, but was not given permission to do so. That was a mistake since it is exactly those types of studies from outside, disinterested parties that will help public media as they grapple with issues of objectivity and balance. Commissioning this series of White Papers is a good start, but commissioning a series of studies on public media content would be a logical follow-up.
- **4. Encourage interactions with critics.** The public, including critics of public media, have a right to be heard and have their complaints taken seriously. Establishing ombudsmen is a step in that right direction. But those critics should be able to talk directly to employees of public media: reporters; producers; editors; and news directors. Not all criticism is legitimate. Much of CAMERA's numerous criticisms about an anti-

Israel bias has been easily dismissed by all of the ombudsmen after they looked into those complaints. But even CAMERA has had some legitimate complaints that deserve to be investigated and corrected. It is important that those running media organizations not dismiss critics as people with an ax to grind and to listen to what they have to say.

**5. Require Transparency.** Nothing could be more important for public media's credibility than to be transparent in how it reports and presents news and information. The guardians of public media must be open and honest about what they do and how they do it. They must not be defensive or dismissive. And most importantly, they must own up to their mistakes quickly and completely.

# **Appendix A: Background of the Author; Research Assistants**

Mr. Kaplan has been a journalist or journalism educator for more nearly 30 years. A graduate of Vanderbilt University where he received a BA in political science, he also received a master's in journalism from the University of Illinois.

In 1979, he joined the staff of *The Tennessean*, in Nashville, where he covered state government and the state legislature and authored or co-authored several investigative series. His work won several statewide and national awards including a National Headliner Award; a Society of Professional Journalists Green Eyeshade Award and a Best of Gannett. In 1986, an investigative series about U.S. Rep. Bill Boner that he co-wrote was one of three finalists for the Pulitzer Prize in investigative reporting. In 1984, he was selected as a Nieman Fellow to study at Harvard.

In 1986, Mr. Kaplan went to work for the *Chicago Tribune*, where he covered city hall and was also a member of the newspaper's investigative team. In 1987 he contributed to several articles in the newspaper's series investigating the Chicago City Council. That series won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize in investigative reporting. In 1990 he co-authored *Murder of Innocence, The Tragic Life and Final Rampage of Laurie Dann*; published by Warner Books. The book was later turned into a CBS-TV movie.

In 1990, Mr. Kaplan was one of five journalists awarded a Knight Fellowship in Law at Yale Law School, where he received a masters in the study of law. Following that year, he joined the faculty of the Newhouse School, where he continued to publish in a wide variety of newspapers and magazines; and was a contributing editor of Chicago magazine.

In 1996 he was elected to the national board of directors of Investigative Reporters & Editors (IRE), the pre-eminent organization for investigative reporters around the world. He was the only academic member of the board and was re-elected in 1998 and 2000. He served as IRE's treasurer from 2001-2002. He also served as a finalist judge for IRE's annual award competition, including a two-year period as contest committee chair.

Mr. Kaplan was appointed chair of the Newspaper Department at the Newhouse School in 1997 and added the responsibilities of director of the Magazine, Newspaper and Online graduate journalism program in 2001. In 2003 he assumed his current job as associate dean. As associate dean he oversees the 11 professional masters degree programs, which include broadcast journalism; television, radio and film; media management; and new media. He teaches advanced reporting as well as communications law.

\* \* \*

Two graduate students in the Media Studies program at the Newhouse School assisted Mr. Kaplan: David Crider and Melissa Crosby. Mr. Crider helped conduct the survey of the public broadcasting entities and analyzed the results. Ms. Crosby helped analyze the results of the commercial broadcasting operations. Both also conducted interviews and

assisted in the research and writing. Mr. Crider authored the analysis of the survey results. Two undergraduate students: Marc Peters and Kyle Austin did research as to how new media channels such as blogs, podcasting and news-based Internet websites have impacted editorial standards. Mr. Austin authored the section on how new media outlets affect editorial standards. Susan Miller Kaplan, a former librarian at the *Chicago Tribune* who teaches database searching to Newhouse students, was the primary researcher on this project.

# **Appendix B: WFTX-TV Viewers' Bill of Rights**

# 4 In Your Corner Viewers' Bill of Rights

Fox 4 News understands that our nation's founders gave special protection to the press with the expectation that a free press would help uphold democracy. We believe this is a pact that gives you, the viewer, certain rights in return. This "4 In Your Corner Viewers' Bill of Rights" serves as our acknowledgment to you that:

# You Have a Right to Ethical Journalism

Fox 4 subscribes to the SPJ and RTNDA Codes of Ethics, which require journalists to seek the truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently and be accountable to the public.

# You Have a Right to Responsible Newscasts and Promotions

Fox 4 will keep it real. While our presentation style will be conversational, we will avoid sensationalism. We will deliver the content that we promise. We will explain our values, but will not indulge in empty bragging.

# You Have a Right to Service

Fox 4 understands that what we do is all about you, the viewer. We will cover issues of community interest. We will keep the benefit to you in mind in everything we do.

### You Have a Right to Be Heard

Fox 4 will seek not just "both sides" but a wide variety of viewpoints. We will give voice to the voiceless. We will reflect the community in all its diversity.

### You Have a Right to Accountability

Fox 4 believes public officials have a duty to give you answers regarding the public's business. We will champion your right to get those answers and to hold those in power accountable.

### You Have a Right to Positive News

While negative news is unavoidable, Fox 4 acknowledges a responsibility to seek out stories that uplift and inspire the human spirit. When reporting problems, we will also spotlight possible solutions.

### You Have a Right to Straight Facts

Fox 4 understands you have a right to decide. Fox 4 will never tell you what to think but may suggest what to think *about*. We'll present the full facts, distinguish fact from

opinion, and guide you through the facts responsibly.

# You Have a Right to Relevant Crime Coverage

Fox 4 understands that an over-emphasis of crime coverage could create a false impression of danger in the community. We will avoid meaningless crime coverage. We will explain how crime affects you or why you should be concerned. We will spotlight crime trends. We will give stories involving threats to your safety highest priority.

### You Have a Right to Privacy

Fox 4 sometimes must place people or organizations into the news who don't want to be there. When doing so, we will conduct ourselves with respect and compassion. We understand that children deserve special consideration and sensitivity. We will not hound the victims of crime or tragedy, and will exercise care when deciding whether to identify them.

# You Have a Right to Hold Us Accountable

Fox 4 understands that we are among the powerful whom you must hold accountable. We will listen to our viewers, and will regularly and publicly explain our coverage decisions to you. If we make a mistake, we will correct it promptly and prominently.

# **Appendix C: Journalism Associations' Codes of Ethics**

# Radio and Television News Directors Association (RTNDA)

http://www.rtnda.org/pages/best-practices.php

#### **Best Practices**

# **Diversity**

Since 1991, RTNDF's [Radio and Television News Directors Foundation] *Newsroom Diversity Project* has promoted the hiring, training, promotion and retention of women and minority professionals in electronic news with a unique mix of professional training, educational programs and research. The *Project* has actively positioned itself as a key provider of diversity training and awareness for electronic news professionals. RTNDF's affiliate organization, RTNDA, signed a covenant with UNITY and its member organizations to commit to efforts to increase diversity throughout electronic journalism.

## **Ethics**

RTNDF's Journalism Ethics Project reinforces core journalism values and ethical practices among news professionals.

The program's goals are to:

- Encourage high standards of electronic journalism among news professionals and news organizations
- Rebuild public trust in the media through improved journalistic practices
- Premised on the belief that local news organizations and their communities depend on each other to survive and prosper, this project encourages local news organizations to have an ongoing dialogue with the communities they serve.

The ethics project offers:

- Public forums for discussing the role and impact of journalism in society
- Training workshops
- Print and video resources
- Research on public attitudes about electronic news

## Freedom of Information

Check out RTNDA and RTNDF's latest efforts and useful resources in the Freedom of Information section.

## The Future of News

RTNDF's Future of News Project offers some of the timeliest and most relevant industry research and information available on topics such as Digital Television, 24-Hour Regional Cable News, Internet Journalism, Newsroom Web Sites and more.

## **Environmental Journalism**

To help reporters, producers and news directors meet this challenge, RTNDF created the Environmental Journalism Center in 1991. The goal of the Center is to accurately inform

reporters about environmental, science and health issues and to help you cover them in informed and compelling ways.

# Community Journalism

Community Journalism is an effort by RTNDF to help news organizations better serve their communities. The program provides ideas and resources to help stations provide more in-depth coverage in cities and towns across the nation involving local television news, local public and commercial radio stations and, in some cases, local newspapers.

#### News & Terrorism

RTNDA and RTNDF want to help journalists covering the war and issues of national security. Here is a comprehensive, updated list of resources that can help you cope with the changing news environment.

# News Leadership

RTNDF's News Leadership Project works to enhance the leadership skills of local news managers.

## **Ethics**

## **Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct**

#### **PREAMBLE**

Professional electronic journalists should operate as trustees of the public, seek the truth, report it fairly and with integrity and independence, and stand accountable for their actions.

PUBLIC TRUST: Professional electronic journalists should recognize that their first obligation is to the public.

Professional electronic journalists should:

- Understand that any commitment other than service to the public undermines trust and credibility.
- Recognize that service in the public interest creates an obligation to reflect the diversity of the community and guard against oversimplification of issues or events.
- Provide a full range of information to enable the public to make enlightened decisions.
  - \* Fight to ensure that the public's business is conducted in public.

TRUTH: Professional electronic journalists should pursue truth aggressively and present the news accurately, in context, and as completely as possible.

## Professional electronic journalists should:

- Continuously seek the truth.
- Resist distortions that obscure the importance of events.
- Clearly disclose the origin of information and label all material provided by outsiders

## Professional electronic journalists should not:

- Report anything known to be false.
- Manipulate images or sounds in any way that is misleading.
- Plagiarize.
- Present images or sounds that are reenacted without informing the public.

FAIRNESS: Professional electronic journalists should present the news fairly and impartially, placing primary value on significance and relevance.

## Professional electronic journalists should:

- Treat all subjects of news coverage with respect and dignity, showing particular compassion to victims of crime or tragedy.
- Exercise special care when children are involved in a story and give children greater privacy protection than adults.
- Seek to understand the diversity of their community and inform the public without bias or stereotype.
- Present a diversity of expressions, opinions, and ideas in context.
- Present analytical reporting based on professional perspective, not personal bias.
- Respect the right to a fair trial.

INTEGRITY: Professional electronic journalists should present the news with integrity and decency, avoiding real or perceived conflicts of interest, and respect the dignity and intelligence of the audience as well as the subjects of news.

# Professional electronic journalists should:

- Identify sources whenever possible. Confidential sources should be used only when it is clearly in the public interest to gather or convey important information or when a person providing information might be harmed. Journalists should keep all commitments to protect a confidential source.
- Clearly label opinion and commentary.
- Guard against extended coverage of events or individuals that fails to significantly advance a story, place the event in context, or add to the public knowledge.
- Refrain from contacting participants in violent situations while the situation is in progress.

- Use technological tools with skill and thoughtfulness, avoiding techniques that skew facts, distort reality, or sensationalize events.
- Use surreptitious newsgathering techniques, including hidden cameras or microphones, only if there is no other way to obtain stories of significant public importance and only if the technique is explained to the audience.
- Disseminate the private transmissions of other news organizations only with permission.

# Professional electronic journalists should not:

- Pay news sources who have a vested interest in a story.
- Accept gifts, favors, or compensation from those who might seek to influence coverage.
- Engage in activities that may compromise their integrity or independence.

INDEPENDENCE: Professional electronic journalists should defend the independence of all journalists from those seeking influence or control over news content.

# Professional electronic journalists should:

- Gather and report news without fear or favor, and vigorously resist undue influence from any outside forces, including advertisers, sources, story subjects, powerful individuals, and special interest groups.
- Resist those who would seek to buy or politically influence news content or who would seek to intimidate those who gather and disseminate the news.
- Determine news content solely through editorial judgment and not as the result of outside influence.
- Resist any self-interest or peer pressure that might erode journalistic duty and service to the public.
- Recognize that sponsorship of the news will not be used in any way to determine, restrict, or manipulate content.
- Refuse to allow the interests of ownership or management to influence news judgment and content inappropriately.
- Defend the rights of the free press for all journalists, recognizing that any professional or government licensing of journalists is a violation of that freedom.

ACCOUNTABILITY: Professional electronic journalists should recognize that they are accountable for their actions to the public, the profession, and themselves.

# Professional electronic journalists should:

- Actively encourage adherence to these standards by all journalists and their employers.
- Respond to public concerns. Investigate complaints and correct errors promptly and with as much prominence as the original report.

- Explain journalistic processes to the public, especially when practices spark questions or controversy.
- Recognize that professional electronic journalists are duty-bound to conduct themselves ethically.
- Refrain from ordering or encouraging courses of action that would force employees to commit an unethical act.
- Carefully listen to employees who raise ethical objections and create environments in which such objections and discussions are encouraged.
- Seek support for and provide opportunities to train employees in ethical decisionmaking.

In meeting its responsibility to the profession of electronic journalism, RTNDA has created this code to identify important issues, to serve as a guide for its members, to facilitate self-scrutiny, and to shape future debate.

Adopted at RTNDA2000 in Minneapolis September 14, 2000.

# **Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ)**

#### Preamble

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.

# **Seek Truth and Report It**

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

## Journalists should:

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
- Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.

- Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.
- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story
- Never plagiarize.
- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
- Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.
- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.
- Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
- Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.

# **Minimize Harm**

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.

#### Journalists should:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage.
   Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
  - Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort.
- Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention.
- Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.

- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

## **Act Independently**

Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.

## Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary
  employment, political involvement, public office and service in community
  organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
- Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

#### Be Accountable

Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

#### Journalists should:

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

The SPJ Code of Ethics is voluntarily embraced by thousands of writers, editors and other news professionals. The present version of the code was adopted by the 1996 SPJ National Convention, after months of study and debate among the Society's members.

Sigma Delta Chi's first Code of Ethics was borrowed from the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1926. In 1973, Sigma Delta Chi wrote its own code, which was revised in 1984, 1987 and 1996.

# National Press Photographers Association (NPPA)

#### **NPPA Code of Ethics**

For further details about NPPA's rules and guidelines for professional behavior, see the NPPA Bylaws.

http://www.nppa.org/professional\_development/business\_practices/ethics.html

#### Preamble

The National Press Photographers Association, a professional society that promotes the highest standards in photojournalism, acknowledges concern for every person's need both to be fully informed about public events and to be recognized as part of the world in which we live.

Photojournalists operate as trustees of the public. Our primary role is to report visually on the significant events and on the varied viewpoints in our common world. Our primary goal is the faithful and comprehensive depiction of the subject at hand. As photojournalists, we have the responsibility to document society and to preserve its history through images.

Photographic and video images can reveal great truths, expose wrongdoing and neglect, inspire hope and understanding and connect people around the globe through the language of visual understanding. Photographs can also cause great harm if they are callously intrusive or are manipulated.

This code is intended to promote the highest quality in all forms of photojournalism and to strengthen public confidence in the profession. It is also meant to serve as an educational tool both for those who practice and for those who appreciate photojournalism. To that end, The National Press Photographers Association sets forth the following Code of Ethics:

#### Code of Ethics

Photojournalists and those who manage visual news productions are accountable for upholding the following standards in their daily work:

- Be accurate and comprehensive in the representation of subjects.
- Resist being manipulated by staged photo opportunities.
- Be complete and provide context when photographing or recording subjects.
   Avoid stereotyping individuals and groups. Recognize and work to avoid presenting one's own biases in the work.
- Treat all subjects with respect and dignity. Give special consideration to vulnerable subjects and compassion to victims of crime or tragedy. Intrude on private moments of grief only when the public has an overriding and justifiable need to see.

- While photographing subjects do not intentionally contribute to, alter, or seek to alter or influence events.
- Editing should maintain the integrity of the photographic images' content and context. Do not manipulate images or add or alter sound in any way that can mislead viewers or misrepresent subjects.
- Do not pay sources or subjects or reward them materially for information or participation.
- Do not accept gifts, favors, or compensation from those who might seek to influence coverage.
- Do not intentionally sabotage the efforts of other journalists.

# Ideally, photojournalists should:

- Strive to ensure that the public's business is conducted in public. Defend the rights of access for all journalists.
- Think proactively, as a student of psychology, sociology, politics and art to develop a unique vision and presentation. Work with a voracious appetite for current events and contemporary visual media.
- Strive for total and unrestricted access to subjects, recommend alternatives to shallow or rushed opportunities, seek a diversity of viewpoints, and work to show unpopular or unnoticed points of view.
- Avoid political, civic and business involvements or other employment that compromise or give the appearance of compromising one's own journalistic independence.
- Strive to be unobtrusive and humble in dealing with subjects.
- Respect the integrity of the photographic moment.
- Strive by example and influence to maintain the spirit and high standards
  expressed in this code. When confronted with situations in which the proper
  action is not clear, seek the counsel of those who exhibit the highest standards of
  the profession. Photojournalists should continuously study their craft and the
  ethics that guide it.

# **National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ)**

#### CODE OF ETHICS

Adopted by the members of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists on April 27, 1985

#### PREAMBLE

The First Amendment, protecting freedom of expression from abridgment by any law, guarantees to the people through their press a constitutional right, and thereby places on journalists a particular responsibility.

The right of people to receive truthful information about events of public interest and to exercise freedom of expression are two of the pillars of a democratic way of life. Journalists, within our daily tasks in the various media, are depositories and guardians of this right and this freedom which belongs to all.

Thus journalism demands of its practitioners not only industry and knowledge, but also the pursuit of a standard of integrity proportionate to the journalist's singular obligation.

A free press has responsibilities to all segments of society. We must recognize that society can best be served by media outlets that represent all those segments. Therefore, we must encourage opportunities for all media to have equal access to news sources regardless of style, orientation, language and/or audience.

Hispanic journalism tradition, of which we are heirs, is in fact one of the main contributions which Hispanics give toward the betterment of society in the United States of America. With the goal of guaranteeing the right of expression and the right of the people to be informed, we the members of the Hispanic Journalists, proud of our heritage, adopt the following Code of Ethics.

## ARTICLE 1

The abilities and values of news professionals are enhanced by diversity of expertise interests and backgrounds. As Hispanics, we are blessed with the opportunity to live and appreciate more than one language and culture. We should be especially aware of the advantages cultural pluralism presents and encourage it.

#### **ARTICLE 2**

The journalist will make every effort to present a proper and just image of those groups which make up society. Thus, he/she will not promote prejudicial or ethnic slurs nor attacks upon a person's honesty.

## ARTICLE 3

The news organization should serve as a constructive critic of all segments of society. It should vigorously expose wrongdoing or misuse of power, public or private. Editorially, it should advocate needed reform or innovation in the public interest.

## **ARTICLE 4**

The journalist will endeavor to present an honest version of the news coverage assigned to him/her and should avoid practices that would conflict with the ability to report and present news in a fair and unbiased manner. He/she will show all sides of every valid controversy. This also includes the reporting of background news and the clarification, with facts, of any allegations which the journalist deems false or misleading.

#### ARTICLE 5

The journalist will not accept remunerations from outside sources to cover or alter news or editorials.

## **ARTICLE 6**

Pledges of confidentiality to news sources must be honored at all costs. Whenever possible, the journalist will endeavor to obtain information from identifiable sources and will not abuse anonymous sources.

## ARTICLE 7

The journalist will not serve as an auxiliary or agent to a police force, nor surrender voluntarily material which he/she receives or produces as part of his/her professional duties, nor as a journalist will he/she be available to judge those accused in a court of law.

#### **ARTICLE 8**

The journalist has the constitutional right to participate in public life and the tradition to express his/her opinions as a journalist through the appropriate medium. However, in order to maintain public trust in his/her honesty and to prevent situations which might create reasonable doubts about his/her integrity, the journalist must not accept renumerations from sources he/she covers, nor use his/her professional status as a representative of the public for selfish or other unworthy motives.

#### **ARTICLE 9**

Journalists must respect the rights of people involved in the news, observe the common standards of decency and stand accountable to the public for the fairness and accuracy of their news reports. Persons publicly accused must be given the earliest opportunity to respond. Substantive errors must be admitted and corrected promptly and prominently.

# ARTICLE 10

We as the National Association of Hispanic Journalists uphold this Code of Ethics and will actively promote it. Any violations brought to the attention of NAHJ will be promptly considered and, if necessary, acted upon.

# **Associated Press (AP)**

#### **Code of Ethics for Associated Press**

02/16/2006

#### THE ASSOCIATED PRESS STATEMENT OF NEWS VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

For more than a century and a half, men and women of The Associated Press have had the privilege of bringing truth to the world. They have gone to great lengths, overcome great obstacles – and, too often, made great and horrific sacrifices – to ensure that the news was reported quickly, accurately and honestly. Our efforts have been rewarded with trust: More people in more places get their news from the AP than from any other source.

In the 21st century, that news is transmitted in more ways than ever before – in print, on the air and on the Web, with words, images, graphics, sounds and video. But always and in all media, we insist on the highest standards of integrity and ethical behavior when we gather and deliver the news.

That means we abhor inaccuracies, carelessness, bias or distortions. It means we will not knowingly introduce false information into material intended for publication or broadcast; nor will we alter photo or image content. Quotations must be accurate, and precise.

It means we always strive to identify all the sources of our information, shielding them with anonymity only when they insist upon it and when they provide vital information – not opinion or speculation; when there is no other way to obtain that information; and when we know the source is knowledgeable and reliable.

It means we don't plagiarize.

It means we avoid behavior or activities that create a conflict of interest and compromise our ability to report the news fairly and accurately, uninfluenced by any person or action.

It means we don't misidentify or misrepresent ourselves to get a story. When we seek an interview, we identify ourselves as AP journalists.

It means we don't pay newsmakers for interviews, to take their photographs or to film or record them.

It means we must be fair. Whenever we portray someone in a negative light, we must make a real effort to obtain a response from that person. When mistakes are made, they must be corrected – fully, quickly and ungrudgingly.

And ultimately, it means it is the responsibility of every one of us to ensure that these standards are upheld. Any time a question is raised about any aspect of our work, it

should be taken seriously.

"I have no thought of saying The Associated Press is perfect. The frailties of human nature attach to it," wrote Melville Stone, the great general manager of the AP. But he went on to say that "the thing it is striving for is a truthful, unbiased report of the world's happenings ... ethical in the highest degree."

He wrote those words in 1914. They are true today.

\* \* \*

The policies set forth in these pages are central to the AP's mission; any failure to abide by them is subject to review, and could result in disciplinary action, ranging from admonishment to dismissal, depending on the gravity of the infraction.

# STANDARDS AND PRACTICES ANONYMOUS SOURCES:

Transparency is critical to our credibility with the public and our subscribers. Whenever possible, we pursue information on the record. When a newsmaker insists on background or off-the-record ground rules, we must adhere to a strict set of guidelines, enforced by AP news managers.

Under AP's rules, material from anonymous sources may be used only if:

- The material is information and not opinion or speculation, and is vital to the news report.
- The information is not available except under the conditions of anonymity imposed by the source.
- The source is reliable, and in a position to have accurate information.

Reporters who intend to use material from anonymous sources must get approval from their news manager before sending the story to the desk. The manager is responsible for vetting the material and making sure it meets AP guidelines. The manager must know the identity of the source, and is obligated, like the reporter, to keep the source's identity confidential. Only after they are assured that the source material has been vetted should editors allow it to be transmitted.

Reporters should proceed with interviews on the assumption they are on the record. If the source wants to set conditions, these should be negotiated at the start of the interview. At the end of the interview, the reporter should try once again to move some or all of the information back on the record.

Before agreeing to use anonymous source material, the reporter should ask how the source knows the information is accurate, ensuring that the source has direct knowledge. Reporters may not agree to a source's request that AP not pursue additional comment or information.

The AP routinely seeks and requires more than one source. Stories should be held while attempts are made to reach additional sources for confirmation or elaboration. In rare cases, one source will be sufficient – when material comes from an authoritative figure who provides information so detailed that there is no question of its accuracy.

We must explain in the story why the source requested anonymity. And, when it's relevant, we must describe the source's motive for disclosing the information. If the story hinges on documents, as opposed to interviews, the reporter must describe how the documents were obtained, at least to the extent possible.

The story also must provide attribution that establishes the source's credibility; simply quoting "a source" is not allowed. We should be as descriptive as possible: "according to top White House aides" or "a senior official in the British Foreign Office." The description of a source must never be altered without consulting the reporter.

We must not say that a person declined comment when he or she is already quoted anonymously. And we should not attribute information to anonymous sources when it is obvious or well known. We should just state the information as fact.

Stories that use anonymous sources must carry a reporter's byline. If a reporter other than the bylined staffer contributes anonymous material to a story, that reporter should be given credit as a contributor to the story.

And all complaints and questions about the authenticity or veracity of anonymous material – from inside or outside the AP – must be promptly brought to the news manager's attention.

Not everyone understands "off the record" or "on background" to mean the same things. Before any interview in which any degree of anonymity is expected, there should be a discussion in which the ground rules are set explicitly.

#### These are the AP's definitions:

- On the record. The information can be used with no caveats, quoting the source by name.
- Off the record. The information cannot be used for publication.
- Background. The information can be published but only under conditions
  negotiated with the source. Generally, the sources do not want their names
  published but will agree to a description of their position. AP reporters should
  object vigorously when a source wants to brief a group of reporters on
  background and try to persuade the source to put the briefing on the record. These
  background briefings have become routine in many venues, especially with
  government officials.

• Deep background. The information can be used but without attribution. The source does not want to be identified in any way, even on condition of anonymity.

In general, information obtained under any of these circumstances can be pursued with other sources to be placed on the record.

ANONYMOUS SOURCES IN MATERIAL FROM OTHER NEWS SOURCES: Reports from other news organizations based on anonymous sources require the most careful scrutiny when we consider them for our report.

AP's basic rules for anonymous-source material apply to pickups as they do in our own reporting: The material must be factual and obtainable no other way. The story must be truly significant and newsworthy. Use of sourced material must be authorized by a manager. The story must be balanced, and comment must be sought.

Further, before picking up such a story we must make a bona fide effort to get it on the record, or, at a minimum, confirm it through our own sources. We shouldn't hesitate to hold the story if we have any doubts. If the source material is ultimately used, it must be attributed to the originating member and note their description of their sources.

## **AUDIO:**

AP's audio actualities must always tell the truth. We do not alter or manipulate the content of a newsmaker actuality in any way. Voice reports by AP correspondents may be edited to remove pauses or stumbles.

The AP does permit the use of the subtle, standard audio processing methods of normalization of levels, general volume adjustments, equalization to make the sound clearer, noise reduction to reduce extraneous sounds such as telephone line noise, and fading in and out of the start and end of sound bites \_ provided the use of these methods does not conceal, obscure, remove or otherwise alter the content, or any portion of the content, of the audio. When an employee has questions about the use of such methods or the AP's requirements and limitations on audio editing, he or she should contact the desk supervisor prior to the transmission of any audio.

#### **BYLINES:**

Bylines may be used only if the journalist was in the datelined location to gather the information reported. If a reporter in the field provides information to a staffer who writes the story, the reporter in the field gets the byline, unless the editor in charge determines that the byline should more properly go to the writer.

We give bylines to photographers, broadcast reporters and TV crew members who provide information without which there would be no story.

If multiple staffers report the story, the byline is the editor's judgment call. In general, the byline should go to the staffer who reported the key facts. Or, one staffer can take the

byline for one cycle, and another for the following cycle.

A double byline or editor's note also can be used when more than one staffer makes a substantial contribution to the reporting or writing of a story. Credit lines recognize reporting contributions that are notable but don't call for a double byline.

If either of the staffers with a double byline was not in the datelined location, we should say who was where in a note at the story's end.

For roundups, the byline goes to the writer, with credit in an editor's note to the reporters who contributed substantial information.

Regarding credits for staffers who do voice or on-camera work: We do not use pseudonyms or "air names." Any exceptions – for instance, if a staffer has been known professionally by an air name for some time – must be approved by a manager.

## CORRECTIONS/CORRECTIVES:

Staffers must notify supervisory editors as soon as possible of errors or potential errors, whether in their work or that of a colleague. Every effort should be made to contact the staffer and his or her supervisor before a correction is moved.

When we're wrong, we must say so as soon as possible. When we make a correction in the current cycle, we point out the error and its fix in the editor's note. A correction must always be labeled a correction in the editor's note. We do not use euphemisms such as "recasts," "fixes," "clarifies" or "changes" when correcting a factual error.

A corrective corrects a mistake from a previous cycle. The AP asks papers or broadcasters that used the erroneous information to use the corrective, too.

For corrections on live, online stories, we overwrite the previous version. We send separate corrective stories online as warranted.

For graphics, we clearly label a correction with a FIX logo or bug, and clearly identify the material that has been corrected.

For photos, we move a caption correction and retransmit the photo with a corrected caption, clearly labeled as a retransmission to correct an error.

For video, corrections in scripts and/or shotlists are sent to clients as an advisory and are labeled as such.

For live broadcasts, we correct errors in the same newscast if at all possible. If not, we make sure the corrected information is used in the next appropriate live segment. Audio correspondent reports that contain factual errors are eliminated and, when possible, replaced with corrected reports.

#### **DATELINES:**

A dateline tells the reader where we obtained the basic information for a story. In contrast, a byline tells the reader that a reporter was at the site of the dateline.

When a datelined story contains supplementary information obtained in another location – say, when an official in Washington comments on a disaster elsewhere – we should note it in the story.

The dateline for video or audio must be the location where the events depicted actually occurred. For voice work, the dateline must be the location from which the reporter is speaking. If a reporter covers a story in one location but does a live report from a filing point in another location, the dateline is the filing point.

## **FABRICATIONS:**

Nothing in our news report – words, photos, graphics, sound or video – may be fabricated. We don't use pseudonyms, composite characters or fictional names, ages, places or dates. We don't stage or re-enact events for the camera or microphone, and we don't use sound effects or substitute video or audio from one event to another. We do not "cheat" sound by adding audio to embellish or fabricate an event. A senior editor must be consulted prior to the introduction of any neutral sound (ambient sound that does not affect the editorial meaning but corrects a technical fault).

We do not ask people to pose for photos unless we are making a portrait and then we clearly state that in the caption. We explain in the caption the circumstances under which photographs are made. If someone is asked to pose for photographs by third parties and that is reflected in AP-produced images, we say so in the caption. Such wording would be: ``XXX poses for photos.''

## **GRAPHICS:**

We use only authoritative sources. We do not project, surmise or estimate in a graphic. We create work only from what we know.

We post or move a locator map only when we can confirm the location ourselves. We create charts at visually proper perspectives to give an accurate representation of data. The information must be clear and concise. We do not skew or alter data to fit a visual need.

We credit our sources on every graphic, including graphics for which AP journalists have created the data set or database.

# **IMAGES**:

AP pictures must always tell the truth. We do not alter or manipulate the content of a photograph in any way.

The content of a photograph must not be altered in PhotoShop or by any other means. No element should be digitally added to or subtracted from any photograph. The faces or identities of individuals must not be obscured by PhotoShop or any other editing tool. Only retouching or the use of the cloning tool to eliminate dust and scratches are acceptable.

Minor adjustments in PhotoShop are acceptable. These include cropping, dodging and burning, conversion into grayscale, and normal toning and color adjustments that should be limited to those minimally necessary for clear and accurate reproduction (analogous to the burning and dodging often used in darkroom processing of images) and that restore the authentic nature of the photograph. Changes in density, contrast, color and saturation levels that substantially alter the original scene are not acceptable. Backgrounds should not be digitally blurred or eliminated by burning down or by aggressive toning.

When an employee has questions about the use of such methods or the AP's requirements and limitations on photo editing, he or she should contact a senior photo editor prior to the transmission of any image.

On those occasions when we transmit images that have been provided and altered by a source – the faces obscured, for example – the caption must clearly explain it.

Transmitting such images must be approved by a senior photo editor.

For video, the AP permits the use of subtle, standard methods of improving technical quality, such as adjusting video and audio levels, color correcting due to white balance or other technical faults, and equalization of audio to make the sound clearer \_ provided the use of these methods does not conceal, obscure, remove or otherwise alter the content, or any portion of the content, of the image. The AP also allows digitally obscuring faces to protect a subject's identity under certain circumstances. Such video must not be distributed without approval of the Editor of the Day or senior manager. In addition, video for online use and for domestic broadcast stations can be fonted with titles and logos.

Graphics, including those for television, often involve combining various photographic elements, which necessarily means altering portions of each photograph. The background of a photograph, for example, may be removed to leave the headshot of the newsmaker. This may then be combined with a logo representing the person's company or industry, and the two elements may be layered over a neutral background.

Such compositions must not misrepresent the facts and must not result in an image that looks like a photograph – it must clearly be a graphic.

Similarly, when we alter photos to use as graphics online, we retain the integrity of the image, limiting the changes to cropping, masking and adding elements like logos. Videos for use online can be altered to add graphical information such as titles and logos, to tone the image and to improve audio quality. It is permissible to display photos online using

techniques such as 360-degree panoramas or dissolves as long as they do not alter the original images.

## **OBSCENITIES, PROFANITIES, VULGARITIES:**

We do not use obscenities, racial epithets or other offensive slurs in stories unless they are part of direct quotations and there is a compelling reason for them.

If a story cannot be told without reference to them, we must first try to find a way to give the reader a sense of what was said without using the specific word or phrase. If a profanity, obscenity or vulgarity is used, the story must be flagged at the top, advising editors to note the contents.

A photo containing something that could be deemed offensive must carry an editor's note flagging it.

When a piece of video or audio contains something that might be deemed offensive, we flag it in the written description (rundown, billboard and/or script) so clients know what they are getting. Recognizing that standards differ around the world, we tailor our advisories and selection of video and audio according to customer needs.

We take great care not to refer readers to Web sites that are obscene, racist or otherwise offensive, and we must not directly link our stories to such sites.

In our online service, we link the least offensive image necessary to tell the story. For photo galleries and interactive presentations we alert readers to the nature of the material in the link and on the opening page of the gallery or interactive. If an obscene image is necessary to tell the story, we blur the portion of the image considered offensive after approval of the department manager, and flag the video.

# PRIVACY:

We do not generally identify those who say they have been sexually assaulted or preteenage children who are accused of crimes or who are witnesses to them, except in unusual circumstances. Nor do we transmit photos or video that identify such persons. An exception would occur when an adult victim publicly identifies him/herself.

Senior editors/managers must be consulted about exceptions.

## PROVIDING ATTRIBUTION:

We should give the full name of a source and as much information as needed to identify the source and explain why he or she is credible. Where appropriate, include a source's age; title; name of company, organization or government department; and hometown.

If we quote someone from a written document – a report, e-mail or news release -- we should say so. Information taken from the Internet must be vetted according to our standards of accuracy and attributed to the original source. File, library or archive photos, audio or videos must be identified as such.

For lengthy stories, attribution can be contained in an extended editor's note, usually at the end, detailing interviews, research and methodology. The goal is to provide a reader with enough information to have full confidence in the story's veracity.

## **QUOTATIONS:**

The same care that is used to ensure that quotes are accurate should also be used to ensure that quotes are not taken out of context.

We do not alter quotations, even to correct grammatical errors or word usage. If a quotation is flawed because of grammar or lack of clarity, the writer must be able to paraphrase in a way that is completely true to the original quote. If a quote's meaning is too murky to be paraphrased accurately, it should not be used.

Ellipses should be used rarely.

When relevant, stories should provide information about the setting in which a quotation was obtained – for example, a press conference, phone interview or hallway conversation with the reporter. The source's affect and body language – perhaps a smile or deprecatory gesture – is sometimes as important as the quotation itself.

Use of regional dialects with nonstandard spellings should generally be limited to a writer's effort to convey a special tone or sense of place. In this case, as in any interview with a person not speaking his or her native language, it is especially important that their ideas be accurately conveyed. Always, we must be careful not to mock the people we quote.

Quotes from one language to another must be translated faithfully. If appropriate, we should note the language spoken.

The video or audio editing of quotations or soundbites must not alter the speaker's meaning. Internal editing of audio soundbites of newsmakers is not permitted. Shortened soundbites by cutaway or other video transition are permitted as long as the speaker's meaning is not altered or misconstrued. Sound edits on videotape are permitted under certain circumstances, such as a technical failure. They must be done only after approval by a senior editorial manager.

#### RESPONSES:

We must make significant efforts to reach anyone who may be portrayed in a negative way in our stories, and we must give them a reasonable amount of time to get back to us before we move the story. What is "reasonable" may depend on the urgency and competitiveness of the story. If we don't reach the parties involved, we must explain in the story what efforts were made to do so.

## USE OF OTHERS' MATERIAL:

An AP staffer who reports and writes a story must use original content, language and phrasing. We do not plagiarize, meaning that we do not take the work of others and pass

it off as our own. But in some respects, AP staffers must deal with gray areas.

It is common for an AP staffer to include in his or her work passages from a previous AP story by another writer – generally background, or boilerplate. This is acceptable if the passages are short. Regardless, the reporter writing the story is responsible for the factual and contextual accuracy of the material.

Also, the AP often has the right to use material from its members and subscribers; we sometimes take the work of newspapers, broadcasters and other outlets, rewrite it and transmit it without credit.

There are rules, however. When the material is exclusive, controversial or sensitive, we always credit it. And we do not transmit the stories in their original form; we rewrite them, so that the approach, content, structure and length meet our requirements and reflect the broader audience we serve.

Similar rules apply when we use material from news releases. Under no circumstances can releases reach the wire in their original form; we can use information and quotes from releases, but we must check the material, augment it with information from other sources, and then write our own stories.

We apply the same judgment in picking up material from members or from news releases that we use when considering information we receive from other sources. We must satisfy ourselves, by our own reporting, that the material is credible. If it does not meet AP standards, we don't use it.

For video, if another broadcaster's material is required and distributed, the name of that broadcaster shall be advised on the accompanying shotlist.

Pickups of audio and of television graphics are credited in billboards/captions when the member requests it.

#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The AP respects and encourages the rights of its employees to participate actively in civic, charitable, religious, public, social or residential organizations.

However, AP employees must avoid behavior or activities - political, social or financial - that create a conflict of interest or compromise our ability to report the news fairly and accurately, uninfluenced by any person or action. Nothing in this policy is intended to abridge any rights provided by the National Labor Relations Act.

Here is a sampler of AP practices on questions involving possible conflict of interest. It is not all-inclusive; if you are unsure whether an activity may constitute a conflict or the appearance of a conflict, consult your manager at the onset.

#### EXPRESSIONS OF OPINION:

Anyone who works for the AP must be mindful that opinions they express may damage the AP's reputation as an unbiased source of news. They must refrain from declaring their views on contentious public issues in any public forum, whether in Web logs, chat rooms, letters to the editor, petitions, bumper stickers or lapel buttons, and must not take part in demonstrations in support of causes or movements.

## **FAVORS:**

Employees should not ask news sources or others they meet in a professional capacity to extend jobs or other benefits to anyone. They also should not offer jobs, internships or any benefits of being an AP employee to news sources.

#### FINANCIAL INTERESTS:

Associated Press employees who regularly write or edit business or financial news must always avoid any conflict of interest or the appearance of any conflict of interest in connection with the performance of these duties. For these reasons, these employees must abide by the following rules and guidelines when making personal investment and financial decisions.

These employees must not own stock, equities or have any personal financial investment or involvement with any company, enterprise or industry that they regularly cover for the AP. A technology writer, for example, must not own any technology equities; a retail industry writer must not own the stock of any department store or corporate enterprise that includes department stores. Staff members who are temporarily assigned to such coverage or editorial duties must immediately notify a manager of possible conflicts to determine whether the assignment is appropriate. If necessary, employees might be asked either to divest or to suspend any activity involving their holdings.

Editors and writers who regularly cover the financial markets may not own stock in any company. They may invest in equity index-related products and publicly available diversified mutual funds or commodity pools.

Financial news employees must also avoid investment activities that are speculative or driven by day-trading or short-term profit goals because such activities may create the impression that the employee is seeking to drive market factors or is acting upon information that is not available to the public. Instead, the personal financial activities and investments of these employees must be based upon the longer term and retirement savings. For these reasons, an employee covered by this policy should not buy and sell the same financial product within 60 days, unless he/she gains the permission of the department manager and is able to demonstrate financial need that is unrelated to information discussed or gained in the course of his/her employment. This trading limitation does not apply to equity-index funds, broadly diversified and publicly available mutual funds and commodity pools.

All employees must comply with federal and local laws concerning securities and financial transactions, including statutes, regulations and guidelines prohibiting actions

based upon "inside information." All employees are reminded that they may not act upon, or inform any other person of, information gained in the course of AP employment, unless and until that information becomes known to the general public.

Employees should avoid any conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest in the investments and business interests of their spouses or other members of their household with whom they share finances. They are expected to make every effort to assure that no spouse or other member of their household has investment or business interests that could pose such a conflict.

Employees should be aware that the investment activities and/or financial interests of their spouses or other individuals with whom they share financial interests may make it inappropriate for them to accept certain assignments. Employees must consult with their managers before accepting any such assignment.

Employees who are asked to divest holdings will be given one year from the date of the request to do so, in order to give them the opportunity to avoid market fluctuations.

When this document requires the sale of stock holdings, an employee can satisfy this requirement by putting the shares into a blind trust (or into an equivalent financial arrangement) that meets the same goal: preventing an individual from knowing, at any given time, the specific holdings in the account and blocking an individual from controlling the timing of transactions in such holdings. If AP assigns a staff member to a new job where mandatory divestiture would impose a financial hardship even after the one-year grace period, AP will reimburse the staff member up to a maximum of \$500 for the reasonable costs of setting up a blind trust.)

## FREELANCE WORK:

Individuals who seek to engage in non-AP work are subject to the following restrictions:

- Freelance work must not represent a conflict of interest for either the employee or the AP.
- Such activities may not interfere with the employees' job responsibilities, including availability for newsgathering.
- Such activities may not exploit the name of The Associated Press or the employee's position with the AP without permission of the AP.

Inevitably, some employees will use material they accumulated in their AP work - notes, stories (either written or broadcast), images, videotape, graphics - for other-than-AP uses. The resulting product must be presented to the AP for its approval prior to submission to any outside publisher, purchaser or broadcaster. And under no circumstances should the AP incur expenses for research material that is not used for AP purposes.

#### FREE TICKETS:

We do not accept free tickets to sports, entertainment or other events for anything other than coverage purposes. If we obtain tickets for a member or subscriber as a courtesy, they must be paid for, and the member should reimburse the AP.

#### GIFTS:

Employees should politely refuse and return gifts from sources, public relations agencies, corporations and others hoping to encourage or influence AP news coverage or business. They may accept trinkets (like caps or mugs) of nominal value, \$25 or less.

Books, tapes, recordings, CDs and other items received for review or provided as promotional material for an event may not be sold for personal gain. Items of more than nominal value, such as computer gear, must be returned. If appropriate, items can be donated to charities.

AP and its employees may accept discounts from companies only if those discounts are standard and offered to other customers.

We do not accept unsolicited contest awards from any organization that has a partisan or financial interest in our coverage; nor do we enter such contests.

## **OFFICIAL SCORERS:**

Employees may not serve as official scorers at sports events.

## **OUTSIDE APPEARANCES:**

Employees frequently appear on radio and TV news programs as panelists asking questions of newsmakers; such appearances are encouraged.

However, there is potential for conflict if staffers are asked to give their opinions on issues or personalities of the day. Advance discussion and clearance from a staffer's supervisor are required.

Employees must inform a news manager before accepting honoraria and/or reimbursement of expenses for giving speeches or participating in seminars at colleges and universities or at other educational events if such appearance makes use of AP's name or the employee represents himself or herself as an AP employee. No fees should be accepted from governmental bodies; trade, lobbying or special interest groups; businesses, or labor groups; or any group that would pose a conflict of interest. All appearances must receive prior approval from a staffer's supervisor.

#### POLITICAL ACTIVITIES:

Editorial employees are expected to be scrupulous in avoiding any political activity, whether they cover politics regularly or not. They may not run for political office or accept political appointment; nor may they perform public relations work for politicians or their groups. Under no circumstances should they donate money to political organizations or political campaigns. They should use great discretion in joining or

making contributions to other organizations that may take political stands.

Non-editorial employees must refrain from political activity unless they obtain approval from a manager.

When in doubt, staffers are encouraged to discuss any such concerns with their supervisors.

And a supervisor must be informed when a spouse -- or other members of an employee's household -- has any ongoing involvement in political causes, either professionally or personally.

## TRIPS:

If a trip is organized, and we think the trip is newsworthy, we go and pay our way. If we have a chance to interview a newsmaker on a charter or private jet, we reimburse the news source for the reasonable rate of the costs incurred - for example, standard airfare. There may be exceptional circumstances, such as a military trip, where it is difficult to make other travel arrangements or calculate the costs. Consult a manager for exceptions.

# Appendix D: Links to public media editorial standards

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)

http://www.pbs.org/aboutpbs/aboutpbs\_standards.html

Public Radio International (PRI) http://www.pri.org/about-pri.html

Public Radio Program Directors (PRPD) <a href="http://www.prpd.org/about/mission.htm">http://www.prpd.org/about/mission.htm</a>

Public Television Programmers' Association (PTPA)

http://www.publicmediadigest.org/index.php?option=com\_content&task=view&id=62&I temid=93

American Public Media (APM)

http://www.apmstations.org/files/about/apm\_underwriting\_guidelines.pdf