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Inside Journalism

Columbia College Chicago

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INSIDE JOURNALISM

JANUARY, 1993

A Newsletter Published by the Journalism Department of Columbia College

Tim Bannon's News Quiz

The answer is: Tim Bannon

The question is: Who scans newspapers in search of trifling tid-bits?

While teaching Copy Editing at Columbia College, Tim Bannon has mastered the art of designing a challenging quiz. And while working on the copy desk at the *Sun-Times*, he used to make up bizarre "newsy" quizzes to lighten his work load.

Now Tim is quizzing Chicagoland in his own news quiz in the *Sun-Times*. "The Quiz" has been running since the last week of June and can now be seen

on page two in place of "Sneed" on Mondays, a major jump from its original spot on the comics page.

"It's a great location. I guess my next goal is page one," Tim said.

"The Quiz" has questions about trivial news items, like: What did a recent study say would make men live longer? (The answer is: getting castrated at age 12). There is also a question that people can call in with their answers to win a prize.

According to Tim, the response has been overwhelming. The *Sun-Times* gets between 700 and 800 calls every Monday.

"It still amazes me," Tim said. "It's quirky, but that's why people like it."

Most of his time is spent editing the *Sun-Times* "Weekend Plus" section; he works on "The Quiz" in his spare time. In fact, he does most of his work on the train. Tim has worked for the *Sun-Times* since 1987, after working for the *Daily Herald* for six years. Prior to that, he worked for the *Anderson Bulletin* in Anderson, Indiana, after graduating from Indiana University in Bloomington.

Outside of his work at the *Sun-*



Times and Columbia College, Tim keeps busy at home. He and his wife, Ceal, have two children, Lucy and Eleanor. Tim also finds time to do volunteer teaching in the public school system.

--Bridget Connelly

Satirists: Writing on the Edge

Everyone's interpretation of satire (and sarcasm) in writing is different. Working with a medium that does not allow factual expressions or tone of voice, writers must rely only on words and the atmosphere they set to get their ideas across.

Inevitably, satirical writing will offend some while leaving others roaring with laughter. At their best, satirists can inspire their audience to do both. At their worst, they can be unfocused about their subject matter and point-of-view and end up confusing their audience.

Last year at the *Columbia Chronicle*, Steve Crescenzo's column "Crescenzo's Club" tested the boundaries of satire. The controversial column challenged issues of race, politics, and gender in a very tongue-in-cheek manner. Problems arose when readers



Tim Bannon

could not tell the difference between Crescenzo's version of satire and of serious racist, sexist sentiment. The left-wing organization Refuse and Resist stuck fliers in the **Chronicle** calling for Crescenzo's resignation from the paper. When they ran out of fliers they burned the remaining papers.

"When I started out with the column, I wanted to make fun of extremists," said Crescenzo. "Unfortunately, I got labeled an extremist myself which is exactly what I didn't want to happen."

Crescenzo said he wanted to offend the readers at first but he didn't expect them to take the column so seriously.

"I assumed that people reading my column knew me and that was a mistake," said Crescenzo. "Anybody who knows me knows I'm not a racist, knows I don't hate women."

For the past three years, Dennis Rodkin, who teaches journalism here at Columbia, has been writing a satirical column about advertising for the alternative Chicago newspaper **New City**. Rodkin says that Steve's mistake as a columnist is that he "formed his opinions at the typewriter."

"Most of his columns were rough drafts that would have been great if he'd gone through them a second time and re-worked them," said Rodkin about Crescenzo's column. "Steve was trying to accomplish too much. He was trying to be satirical and at the same time take on some pretty big issues, and yet he wasn't putting enough thought into it up front."

Crescenzo admits to often having written the column late at night and turning it in at the last minute. If he could do it over again, he says he would try to understand his audience more and be more careful.

"I would try to realize that the audience doesn't know I'm kidding," said Crescenzo. "If they weren't getting it, then I wasn't doing it right."

Rodkin prefers to stay away from controversial issues like race. Instead of confronting social issues, he chooses instead to make fun of the absurdities of his profession: writing about advertising.

Rodkin describes his column in **New**

City as a "weekly encapsulation of the interior monologue" of his "extremely self-indulgent thoughts." Rodkin prefers to make jokes at his own expense rather than at the expense of others.

"I think it's possible to be funny without being degrading to groups of people," said Rodkin. "I would much rather make fun of myself because I know how much I can take."

Even though Rodkin makes offensive remarks in his column, he says he rarely gets letters from people who are offended.

That's probably because Rodkin gets his ideas across clearly and his audience, unlike Crescenzo's, almost always knows he's being satirical.

So what makes a good satirist?

"Somebody who has a deep personal well of cynicism," said Rodkin. "Somebody who is deeply cynical about everything including his or her motivations, but somebody who sees that it's absurd not depressing."

--Tom Shea

New City Editor Joins Columbia

Being a teacher at Columbia College, the Assistant Editor and feature writer for **New City**, and a freelance writer, Dale Eastman doesn't have much time to do anything these days but work. She says she considers herself a workaholic and she admits to sometimes pushing herself to the point of exhaustion.

Eastman started teaching at Columbia last semester. She currently teaches Media Writing and in the Spring will teach Feature Writing. She says she enjoys teaching because she learns a lot about her own writing by having to explain it critically to her students.

"It's one thing to do something and do it very well," says Eastman, "and another thing to go into a room full of



Dale Eastman

people and explain to them what you just did or what they should do."

Since **New City** is a small alternative newspaper, Eastman says her job as Assistant Editor encompasses "everything." More specifically, she's in charge of all the copy that arrives at the paper and of editing certain parts of **New City**. She has written recent cover stories on Carol Moseley Braun and the gangs' truce in Chicago.

She appreciates **New City** for its efforts to cover feature news stories in much greater detail than most mainstream papers. She also admires **New City's** diversity of ideas they cover.

"There's almost no subject that we wouldn't consider writing about," says Eastman.

Eastman denies the charge, sometimes made, that **New City** is "politically correct." She says that she hates that phrase because it suggests a type of censorship.

"The paper is here to give voice to alternative ideas and often those are unpopular ideas, not politically correct ideas," she says.

Eastman was born in San Francisco and raised in Oregon and California. She received her undergraduate degree at the University of California in history. She later went for a graduate degree at Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism and graduated from there in 1989. She says her background in

history has helped make her a more thorough feature writer, but it has also made her wary of daily reporting.

"I'm uncomfortable going in and writing about an event without knowing the history of that event," says Eastman. "Often times, daily newspaper writers, not intentionally, can distort the perspective of their story because they don't understand the issues surrounding it."

After graduating from Medill, Eastman worked as a freelance writer at the **Chicago Reporter** and several other publications. Then she started as a part-time worker for **New City**. A year-and-a-half later, she went full-time at **New City**.

Columbia College News Reporting and Writing Director Carolyn Hulse calls Eastman "a very distinguished feature writer for the alternative press."

"I think it's particularly important that students be exposed to young journalists like Dale," says Hulse, "because it gives them a sense that professional success is within their reach."

--Tom Shea

Sportswriting In Chicago: Nothing Could Be Better

So, who do you think is the most envied person on any newspaper staff?

Is it the high-ranking editor who ultimately decides what goes in, and stays out, of each day's paper? No.

Or is it the general assignment reporter who gains a world of experience by covering anything and everything? Wrong again.

Or could it be those wonderful advice columnists who share their wisdom to guide us toward happy and productive lives? Yeah, right. (When was the last time you heard someone say they wanted to be the next Dear Abby?)

No, the most envied person on any newspaper has been, is, and always will be the sportswriter. Who wouldn't want to spend his or her time writing about sports? Who wouldn't want the chance

to interview Michael Jordan or Mike Ditka or Ryne Sandberg? Although sportswriting is one of those jobs requiring a lot of hard work, the very nature of it makes the work seem less difficult and more fun than it probably is.

Combine that with the fact that a good sportswriter can be among the most widely-read writers on any paper and you can see why many j-students think sportswriting would be an interesting career choice.

One of the advantages of aspiring to be a sportswriter in this town is that Chicago has some of the finest sportswriting in the country. The two major newspapers, the **Chicago Tribune** and the **Chicago Sun-Times**, do an excellent job of covering local and national sports, and both are home to several columnists worth reading. Some of the better ones include Skip Myslenski (see accompanying article), Mike Kiley (hockey), and Neil Milbert (horse racing) of the **Tribune**; and Taylor Bell (high school sports), Brian Hewitt (football), and Dave Van Dyck

Sports Invades J-Department

After you've finished the article on sportswriting in Chicago, telling you how cool it is to be a sportswriter, you're saying to yourself, "Self, how do I become a sports scribe?"

Well, Columbia offers a little secret in its spring semester class schedule--Sports Reporting.

To learn the ins-and-outs of writing sports, sign-up for the class taught by Skip Myslenski, a national college basketball writer at the **Chicago Tribune**.

Myslenski is a veteran of the sportswriting world. Although his duties primarily entail covering college hoops nationwide, he also reports on boxing and was one of the **Tribune's** writers at the last two Summer Olympics in Barcelona, Spain and Seoul, South Korea.

This will be Myslenski's third semester at Columbia teaching sports reporting and has given him as many benefits as the students.

"It makes me think about what I do," says Myslenski. "[The students] will ask questions of me and then I have to consider the way I'm going about my job. That way, I don't fall into a rut of using the same style or taking the same approach. That's pretty easy to do."

Obviously looking forward to teaching again, Myslenski has already worked up one of the first assignments.

"Early on, I think I'll have the students do something that gives them a clue of present compared to past," he says. "I think it's very important if you're going to go into the business that you have some sort of perspective on what you're covering."

Myslenski earned an English degree from Notre Dame before going to Northwestern for a master's in journalism in 1967. After a brief pit stop in Rochester, N.Y., he became a "leg-man" for Pat Putnam at **Sports Illustrated**. From there, it was off to the **Philadelphia Inquirer** and, in 1979, he joined the **Tribune**.

Myslenski's class is a must for those who think they know about sportswriting. In the past, guest lecturers have included Mike (Odds-and-Ins column) Conklin, sports editor Bob Condor and Bulls writer Melissa Isaacson from the **Tribune**.

If you're interested in sports and are looking for a new angle to reporting, think about Myslenski's team for the Spring semester.

--Chris Dolack

(baseball) of the **Sun-Times**. All are knowledgeable journalists who cover their respective sports better than anyone else in town.

But while the writers mentioned above are good, there are two others who are even better. The most envied sportswriter on any paper is its "big gun," a columnist who can make people stop and think about what's really going on in sports today. Someone who is either loved or hated with a passion by every sports fan in the city. At the **Tribune**, that person is Bernie Lincicome. At the **Sun-Times**, it's Jay Mariotti.

Lincicome is the epitome of the sarcastic columnist. His biting comments, offbeat humor, and "in your face" attitude make him a Chicago favorite. He cuts self-important people down to size and shows the reader just how ridiculous the world of sports can sometimes be.

In comparison, Mariotti is more reserved and not as sarcastic, but his writing is just as powerful. He's not afraid to tackle any issue or to ridicule a person if he thinks it's deserved, no matter how many people disagree with him (i.e. the "Should Mike Ditka Be Fired?" poll). Like Lincicome, Mariotti is insightful and a lot of fun to read.

As a group, sportswriters are an enviable lot. The best ones make a difficult job look easy. Some, like Lincicome and Mariotti, just do it a little better than others.

--Gino Carlino

Getting To The Source

One of the most important aspects of reporting is preparing to write your story.

Before interviewing a person for a profile or even looking up information already in print, background information must be obtained.

So where do you start? How do you get that information without being an expert in every field you're asked to write about?

Sources. Experts. People in different fields whom you befriend and who are willing to talk to you. Friends or acquaintances who can give you correct information and possible leads.

Sources are also just as important to editors. A source can give more insight into a topic or even ideas for possible articles. They may also be able to mention people to contact for interviews or as writers.

Who are good sources? People that are knowledgeable--experts in their fields. They should be well-respected within their professional communities also.

Sources should know more than most others, and still be willing to talk. Good communication between you and the source is essential.

Professors from universities, owners of corporations, and industry leaders are ultimate types of people to have as sources. Unfortunately, most of them aren't accessible to j-students and recent j-grads.

So start lower on the ladder. Work with the people you already know and try to move from there. Pay attention to who's on staff at Columbia. Try to become better acquainted with those who could be an asset to you. Look to your friends, parents, or friends' parents--their professional lives may be of interest to you someday.

In some cases, if you can't get to the top people right away, look for help from their employees. For example, secretaries and teachers' assistants probably know a lot. They know what their supervisors are doing and who their colleagues are. If introductions aren't possible, information may still be obtained for another aspect of the story or another source.

Go to conferences, seminars, and conventions. **NETWORK!** As over-used as the term is, it's valid. Meeting people is vital to a journalist's career. Be alert and friendly; casual acquaintances can lead to relationships where information and new sources become possible.

Get business cards, keep a phone book, or files. List names, fields, and avenues of contact.

Keep in touch with them. If you

don't see them often, make sure they'll remember you. Create a relationship that will allow them to be cooperative should you ever want their opinions or expert knowledge.

--Kari Smith

Students Just Want the Truth

Some j-students want to get into journalism for the fame. Others, for the money (ha! ha!). Still others for free theater tickets and other perks. But some j-students at Columbia say they have different, more important reasons for wanting to get into journalism.

When he was younger, Steve Guillermo had a dream, a dream to become an architect--just like Mr. Brady.

Years later, Steve finds himself in his senior year in the Columbia j-department, trying to fulfill his other dream--to become a journalist.

But it wasn't a television character who influenced Steve this time. Like many journalism students, Steve wanted to become a journalist because he saw a need for change.

"I have the talent to convey a message and I feel that I should do it if I am capable of it. I saw so much bad journalism and I felt I could do a better job," Steve said.

Senior Lindsey Schwartz also felt a responsibility to deliver good journalism (i.e. the truth) to the public, although her desire to do so was more personal.

When Lindsey was ten years old, **20/20** did a story on her family which, according to her, was one-sided and untrue.

"That day I decided to become a journalist so that I would be able to present both sides of the story," she said, "There are so many bad reporters out there."

Tiffany Runyon, also a senior, said she is looking forward to the exciting and fast-paced world of journalism. But, like Steve and Lindsey, Tiffany also feels that people deserve to know the truth.

"People have to be aware of what's

going on and hopefully if you keep giving them information, they will have concern about an issue," Tiffany says.

Steve, Lindsey and Tiffany agree that Columbia is the right place to learn about their trade. Through their hands-on experience and internships, they know what to expect when they graduate.

Let's just hope the field of journalism knows what to expect when these three students graduate.

--Bridget Connelly

Newsweek Reporter Teaches Copy Editing

Persistence and hard work pays off for Karen Springen. After slaving away for two years as a fact-checker at Newsweek, she finally got to do what she likes to do: report. She's been reporting for six years now. "I did everything they told me to do, I never said no," she says. Springen is teaching Copy Editing I this semester at Columbia. She has a B.A. from Stanford in International Relations and a Masters in Journalism from Columbia University.

After getting her undergraduate degree, Springen worked at Hewlett Packard in California, writing employee newsletters and conducting tours through the computer facilities. While working there days, she did a part time job at a wire service three nights a week. One year later, she moved to New York to work on her masters' degree. In search for a job, she found a graveyard shift at Time magazine in the computer room but never got to write for them. When summer internships were available, she got a chance at Newsweek where she had applied before for part time work.

When she finished her masters in 1984, she began at Newsweek full-time as a researcher. After two years, she was given a tryout as a reporter

and has been doing it ever since. Her job has required that she work in different locations; in New York, Denver and now Chicago where she's been since March, 1988.

Springen loves teaching at Columbia College because she has the freedom to teach the way she likes. She also admires Columbia students for their dedication--most students work either full or part time--and their curiosity, which she says is a plus in journalism.

She wanted a new challenge and to give back the generous time people had given her in the past. "To make that extra step, make that extra call," says Springen. "My goal is to make everybody want to be more than just mediocre with whatever they do, to really care about detail."

Springen worked in high school and college newspapers as an editor and she highly recommends that students here do the same. Aside from working at her full and part time jobs, she freelances whenever she has a chance. Her interests are marathon running, health and women issues, and vegetarian food.

--Susan Olavarria

Successful Alumni

Every year, thousands of college seniors look forward to one event more than any other--graduation. It brings with it a mixed bag of emotions--anxiety, happiness, fear, relief. Thinking of moving beyond college and into the real world, to pursue an actual career instead of just holding down a job, is a frightening thought for many of us. With the job market slumping, especially for j-majors, this can be easier said than done.

For Columbia College j-students, however, the road to career success is a road well-traveled. The opportunities available at Columbia--including an excellent internship program and award-winning student publications--have helped many j-students begin successful careers after graduation in all phases of print and broadcast journalism.

The following students are just a handful of recent Columbia success stories:

--Shelly Acoia, graduate class of '88, is an award-winning writer and managing editor of both the Schaumburg Review and the Hoffman Estates Review in suburban Chicago.

--Rachel Bittner is an anchor and reporter for radio station WIZM-AM in LaCrosse, Wis.

--Jerry Bowman, g-class of '88, works as a staff writer with the American Academy of Pediatrics in Elk Grove Village.

--Ron Rogers has recently been named the new overnight DJ on Chicago's only country music station, US-99.

--Cary Eldridge, g-class of '90, is a DJ as well as sports and



Karen Springen

Apology to Millette

The editors and advisors of **Inside Journalism** apologize to Marijo Millette, one of our stellar students, for omitting her name from the IJ list of Fischetti scholars, earlier this semester. The omission was inadvertent, but we feel just as repentant: carelessness in journalism is no less excusable than malice. (J-students, take note.) Marijo, you're one of us and we love you.

news director for radio station KNFT in Silver City, N.M.

--Ilyce Reisman Fleischman, g-class of '86, is an editor and public relations writer for Benefit Trust Life Companies in Lake Forest, Ill.

--April Rivera Hattori, g-class of '89, formerly with the **Milwaukee Journal**, is a midwestern reporter for the daily **Bond Buyer** in Chicago.

--Luella Leu, g-class of '87, is the founder and editor of the **MAFBO Advocate** and is an award-winning, nationally-recognized advocate for minority and female business owners.

--Kerry O'Rourke, g-class of '89, is a general assignment reporter for the **Baltimore Sun**.

--Robin Orvino, g-class of '89, is vice president of public relations for JDI International Communications.

--Elizabeth Owens, g-class of '88, is managing editor of the **Libertyville Review**, **Mundelein Review** and **Vernon Hills Review**.

--Rachel Pepper, g-class of '87, is a columnist for the **Bay Area Reporter** in San Francisco.

--Peter Stenson is an editorial assistant for **Communication World Magazine**, also located in San Francisco.

--Paul Tarini, g-class of '86, is an associate science news editor for the **American Medical Association**.

--Frank Vascellero is a weekend anchor and reporter for WAND-TV in Decatur, Ill.

As you can see, these alumni went to where the jobs are, working in a

variety of positions throughout the country as well as in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs.

Much of their success can be attributed to the working professionals who teach at Columbia and who provide invaluable hands-on experience that give Columbia grads a leg up on the competition.

So j-students, take full advantage of everything Columbia has to offer. With a lot of talent, determination and a little luck, you could be one of our next Columbia success stories.

--Gino Carlino

American Journalists Not Happy

With the cheers and resolutions of the new year comes the moans and groans of many journalists.

Twenty-one percent of American journalists say they would like to be working outside the news media in five years, compared to 11 percent a decade ago, according to a study by the Freedom Forum.

Limited pay is among the top reasons why journalists hope to leave the field. The median income of full-time journalists increased from \$19,000 in 1981 to \$31,297 last year. This income increase, though considered not enough for most journalists, was greater than the rate of inflation during the past 10 years.

The need for a change or a new challenge is another cause of dissatisfaction. Only 27 percent of the journalists surveyed said they were satisfied with their jobs, compared with 40 percent in 1981.

"The most serious problem facing the industry is the upward slope of those who say they want to leave," says G. Cleveland Wilhoit, one of two Indiana University journalism professors who conducted the study.

The typical U.S. journalist, the study reports, is a white Protestant male, 36, married, has a bachelor's degree from a public college, earns \$31,000 a year

and has about 12 years of journalism experience.

The Freedom Forum, a nonprofit organization that studies the news media, conducted the survey. This group's objectives include advancing freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

This particular study was based on 45-minute telephone interviews with 1,410 U.S. journalists. The journalists work for daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television stations, news services and magazines.

The professors who conducted the survey caution against putting too much reliance on this profile, though.

"It is difficult to talk in general terms about the 'typical' U.S. journalist because there are more than 122,000 of them," says Wilhoit.

--Jennifer Blackwell

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