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# Inside Journalism

Columbia College Chicago

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# Inside Journalism

A Newsletter Published by the Journalism Department of Columbia College November 1997

## J-dept. students get on FasTrax

By Jennifer N. Channer

One of the J-department's recent additions is the FasTrax program. FasTrax is the newest way to get incoming and transfer students acclimated to the journalism department and college lifestyle.

FasTrax will be administered by Rose Economou of the J-department faculty; Student Life and Development Assistant Dean Madeline Roman-Vargas; Chair of the J-Department Ed Planer; and student FasTrax Coordinator Diane Bell.

"The goal of the FasTrax program is to increase the rate of retention in the Journalism Program at Columbia College and track the participants through graduation and their careers," Economou said.

The program focuses on freshman who have declared journalism as their major or minor. FasTrax will connect new students with upper class students who are journalism majors. It will give the new students opportunities to attend lectures,

workshops and field trips. Students will also be given the opportunity to improve their writing by an organized essay contest judged by students, faculty and professionals.

According to J-Department Chair Ed Planer, FasTrax is "an innovative way of helping new students get a sense of community that will last throughout their years at Columbia."

FasTrax will also have a regular column in *Inside Journalism* that will highlight the project and the students who are participating in it.

Along with the student mentors, freshmen will be given the opportunity to have a professional mentor. Freshman Erica



FasTrax students attend opening reception at Chronicle office in October

Tava, 18, said, "Personally, I am really excited about the idea of having a mentor who is a working professional. I hope to network, I want to meet people who can help me get my foot in the door."

## Kurtis picnics in park with j-students

By Sheryl Tirol

A new project has started in the j-department—The Bill Kurtis Learning Community. The Learning Community is made up of 18 students who are enrolled in Les Brownlee's Intro to Mass Media and Karen Osborne's English Composition I class.

A kick-off picnic was held October 7 in Grant Park. Award winning TV journalist Bill Kurtis was present for the discussion about different issues in the media. Kurtis told the students about important

factors to look at and consider in the news business. Rose Economou, j-department professor and coordinator of the project, said students also will have the opportunity to see many media outlets. Recently the students toured the Chicago Tribune.

One student remarked how impressed she is with the class. "I think the class is great, because it is different than all my other ones. I have someone to look up to as an example and there is a professional and not just text books to back it up," said freshman Dalal Ali.



The Bill Kurtis Learning Community holds first meeting, picks park for picnic

# Chronicle gets new, bigger office

By Rui Kaneya

If *The Chronicle* staff were asked last semester to make a list of dysfunctional things at Columbia, perhaps their office would have been on top of the list along with the elevators.

But not this semester: The *Chronicle* has just gotten a new—and bigger—office.

After years of being confined to a tiny space on the eighth floor in the Wabash building, *The Chronicle* now occupies a spacious room—a space about four-times bigger—on the second floor of the building.

The relocation came as one of Columbia's renovation

projects carried out this summer. The college spent millions modernizing its buildings, along with newly acquired buildings in the South Loop.

The project designated the eighth floor of the Wabash building to be used for the Art Department, and everything else had to be relocated.

*The Chronicle* and the Community Media Workshop, which also occupied the floor, moved to the completely refurbished second floor.

"I'm more than pleased with the outcome," said Jim Sulski, *Chronicle's* faculty advisor. "There's an ample space for everyone. We are set for a few years and not going to

feel choked."

The relocation seemed long overdue. In the last semester, with a record number of staff writers and editors, the old *Chronicle* office was bursting at the seams. The office couldn't hold more people.

In a room filled with desks and chairs, 17 editors and 13 staff writers struggled to find the space to work. On days of staff meetings, people could walk only a few feet without bumping into something or someone.

Six computers were placed in a tiny space with a handful of chairs. But six terminals were rarely used at the same time; the room barely had room

to accommodate six people.

In the new office, though, plentiful space is available for staff meetings. Most editors have their own desks, and each one is equipped with a computer. And there's still more space to be filled.

The new editor-in-chief, Mema Ayi, secured her own office in the corner. "Now I can yell at people from across the room," Ayi said jokingly. "I don't have to yell at them in their face."

"Space is sized for equipment," said Sulski. "We are now able to have computers on the desks and an eye-to-eye communication among editors."

## Chronicle enters high tech age

By Rui Kaneya

Along with a new space, *The Chronicle* acquired new equipment to streamline the production process.

Three top-of-the-line computers—with 200 mega hertz processors—with several flat monitors and a scanner are used for faster page layouts and photo processing.

Two modems were added to a slower model with "T1" connections, which allows much faster download when researching on the Internet.

In addition to seven networked computers, *The Chronicle* purchased a laptop computer for more updated coverage in a weekly publication. When covering breaking news near the

deadlines or filing a field report, a reporter can e-mail the story to the office before the pages are sent to the printer.

In a Oct. 27 issue of *The Chronicle*, the idea was first used by Senior Writer Leon Tripplett who went on a trip to Philadelphia to cover the Million Women March on Saturday, Oct. 25.

In order to get an issue out on Monday, all pages must be sent to the printer on Saturday. Tripplett filed two stories in Saturday afternoon from Philadelphia to meet the deadline using the laptop—giving just enough time for editors to edit the stories and put them on the page.

Tripplett's stories were published in the Oct. 27 issue.

## Inside Journalism

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**Inside Journalism** is a student publication that is published three times a semester during the fall and spring semesters.

# Columbia grad strives to touch community through journalism

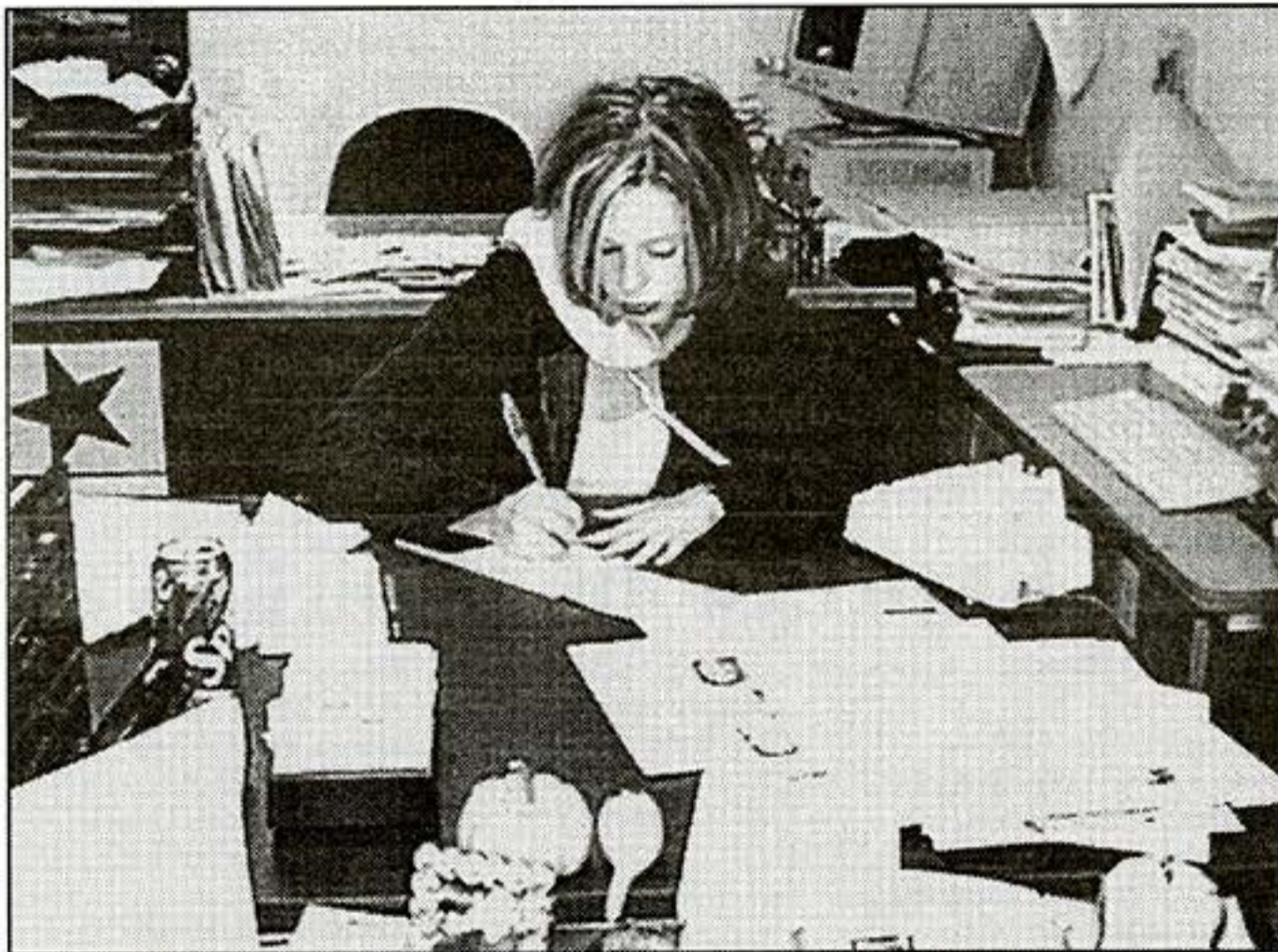
By Yasmin Khan

She stares intently at the telephone on her desk. "Ring damn you, ring," she mutters, in the midst of a string of other unprintable verbs.

Occasionally she growls and curses at everything from the Rolodex to an old-modeled Macintosh computer that, like a phoenix, albeit a wounded one, has risen from under the pile of papers that have run amok on her desk. She glances intermittently at her black patent Swatch. She's missing a quote and it's less than an hour to deadline.

Welcome to Cristin Monti's glamorous world of journalism. The Columbia graduate is now the city editor of the Lisle Reporter, a suburban paper under the umbrella of the Reporter/Progress Downers Grove chain of newspapers. Monti's job is to write, report, copy edit, layout, supervise and, short of printing it herself, make sure it is not only a good paper but one that she can be proud of.

"It's that sense of accomplishment that keeps me going week after week. That has to be it because if you're going into journalism for the money or for the glamour, then you're in the wrong business," said Monti, a 27-year-old who has been with the paper for five months. "It's really a lot of hard work so it's something you have to do because you want to. It's hard to fake the feeling because it will show in your writing and readers are discerning a lot nowadays. They can tell if you're just



**J-grad Cristin Monti works at her office at the Lisle Reporter newspaper**

dragging yourself through it or if you really take pride in what you do."

It is this pride and a deep-seated desire to make her job more than just the churning of stories that give Monti the edge over some of her peers and counterparts. She brims with determination, zeal and enthusiasm, but it is her belief that she can truly make a difference that sets her apart from the jaded journalist.

"I can make a difference and I should," she says with almost feverish gusto. "What's the use of becoming a reporter if you can't touch lives and change things? It's called Community Journalism and it should be what all papers are leaning towards." And she

isn't talking about stories that could make an impact on what ails the world but stories, she says, that affect the individual "right in his backyard."

"We need to go back to the community, back to the roots and talk to people about what really matters in their lives. Sure, people want to know what is happening on a national and global scale, but it is still what happens in people's backyards that affect them the most. I think as journalists that's where we need to be. We need to be in touch with the community. We need to make a difference. We need to go back into people's backyards."

Monti has seen the power of community journalism first

hand. She first felt its strength when she interned for the Chicago Housing Authority a year ago.

Monti remembers being amazed and a little overwhelmed by the experience of working with the residents in putting together the Residents' Journal - a quarterly newspaper put out for and by CHA residents.

"When I started my internship, the first issue had just been printed and I helped deliver it," recalls Monti. "These people had long felt that their voices had not been heard. Nobody wanted to hear what they had to say, so the paper was very important to them."

"The paper gave them a  
**See Monti page 5**

# 15th Annual NAHJ Convention

By Edith Veronica Rodriguez  
and Brenda Alvarez

What were four students from Columbia College doing between June 4 to 7 in Seattle, Wa.? Networking, having fun and getting insights in journalism from the professionals of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.

Michelle Alegria and Christine Lock, who both graduated in the summer of 1997, and present seniors Edith Veronica Rodriguez and Brenda Alvarez attended the convention.

The NAHJ is dedicated to the recognition and professional advancement of Hispanics in the news industry. The con-

vention offered a wide-range of workshops and seminars geared to the development and growth of journalism.

Alegria and Lock took advantage of the career-expo and spoke with recruiters for possible job leads.

Rodriguez met with professionals who provided advice and guidance in the field of broadcast journalism. Rodriguez also enjoyed the workshops, such as "Finding Your First Job in Broadcast Journalism" and "Freelancing Tips."

As for Alvarez, the conference was a learning experience that enabled her to grow as a writer. NAHJ organized several workshops that allowed her to sharpen her skills as a feature writer.



Columbia j-students attend NAHJ meeting

For more information on the NAHJ call the national office at (202)662-7145.

## New Expressions publishes at Columbia

By Michelle Pocock

Twenty-five years ago, a study was done on high school journalism and newspapers. Four major conclusions were drawn. One, that censorship was abundant; not only by administrators, but also by the students themselves. Two, that the majority of the students on the staff of papers were white. Three, that journalism was quickly being eliminated from the curriculum, and four, that professional journalists didn't seem to care about the budding writers who would be the future of the business.

One person took notice of these disturbing findings and decided to do something about it. Sister Ann Christine Heintz founded Youth Communication in 1976 in Chicago and dedicated the group to addressing the four problems.

In 1977, Youth Communication began publishing a one-of-a-kind high school newspaper—a free, independent paper—by, for and about Chicago teens. This paper was named New Expressions, and

with 120,000 readers a month, it is going strong.

This summer, NE made what Provost Bert Gall calls a "synergistic move" to the Columbia College Campus. Housed in the second floor of the Wabash Building, NE is now neighbors with both the Chronicle and the Community Media Workshop.

NE is a monthly paper, published during the school year and distributed at 138 sites in Chicago, including all of the Chicago Public High Schools.

The staff is composed of about 80 volunteers representing schools from all over the city. Although most of the staffers are in high school, some students choose to stay on the staff in to their college years. Corey Miggins, NE Tech Editor, started on NE when his Harlan High School newspaper was cut in 1994. Today he is a freshman at Kennedy-King College and has goals of becoming a "great reporter."

Other members of the NE family include a handful of adult staffers who help the stu-

dents perfect their journalism skills. Executive Director Bill Brooks and Editorial Advisor Billy D. Montgomery are at the paper every day to make sure that everything runs smoothly.

Because Youth Communication was founded in part to battle censorship, there are no censors scanning the students writing at NE. The writers are allowed to develop a unique voice, and in the process, get to cover some controversial issues. Authors have covered stories on the problems with the Chicago Public School system, teenage mothers, curfew laws and college. They report without worrying about whether the story will run or not.

Another goal of Sister Heintz was to make high school journalism more racially integrated. As an urban paper, NE incorporates teens of all colors, races and genders who have been part of a city environment all of their lives.

Youth Communication does not end with NE. There are several other programs that are currently being implement-

ed and some new projects are in the works. When NE is not printing during the summer, Youth Communication offers a Summer Urban Journalism clinic for the high school students. This program prepares the students for reporting positions with NE during the school year.

NE Extra is a paper the Chicago Public Schools use as a learning tool. Hundreds of teachers distribute the paper to their students and quiz them on certain articles. Teachers also encourage students to write essays for the paper. If published, the essay could earn the student a \$100 prize.

Two new programs in the works are a bi-monthly creative and journalism publication, and a web-site in connection with the Chicago Tribune.

NE is distributed at Columbia, but any journalism major should make a trip to the Wabash building to get a glimpse of history—and a group of seasoned high school journalists.

**Monti**

Continued from page 3

voice and a tool to express their feelings. It was a way to empower the residents. It wasn't a big paper. It wasn't going to win awards or anything, but it made a difference and maybe that's what journalism should be all about. I try to do that now, and I love the fact that the people of Lisle love the paper even though it's just a small suburban paper. It feels good to be part of that vibe."

But achieving that positive vibe doesn't come easy. It takes a lot of listening and observing, two traits she picked up from the Chicago Tribune's Jeff Lyon who also teaches at Columbia. "He was my Feature Writing teacher and he used to say 'observe everything and take in every single thing' and that really stuck in my head," Monti said of Lyon. "He was by far the best teacher I had at Columbia. He brought realism to the class by talking about his life as a journalist and that helped me a great deal."

Monti also credits the j-department's Director of News Reporting and Writing Carolyn Hulse for being a strong role model and an inspiration. "The woman is amazing. She's articulate, she knows what's up in the journalism industry and she's really tough. You can't get much past her. I try to be as much like her as I can."

Hulse was also instrumental in steering Monti towards her first job after graduation with the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. It was a valuable experience which led to her current job, but Monti admits that all the internships paled in comparison as a training ground to The Chronicle. Monti spent three semesters on the school paper, the last as managing editor.

"The problem with Columbia students who work on any of the publications in the journalism program is they don't realize how lucky they are. That's the closest they will get to the real world without leaving school and they need to appreciate the opportunity a lot more. Make the most of it," advised Monti.

For Monti, despite the strides she's taken, making the most out of her career is more than just seeing her name in lights. "Everyone wants to make it big, everyone wants to see their name on the front page. I don't know how much I want that." She pauses and contemplates the move. "I know everybody in Lisle. Gee, I know more people here than I do where I have lived all my life and I am not sure if it's worth the trade-off anymore. I am afraid that big papers have a more cold clinical feel which

# J-students surf the Net

By Allison Martin

In an effort to continue Columbia's cutting-edge teaching focus and reputation, the journalism track has been revamped to include Information Search Strategies.

The class made its debut this semester in three sections, and according to Carolyn Hulse, director of News Reporting and Writing, 42 students are enrolled.

Designed to be taken on a sophomore level concurrently with Reporting for Print and Broadcast, the class has various objectives. By the conclusion of the semester, students should be able to identify and employ the correct search method for obtaining information, use traditional or electronic resources, know which questions to ask to get what they need on the Internet, evaluate content and have a better idea of what information to trust.

All of this helps in the ever-growing field of "Computer Assisted Journalism," or CAJ, which incorporates the use of computers in the newsgathering process. CAJ has four main points, or the four "Rs." These can be divided into reporting, research, reference and "rendezvous" (meeting others on-line). For journalism students, the Internet will be most helpful in the reference and

research categories.

Students will also learn to use e-mail as a communication and reporting tool.

Each section of the class will complete an annotated bibliography of sources for a final project. The sources, electronic and print, should be designed to be of help to journalists covering a particular beat, and the annotation must include the positives and negatives of the site itself.

When j-department Chairman Ed Planer came on board, one goal was to eliminate outdated classes, and because of the increased use of CAJ and Internet technology, Information Search Strategies was added to the curriculum. This substitutes for Copy Editing II, which was combined with Copy Editing I into a single Copy Editing course.

According to Hulse, the department felt the j-students were adept enough to handle a combined copy editing course, but if the student has already completed Copy Editing II, he or she can take Information Search Strategies as a journalism elective.

Hulse discovered most students in her class have computers at home and said, "Without home practice, search skills will not develop into significant journalistic asset."

defeats my purpose of getting close to my readers. I guess it all boils down to goals and priorities and I'll cross that road when I get there."

And with that she returns to glaring tenaciously at the telephone as though willing it to ring. She glances at her Swatch again. It's 20 minutes to deadline. And then like magic, the phone rings. Five minutes later the story is complete. She sends the story through the system, gets up from her new ergonomic chair and smoothes out the creases on her flowing black, cotton skirt.

"There," she says, her face breaking into a smile. "Now we're all done."

**Working at an interesting job?**

**Tell Inside Journalism about it!**

# J-instructor Jody Becker wins Lisagor award for feature writing

By Jonathan Bethely

Taking risks doesn't seem to bother Jody Becker. Conventional wisdom may be practical, but for her the end result may not challenge the possibilities. She's crafty but not overly so. She's a down to earth, free spirit willing to go out on a limb.

It was that sort of spirit that prompted Becker, fresh out of graduate school at Columbia University in New York to purchase a laptop, pack a backpack and head overseas to Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1991. As Becker explains it, the decision was really quite simple. Freelancing in New York wasn't working well and job offers weren't beating down her door. So she packed a bag and off she went.

The part time J-school instructor and full-time reporter/producer at WBEZ, began her career in print where she interned at United Press International during summers in college.

She's also worked at the Los Angeles Times and the Seattle Times. Her passion for writing and telling people's stories is evident through experiences that have taken her around the world.

"I do something incredible every single day of my life," Becker said. "That is worth so much more to me than anything money can buy. I'm asking questions about the world that I live in and people talk to me."

Becker recently won the Lisagor Award for a story about Scott McPherson, the local playwright who wrote a

play entitled "Marvin's Room." The play was eventually made into a movie starring Diane Keaton and Meryl Streep in 1996. Family and friends worked hard to get the movie made in Hollywood, but McPherson died before it was released.

"I wanted to show how this movie was shepherded through Hollywood after the playwright was dead," Becker said. "(The play) doesn't have a happy ending which is the antithesis of Hollywood's formula approach to life. It has a sad ending, an ambiguous ending and I think that's a victory for the playwright."

Becker said her story became recognized because it demonstrated how a local playwright gained national attention. She also described the long and drawn-out process the movie went through to get produced.

Her style is evident in the report. Becker talks to a wide variety of sources. She includes most of them in her story, but says some people she interviewed didn't add anything special to the story and were not included.

Becker says too much emphasis is put on writing and reporting as the two components that make a good journalist. In radio writing, Becker said, "I sort of think people skills are ninety percent of it and five percent is writing."

The piece ends with Becker interviewing McPherson's sister at the movie premiere of "Marvin's Room." Becker gets the woman to share how much they love each other, including

a touching story describing McPherson's love for his sister's unborn child. The sister was in tears.

Knowing the right person to talk to in a room full of people takes some intuition, Becker says. The night she got her last quote for the award winning story, she said there must have been 100 people she could have interviewed.

"I have to say that in story after story intuition saves the day," Becker said.

Becker got her start in public broadcasting during a short stint at KCET-TV in Los Angeles where she was a news writer and researcher in the late 1980's. But that was short-lived, lasting only about a year. When she returned to the U.S. from Prague in 1993, Becker went to Cincinnati to live with her parents. While working in a clothing store and doing some temp work, she convinced a local public radio station to give her a shot.

"I bartered my services," she said. "I said 'I know how to report, you don't have to teach me to be a journalist, but I don't know how to use this equipment.'"

From the Cincinnati station, Becker applied and landed her current position at WBEZ in Chicago.

"I never hear from people that I didn't get it right," Becker said. "I do hear from people that I captured them."

"That was one of the huge challenges with 'Marvin's Room.' How could I do justice



to a person I never met? And it meant finding the right people to capture his spirit in the right way."

Even while freelancing in New York for various publications, Becker had a keen sense for telling people's stories. Now what seems like a million miles away from being a struggling freelancer, Becker continues to humanize her stories on the radio. Becker slugs her stories on the computer by the name of the person or place the story is about.

"So the 'Marvin's Room' story was called Scott's story in my computer because it was Scott's story," Becker said.

## Inside Journalism

always welcomes

story ideas!

Put them in the IJ box

in the j-dept office