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Assessing the Level of Administrative Censorship and Control in Student Newspapers in Ontario

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Abstract

In the now famous documentary Manufacturing Consent, Noam Chomsky (1992) differentiates between the structure of the professional and student press. Chomsky argues that the professional press is governed by an elite body, whereas the student press is not. In fact, Chomsky notes that the student press is often ignored as a media source unless it takes steps to radically break medial and societal conventions. It is only then that the student press feels pressure from the authoritative class.

In the professional press, it can no longer be disputed that the media is under the close watch of the authoritative class, and subsequently, the media is often censored. Whether it is a silenced profanity in a prime-time Hollywood movie, or the complete exclusion of opinion regarding a controversial news issue, the pubic rarely gets to see the full picture. The underlying question regarding censorship is, what is the motivation? The answer is painfully simple: profit and influence (Bagdikian, 1992). News media in particular are susceptible to very specific types of censorship. Owners want to influence their audiences and profit from them. And to ensure that their goals are met, owners and publishers pay great attention to the content and slant of the news, because if the public doesn't tune in, the owner loses both money and potential influence.

University publications, on the other hand, are run on a different set of goals and values. The goals of student publications are not profit and influence, but information and education. Because the goals are different, the process, ownership, and organization of the newspaper are inherently different. Many university publications receive funding from either the university administration directly or from another university source such as a students' union. And "although salaries and news production costs often are paid by administrators, few believe that there is a correlation between funding and news selection" (Bodle, 1994: 907). But is this true? How much control does the funding body of a student publication have over content and slant? This study will aim to address these questions by examining the level of administrative control and censorship in student newspapers across Ontario using David Taras' ownership model, and Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's propaganda model, as the defining theoretical frameworks.

Four primary research questions are going to be considered: (1) How often and why does the funding body (excluding advertising revenue) attempt to control the content of the student publication, and how successful are they? (2) Under what circumstances do editors-in-chief or executive editors of university publications feel pressured, either directly or indirectly, by the funding body to censor or tailor the content of the newspaper, and under what circumstances do editors oblige? (3) From the editor's point of

view, how does the funding body handle situations in which unfavourable content has been published in a university publication? (4) What do editors see as the prime function of the student press? What measures are taken to ensure that this mandate is fulfilled?

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Introduction

In the now famous documentary *Manufacturing Consent*, Noam Chomsky (1992) differentiates between the structure of the professional and student press. Chomsky argues that the professional press is governed by an elite body, whereas the student press is not. In fact, Chomsky notes that the student press is often ignored as a media source unless it takes steps to radically break medial and societal conventions. It is only then that the student press feels pressure from the authoritative class.

In the professional press, it can no longer be disputed that the media is under the close watch of the authoritative class, and subsequently, the media is often censored. Whether it is a silenced profanity in a prime-time Hollywood movie, or the complete exclusion of opinion regarding a controversial news issue, the pubic rarely gets to see the full picture. The underlying question regarding censorship is, what is the motivation? The answer is painfully simple: profit and influence (Bagdikian, 1992). News media in particular are susceptible to very specific types of censorship. Owners want to influence their audiences and profit from them. And to ensure that their goals are met, owners and publishers pay great attention to the content and slant of the news, because if the public doesn't tune in, the owner loses both money and potential influence.

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(1) How often and why does the funding body (excluding advertising revenue) attempt to control the content of the student publication, and how successful are they?

(2) Under what circumstances do editors-in-chief or executive editors of university publications feel pressured, either directly or indirectly, by the funding body to censor or tailor the content of the newspaper, and under what circumstances do editors oblige?
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Background Information

To consider these issues, it is useful to recognize some of the widely publicized cases of censorship in the student press that have taken place across North American in the past two decades. These incidents are regularly remembered and brought into discussions surrounding the freedom of the student press.

There has been considerable coverage with respect to a case of censorship in Hazelwood East High School in Hazelwood, Mo. (see Cohodas 1988, Hoyt 1987, and Kopenhaver & Click, 2001). Robert E. Reynolds, then principal of Hazelwood, deleted two pages that dealt with issues of divorce and teen pregnancy from the Spectrum, the school newspaper produced by the journalism class. The Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favour of the principal stating that "public school officials have wide latitude in censoring student publications […] Justice Byron R. White said a school 'need not tolerate student speech that is inconsistent with its basic educational mission, even though the government could not censor similar speech outside the school.' […] The First amendment is not in violation, White added, when school officials exercise 'editorial control over the style and content of student speech in school sponsored expressive articles' as long as the officials' actions are 'reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns'" (Cohodas, 1988:133). Although this incident occurred in a U.S. high school, it is relevant in relation to this study, because it clearly illustrates the attitude held toward student interest and student rights.

Canada has also seen its fair share of controversy surrounding the student press. Arguably, the most controversial instance of censorship occurred in Newfoundland in 1991 (see MacDonnell 1991, Edwards 1993, and Dearing, 1994). Memorial University's *The Muse* ran a piece entitled "A Gay Man's Guide to Erotic Safer Sex." This piece caused controversy within Canada's student press as well as Canada's professional press, making both national and international headlines. The guide details acts of anal and oral sex in conjunction with tips on how to have safer sex and reduce the risk of getting AIDS.

Then president of Memorial University, Arthur May, noted that the guide had the ability to offend financial backers of the university and ultimately lead to higher tuition costs. Furthermore, the publication of this guide led to an investigation by the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary's morality squad. Meanwhile, the Canadian University Press (CUP), a wire service for Canada's student papers, picked up the guide thereby allowing it to be published in student papers all across Canada.

For those campus newspapers that chose to run the guide, public and campus reactions were similar to those in Newfoundland. Halifax's *Dalhousie Gazette* decided to run the guide and was met with the Phi Kappa Pi fraternity throwing a "Nuke the Gazette" party, and a two-week long investigation of the Gazette by the Halifax Police Department. Also in Halifax, *The Watch*, the University of King's College newspaper, attempted to run the guide, but when the newspaper came back from the press there was a large blank space with the word "censored" where the article should have been. Web Atlantic Ltd., the paper's publisher, refused to print the article. Wilfred Laurier's *The Cord*, in Waterloo, Ontario, published the guide and was shut down for three days. York University's *The Lexicon,* in Toronto, was threatened with closure after running the article. All over the country, other

student papers were threatened to be shut down by administration. Staff members were asked to resign, and papers were boycotted by both students and surrounding communities, all due to the publication of this guide.

Six years later, an incident at the University of Alberta caused a stir amongst the student press population. Adam Thrasher, a doctoral student in biomedical engineering, authored a comic known as "*Spacemoose*." The comic was originally published both in the print and in the online version on the University of Alberta's Gateway, but the October 9, 1997 installment was not published in the paper, only online. Then Editor-In-Chief Rose Yewchuk found the strip, which was a gun-laden commentary on the annual women's walk against violence "Take Back the Night," to be offensive, and she chose not to run it. But the online link was advertised as to where Space moose fans could find that week's installment. This decision led to a stream of headlines and controversy about the use of university web space (see Cosh 1997 and Coyle, 1997). Thrasher's comic was soon removed from the university's web space, and consequently from the university's paper. Then acting dean, Burton Smith, noted there were no guidelines for what constitutes "appropriate" use of university web space, but he went on to say that "unless he has no sense of taste or right and wrong, Mr. Thrasher ought to know that this is an inappropriate use. The university's computers are not for putting cartoons on, they' re not for having great debates on, they' re not for attacking any particular group of philosophy. It's intended for academic work and research" (Cosh, 1997: 1). Thrasher's comic can still be found online, but not on the University of Alberta's website.

Such events have sparked researchers to operationalize and consider the notion of censorship in relation to the student press, and a number of studies on the topic have been published in the past two decades (see Walden 1985, Ryan and Martinson 1986, Hoyt 1987, Bodle 1994, and Kopenhaver and Click, 2001). Much of this research has concentrated on American universities, and although these studies deal with censorship, many approach the issue from the administrative perspective rather than from the perspective of the editorial staff.

Ryan and Martinson's "Attitudes of College Newspaper Advisors Toward Censorship in the Student Press," looks to define the parameters of censorship in student press by asking advisors their opinions on free speech, the freedom of the press, student newspapers and campus reporting, and the image of institutions in student publications. This study showed that the majority of advisors (members of the funding and administrative body) were supportive of the freedom of the student press, even at the cost of personal or institutional reputation. 59.8 per cent of 123 participants strongly agreed that a "student newspaper should be allowed to print a story it can prove is true, even if printing that story may embarrass the institution," and 72 per cent strongly disagreed that "a college/university should have the right to prohibit publication of articles it thinks are harmful, even though such articles might not be libelous, obscene or disruptive" (59). Ryan and Martinson's findings are valuable when thinking about the opinions of editorial staff, and when assessing whether opinions expressed by newspaper advisors match the feeling of executive editors and editors-in-chief of student publications.

John V. Bodle includes the opinions of advisors, editorial staff, and advertisers in his 1994 study "Measuring the Tie between Funding and News Control at Student Newspapers," conducted in 449 universities across the U.S. This study addresses questions regarding the attempts of the administration and advertisers to control the news content of student papers, and the potential consequences and punishments for editors if unfavourable news content is published. Bodle found that 85.5% of university publications reported that their school's administration had never requested nor demanded that the paper not publish something or report on a particular issue, and 71.1% said that they had never been asked by their school's administration to publish a particular story or cover a particular issue. Either way, 80.4% of the paper's editors said they would not comply with any request made by the administration (908). And "while the majority of advisors at public (76.8%) and

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private (58.9%) universities indicated they did not believe there was a tie between university funding and control of news content […] nearly one in five (19.7%) at private universities indicated that funding was either strongly tied (9%) or somewhat tied (10.7%) to news selection […]" (907). In Canada, the distinction between public and private universities is less significant as the majority of Canadian universities are publicly funded. However, overall, the study offers some valuable insight into the opinions on the relationship between news selection and funding bodies from both sides of the censorship coin.

Bodle's work acted as a guiding influence for this study, and the reader will notice similarities in methodology. However, the reader will also note that there are differences with respect to the emphasis on a qualitative versus quantitative approach, and the Canadian versus American focus. In Bodle's study, he presents concrete percentages to gauge levels of censorship, but he does not discuss the factors which might account for these results. Although Bodle's findings were used to guide the initial research, in contrast to Bodle open-ended questions and circumstance-specific scenarios were used throughout the methodology as the primary guiding tool to pinpoint the factors that might lead to censorship. As well, two theoretical frameworks helped set the theoretical groundwork for this qualitative approach to studying censorship. Both David Taras' Ownership Model and Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's Propaganda Model provide frameworks for thinking about the motivations and circumstances surrounding censorship in the professional press. Furthermore, these two models outline the parameters for the idea of 'censorship.'

Throughout my undergraduate career, I have held the positions of both Production Manager and Managing Editor of *The Silhouette*, McMaster University's student newspaper. My role at the paper allowed me to adopt an emic perspective as to how a student paper functions. Utilizing this experience in conjunction with the ideas provided by Taras' and Chomsky and Herman's models, this study will draw a comparison between the student press and the professional press to assess similarities and differences in the factors and motivations behind circumstances of censorship.

The Ownership Model

In his ownership model, Taras focuses on the increasing corporate control of news media across Canada. Contrary to the idea that news simply mirrors reality, Taras (1990) argues that "news is dictated primarily by the interests of the huge corporate empires that own so much of the Canadian media" (8).

In this case, censorship is seen as the overt elimination or suppression of content, and as a hierarchical and hegemonic method of suppressing information. Conrad Black, the former chairman of Hollinger, says that the working press is "ignorant, lazy, opinionated, intellectually dishonest, and inadequately supervised" (Taras, 1990: 10). This negative opinion permeates other levels of the industry and leads to direct action and censorship. In some cases, owners blatantly dictate content, as seen through comments made by David Radler, president of Hollinger: "I don't audit each newspaper's editorials day by day, but if it should come to a matter of principle, I am ultimately the publisher of all these papers, and if editors disagree with us, they should disagree with us when they're no longer in our employ. The buck stops with the ownership. I am responsible for meeting payroll; therefore, I will ultimately determine what the papers say and how they're going to be run" (Hackett, 2000: 38). Many owners clearly show little or no respect for those on whom they rely to produce their product and, in turn, they feel a need to dictate exactly what these "grunting masses of jackals" must produce and what they can't produce (Taras, 1990: 10). This is overt corporate censorship.

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Radler openly admits he is an active participant in shaping the content and bias of his papers. Despite this confession, journalists are often blamed for slanted news articles or editorial content. Just as journalists are often faced with few options in terms of imposed ownership biases, the public,

as news consumers, is also silenced. As Bagdikian (1992) notes, "even when the most blatant deterioration of news takes place, the public has little power to force changes" (9). By-lines identify journalists, and the public can easily connect the slant or bias of an article to a particular journalist. Therefore, being on the frontline of the media structure, the journalist receives the bulk of any negative feedback. Editors may also receive a number of complaints as visible members of the structure who appear to have power.

However, censorship in Canadian newspapers is not always a conscious act on the part of the owner. Even in the absence of direct intervention, past experience, or even speculation that owners may interfere with possible storylines, might be enough to deter journalists from pursuing particular avenues. Due to the power structure of oligopoly, journalists have little choice but to adhere to their owners' demands, or they run the risk of losing their job or losing credibility in the profession (Taras, 1990: 14).

The Propaganda Model

Tim O'Sullivan et al. (1994) define propaganda as "an historically specific form of mass persuasion (involving the production and transmission of specifically structured texts and messages) designed to produce or encourage certain responses in the mass audience" (247). This definition, however, does not address specific questions regarding the circumstances surrounding the use and creation of propaganda. For instance, what sorts of messages are transmitted via propaganda? Who has the ability to control and shape these messages? What tactics are used to encourage certain responses from the audience? Does the audience readily accept or decline these messages? How does propaganda affect the freedom of the press and the freedom of the people? Chomsky and Herman attempt to address some of these questions in the model.

Similar to Taras' ownership model, Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model suggests that the elites control the content of the media. However, this model "does not assume that news workers and editors are typically coerced or instructed to omit certain voices and accentuate others" (Klaehen, 2002: 150). Rather, the propaganda model notes five filters through which the media and the news is shaped. The five filters are described by Chomsky and Herman in Klaehen (2002) are:

(1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms;

(2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media;

(3) the reliance of the media on information provided by the government, business, and the 'experts' funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power;

(4) 'flak' as a means of disciplining the media; and

(5) 'anti-communism' as a national religion and control mechanism (158-159).

These filters lead to the framing and shaping of news stories by the media. So, although the media actually write and transmit the messages to the public, the media do not have control over the slant and content of these messages. They are shaped within an elitist frame.

The first filter emphases points similar to Taras' ownership model. Canada's media is one of the most corporately concentrated in the world, and is commonly known as a media oligopoly. Although the role of the media may appear to differ from that of other large corporate institutions, Chomsky and Herman argue that "[…] dominant media firms are quite large businesses; they are controlled by very wealthy people or by managers who are subject to sharp constraints by owners and other market-profit-oriented forces" (Herman and Chomsky in Klaehen, 2002: 159). The elites, like Izzy Asper, who own the dominant media firms, like Torstar, are ultimately the ones who are able to control the bias and slant of the media. They have the ability to proliferate propaganda-like messages. Whereas the media reflects the interests of media owners, media owners' interests must appeal to the interests of the advertisers, as is the focus of the second filter. News media rely heavily

on advertising revenue and without the support of major advertising corporations, there would be no media. Consistent with Bagdikian's idea that influence and profit motivate slant, bias, and censorship in the media, the first filter plays on influence, whereas this second filter plays on profit.

Chomsky and Herman's third filter identifies the media's tendency to rely on politicians and other experts to "facilitate the news gathering process" (Klaehen, 2002: 159). Through this process, the experts who subscribe to the dominant ideology are able to embed their ideas into the media by providing quotes, press releases, press conferences, and photo opportunities. Thus the dominant ideology is perpetuated through mass media messages.

The fourth filter focuses on what Chomsky and Herman define as "flak." "[D]ominant social institutions (most notably the state) possess the power and requisite organizational resources to pressure the media to play a propagandistic role in society" (Klaehen, 2002: 160). Basically, the "dominant social institutions" can punish the media on the grounds that they do not adhere to the limits of the dominant ideology.

The fifth filter changed meaning in the post-Cold War period. Chomsky suggests that the idea of anti-communism "has been replaced with a dichotomy of 'othernesses" (Klaehen, 2002: 161). Essentially, the media needs an enemy, something to instil rage and fear into the public. This tactic is used to distract audiences from the reality of a news event (the recent war on Iraq is a prime example), and to help channel potential public anger toward the capitalist structure into other directions. Chomsky and Herman note the fifth filter as a tactic that the elite class uses to perpetuate dominant capitalist ideologies. This fifth filter can be used as the basis of explaining why Chomsky and Herman think the public is susceptible to propaganda. Herman (1996) explains:

> The model does suggest that the mainstream media, as elite institutions, commonly frame news and allow debate only within the parameters of elite interests; and that where the elite is really concerned and unified, and/or where the ordinary citizens are not aware of their own stake in an issue or are immobilized by effective propaganda, the media will serve elite interests uncompromisingly" (119).

It is important to remember that, although the institution itself is elitist, members of media institutions are not responsible for this framing of ideas. The members of the press, like the public, are under great influence to behave according to the system of elites who own the press. In much the same way, it can be argued that editors of the student press are under extreme pressure to present the academic institution in a particular way. Student publications, although not run by the elite (as Taras, Chomsky and Herman define them), are governed by a form of student elites – student government. Within the confines of the institution, the student government/funding body assumes the role of the authoritative class. According to Taras and Herman and Chomsky, they have the money, so they have the power and influence.

Methodology and Sample Selection

To look more closely at how these issues play out with respect to the student press, 15 university campus publications were contacted within the province of Ontario. Publications not under the advisement of a board, publications that receive private funding (not funded by a university organization), non-English language publications, publications not listed as the official campus newspaper, and publications not written and produced by attending students (opposed to non-attending students, staff or faculty) were excluded from the selection process. (See Appendix A for a complete list of contacted publications.)

The primary tool for data collection was a questionnaire. The executive editors/editors-in chief of the 15 selected papers were contacted via telephone or e-mail. The purpose of the study was de-

scribed and their participation was requested. Out of the 15 newspapers contacted, 10 publications did not reply to the request for participation, one publication was closed for the summer months, one declined due to time constraints, and three agreed to participate. The low response rate could be due to a number of circumstantial factors. First, although executive editors are generally required to work full-time through the summer months, many do not actually work full-time hours making them less available to receive phone call or return e-mails. Second, many executive editor contracts run May to April, therefore editors may not have felt confident enough with their experience to feel they could adequately answer question regarding the management and history of the publication. Third, this research project addresses an issue that is sensitive to any media personnel. Censorship is a buzz word. The parameters of the topic are nearly impossible to define on a macro scale, and often hard to justify on a micro scale. Editors of the student press face the issue of censorship on a daily basis. And as seen in the examples of disciplinary action outlined in questionnaire responses (see Disciplinary Action), the choices editors make regarding the publication of certain content can have drastic ramifications. Therefore, answering a questionnaire outlining the strengths and weaknesses of a publication's censorship policy may be difficult.

However, there is one major advantage to conducting such a study during the summer term. Head editors are generally under less pressure and stress during the summer months due to the lack of weekly deadlines and reduced staff. The normal school term runs September to April, and during this time, student newspapers typically put out 25-30 issues. The summer months, May to August, typically see three to five issues. Head editors have more time to put together the content and the layout while taking time to prepare for the upcoming year. Hopefully, these circumstances will be more conducive to participation in this study, as editorial positions are ones of high demand, pressure, and stress.

The willing editors were sent a five page questionnaire via e-mail. (See Appendix A for an initial outline of the survey.) Out of the three editors that agreed to participate, only two returned completed questionnaires. Numerous follow-up phone calls and e-mails were made in attempts to recruit more editors, however, there was no response. Out of 15 potential publications there were two participants.

Using the outlines provided in the ownership model and the propaganda model as guidelines to determine levels of and reasons for censorship in the professional press, the responses from the questionnaire were analyzed and scrutinized to establish a sense of the level and nature of censorship in student newspapers in Ontario. As well, a brief comparison will be made between the situation of professional press and the student press. First, the results of the questionnaires will be summarized.

Background Information on Participants

Both of the participating editors were from weekly newspapers in Southern Ontario, and both were the Executive Editor/Editor-In-Chief of their respective publications. The duties associated with this position include general management of the newspaper; supervision and support of staff; financial, operational, and administrative duties; and filling in gaps in writing and production when necessary. Will, Executive Editor of *The Shadow*, has been in his position for one year and has been a member of the editorial staff for four years. Rachel, Editor-In-Chief of *The Bugle*, has been in her position for 1.5 months and has been a member of the editorial staff for one year.

Funding and Administrative Profile

Both respondents noted that the bulk of their paper's funding comes from student fees (either directly or through the students' union) and advertising revenue. Both papers are governed by an advisory Board of Directors/Board of Publications that is run through the school's students' union or student governance. Each publication's Board consists of members of the student government (e.g. president, vice-presidents, chairs, etc), and members of the editorial staff. In addition, each publication is governed by an official operating policy, although the two individual policies differ in content. Each editor summarized sections of their operating policies that address issues of censorship, disciplinary action, and the role of the funding body in relation to the newspaper.

***The Shadow*:** The operating policies guiding the procedures at this paper are extensive. Will referred to four sections of the operating policy that he felt were directly related to the issue of censorship. The individual sections address: "the censorship of libel and the discretionary censorship of 'bad taste', the censorship of prejudice, homophobia, racism and sexism, the extent of (and limits to) *The Shadow's* editorial and functional autonomy, [and] the censorship of parody in *The Shadow* except for designated areas." Will explained that "If parody is printed in any section other than the [designated section], the editorial staff can lose two week's pay."

The limits of editorial and functional autonomy that Will speaks of are explained in the operating policy: "*The Shadow* shall remain completely autonomous in terms of editorial content of the paper; the sole exception is that *The Shadow* shall be accountable to the Student Representative Assembly with regard to financial management and workplace health and safety issues." Will also explained that there is a Code of Ethics in the operating policies that he feels censors *The Shadow* to "a certain degree." He also felt a possible infringement on editorial autonomy by *The Shadow's* advisory body, as noted in a clause outlining the relationship of the funding body to the newspaper: The Board of Publication shall "serve as an arbitrator in cases of possible violation of the laws of libel or other grievances, according to the Procedures outlined in [the operating policy]; otherwise, the Board of Publication may not fringe on the autonomy of *The Shadow*." Will admits that the operating policies are nearly a decade out of date, and that many of the sections are "no longer valid in the face of the current infrastructure" of the newspaper. Nonetheless, *The Shadow* tends to adhere to the censorship guidelines.

***The Bugle*:** The operating policies guiding the procedures at *The Bugle* are minimal. Rachel notes that there are "no policies on censorship of editorial material," but there is an advertising censorship policy that says the newspaper can "refuse oppressive materials, materials that contravene civil law, and for unpaid accounts." However, she notes that there is some variance about what constitutes "oppressive" material. In the masthead of *The Bugle*, there is a disclaimer that reads, "*The Bugle* reserves the right to edit or refuse all material deemed sexist, racist, homophobic, or otherwise unfit for publication as determined by the Editor-In-Chief." Rachel did not comment on this policy, but she noted that there is no code in the operating policy regarding disciplinary action for the publication of "inappropriate" content. She admitted, however, that the newspaper is often expected to print apologies with regards to the publication of "inappropriate" content.

The relationship between *The Bugle* and its funding/administrative body is different than that of *The Shadow*. Rachel noted that the only section in *The Bugle's* operating policies that comment on this issue state "that there is no degree of control by the university, and *The Bugle* [does] not have to reflect their opinion." Although *The Shadow's* policies boast editorial and functional autonomy for the paper, there is a short clause that suggests the Board of Publications be used as an arbitrator in situations of libel or "other grievances." *The Bugle's* policies suggest no such action.

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Both Will and Rachel commented on what an "ideal" relationship between the funding body and the process of news selection would look like. Given different contexts, both editors agreed that funding bodies should remove themselves from the process and production of news selection. Will noted that an ideal relationship between the funding body and news selection rests not only in edito-

rial autonomy but in functional autonomy as well. Will suggested that "[a student newspaper] should govern its own affairs and not be linked with other departments." Rachel noted that "Ideally, the funding body would have no vested interest [in news selection] and would not attempt to assert any kind of control over news selection."

Both editors admitted that this "ideal" relationship is not a reality in the everyday workings of the paper. Will said that, "editorial autonomy notwithstanding, *The Shadow* has fallen victim to the coercion of functional overseers on more than one occasion." Rachel said nothing about the funding body directly in terms of the "ideal" relationship, but she did note that often advertisers complain about content because it may potentially harm relationships with clients.

Frequency and circumstances surrounding content control by the funding/administrative body:

Both Will and Rachel acknowledged instances when attempts have been made on behalf of the funding/administrative body to suggest that specific content be published or not be published in the paper. However, it is interesting to note that neither editor made reference to specific circumstances or instances when this sort of coercion occurred. *The Shadow*: Will complained that *The Shadow* is often approached with suggestions/demands to cover stories about "groundbreaking" policy, is criticized for not focusing closely enough on student politics, is asked to print a number of apologies, and is chastised for its news reporting methods. He says that "while this is hardly a proactive approach to suggesting content, these events were just as suggestive." Interestingly, Will noted that he does not think press releases and advance copies of public addresses should be included as suggested content. He said that press releases keep the paper "informed" and "are an important source of information" for the newspaper.

Will did mention specific instances when he was asked by members of the funding/administrative body to refrain from running certain content. Will recalled that *The Shadow* was approached by a senior member of the funding body and was asked to stop printing articles that reflected negatively on the campus bar. In another instance, *The Shadow* was approached by the same senior member and was told that if the paper covered the arrest of an employee of the funding body for embezzling student's fees, the executive editor and staff could be "subject to legal implications."

The Bugle: Rachel noted that the largest source of suggested content came in the form of misdirected news releases and news releases that promote a service or a business. She added that advertisers often asked for special privileges. For example, an advertiser asked the paper to print a feature on a band that would be playing at an advertised club. The issue of news releases and advance copies of public addresses acting as a form of suggested content is a sensitive issue at *The Bugle*, and Rachel made the distinction between news releases that are beneficial to the promoter and/or to the readership. "An editor has to have a critical eye about the kind of releases that should be covered. Public addresses that are of importance to the community are good to highlight in a campus paper." Rachel claimed that she had no direct knowledge of any instances when the funding/administrative body had asked the paper not to publish specific content.

The issue of non-compliance with the demands of funding/administrative bodies was one of importance to both editors, and both editors agreed on their approach to handling the situation. Both said they tried their hardest not to comply with any suggestion or demands made from outside the editorial staff. In response to an issue that will soon be raised before *The Bugle's* Board of Directors regarding free concert listings and a possible conflict-of-interest for advertising staff, Rachel said, "My preference is never to comply, because the paper belongs to students, not to advertisers." Will agreed and refrained from printing apologies demanded by the funding/administrative body and continued to print articles about the campus bar, but noted that for the protection of the editorial

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staff, *The Shadow* had to comply on the issue of not printing an article about the arrest of a staff member from the funding/administrative body.

Disciplinary action

Student newspapers often have clauses regarding disciplinary action in their operating policies (see *The Shadow*'s operating policies), but special circumstances can arise that do not fit into the clauses outlined in these policies. It has been my experience that these special circumstances are often directly related to a negative portrayal of a member of the funding/administrative body, a negative portrayal of the funding/administrative body itself, or the publication of any content that reflects poorly on the "morals" of the institution. The participants were asked if they had ever been part of, or witness to, any disciplinary action from the funding/administrative body.

The Shadow: Will recalled four incidents in his tenure at *The Shadow* when he had been involved in such disciplinary action. For reasons of confidentiality, he was only able to comment on one of these incidents.

In what will go down in the annals of Shadow history as the 'Big Black Dildo Incident,' our beleaguered publication printed certain profanities on the front page of a weekly issue. The text was taken from an article on sexual habits that was published in the lifestyles section of our paper. Following an uproar from the community (to which we distributed *The Shadow*), the Board of Publications deemed it fit to order a written apology to several parties, a printed apology on the front of the newspaper, and several in-person apologies and meetings. A motion to dismiss the executive editor and managing editor was considered, but ultimately failed.

The Bugle: Rachel reported that she had never been part of or witness to disciplinary action on behalf of the funding/administrative body.

Controversial Content

Both editors have addressed the issue of "inappropriate" content, content in "bad taste," or "controversial" content. These are difficult concepts, because they hold different meanings for different people, publications, and communities. This was evident through the range of action taken, depending on the geographic location and slant of the newspaper as occurred in the range of responses to the publication of the "Gay Man's Guide to Erotic Safer Sex." Although all noted instances dealt with a level of disciplinary action, the severity of the action varied from paper to paper. To understand what each editor meant when using the term "controversial content," the participants were asked to discuss the idea of controversial content in terms of their own opinion, their own publication, and other student publications.

***The Shadow*:** Will stated that *The Shadow* often publishes controversial articles, but he distinguishes these pieces from articles written in "bad taste." Controversial articles are ones that stir controversy, which Will notes "for all intents and purposes is generally a positive thing in that it sparks discussion, debate, and thought." Articles in "bad taste" are not "aligned with the most basic principles of respect, tolerance, and taste." Will admitted that he has pulled articles from the paper that he considered to be in "bad taste." Will stated that there are no topics about which he feels uncomfortable running articles. On the other hand, there are topics that he feels uncomfortable addressing in an editorial, because he doesn't "want readers to assume *The Shadow* is biased and that the selections for publication mirror the personal interests and values of its editorial staff."

In terms of other student newspapers, Will cited an issue of a college paper that "contained inappropriate content in that it was little more than crude bigotry obviously aimed at attracting readers through shock value as opposed to journalistic integrity."

The Bugle: *The Bugle* often publishes sex columns and political columns that criticize politicians, university bodies, and corporations, and Rachel deemed these articles "controversial." In regard to other student papers, she says that she has seen articles that were sexist or racist in nature, and she does not think these articles deserved to be published. There are no topics that Rachel feels uncomfortable addressing in *The Bugle*. She thinks that campus and community papers should have "fresh, critical perspectives and [should] bring new ideas to the table."

Mandate of the Student Press

Both editors agreed that the mandate of the student press is focused on appealing to issues that are important to students and student communities in an effort to get students active, interested, informed, motivated, and involved on campus. To appeal to this aspect of their mandate, both editors agreed that it is necessary to make an effort to cover issues and opinions not commonly found in the professional press. Whereas, this sort of advocacy journalism was crucial to Rachel's opinion of the mandate of the student press, Will further emphasized other aspects.

> "In an ideal world, the aims and goals of campus newspapers would be very much aligned with the larger free press. However, as free press is a rare commodity these days in lieu of corporate media conglomerates and the like, campus newspapers are charged more now than ever with upholding the standards of fair, impartial, and informative journalism[…] [The student press] should be a source of credible information that allows readers to make their own judgments based on the facts presented[…] "

While each editor admitted that there are barriers and set-backs to continually meeting this mandate (e.g. an annually rotating editorial staff), both Will and Rachel feel their editorial staff does their best to meet this mandate. For the most part, both editors feel they have been successful.

Discussion

Taras argues that the news is dictated primarily by large corporate media empires. Essentially, this means that news is dictated primarily by media owners. Taras' argument is supported by comments made by both Conrad Black and David Radler when they say that they have no qualms with directing and dictating the news selections in the their newspapers (9). Chomsky and Herman make a similar claim regarding the relationship between the funding body and news selection and creation. They say that media firms are much like large businesses, in that owners control managers and staff. However, Ryan and Martinson's study suggests that Taras', and Chomsky and Herman's claims do not apply to the student press. Their results showed that the majority of funding and administrative bodies in the student press support editorial autonomy and freedom of the student press. But according to comments made by both Will and Rachel, the funding/administrative bodies have varying levels of official control (as stated in the operating policies) over the content of their newspapers. Both Will and Rachel commented that they have experienced pressure from the funding/administrative body regarding the publication of certain news items. However, only Will stated that he had been asked not to publish a specific article or cover a specific topic by a member of the funding/administrative body. This discrepancy between the official on-paper claim of editorial autonomy versus the pressures felt on a daily basis suggests that the student press does share common threads with Taras' and Chomsky and Herman's models of the professional press. Both presses experience a level of pressure from the funding and governing entities of their newspapers.

However, it is important to note that each respondent recalled only a few situations when they felt pressure to either publish or not publish specific content. The fact that each of these editors

could pinpoint specific instances, and that the aforementioned instances of censorship in student papers across Canada lends support to the notion that censorship is a rare occurrence in student papers. Taras and Herman and Chomsky admit that one of the reasons the media is so persuasive in propagating messages to the public is that the corporate/elite control of the media is so entrenched that both the staff and the public have stopped noticing its existence. Censorship happens on a daily basis in professional news media and appears to be invisible, while it is more apparent in academic forums. A concern with respect to suggested content arises around the use of press releases and advance copies of public addresses. Chomsky and Herman clearly state that press releases, photo opportunities, advance copies of public addresses, and expert quotes act as a way for elites to broadcast their message under the guise of providing accurate up-to date information to the press. Whereas Rachel acknowledged the distinction between press releases that provide information of interest to the student press and press releases that act as promotion for a business or service, Will did not. An editor's job is to be critical of all information that passes his or her desk. However, positions at student newspapers work on a learning curve. Some would argue that Will's lack of critical eye could be due to a lack of experience in the area.

Despite differing opinions regarding press releases, both editors agreed on the issue of non-compliance, and this is an area that clearly separates the student press from the professional press. As Taras notes, in the professional press journalists often do not have a choice in regards to owners' demands surrounding content and slant of their newspaper. In fact, as seen in Radler's bold statement, many owners' will terminate contracts if the paper is not run in their preferred manner. Non-compliance was one of the issues on which Will and Rachel fully agreed. They both commented that they try not to comply with any demands or suggestions made by members of the funding/administrative body. Only under direct threat of legal action against himself and staff members did Will give in to a demand made by a member of the funding/administrative body. Because both editors were strong in their assertion strongly that they try not to comply with demands, it may appear that the influence of funding/administrative bodies in directing content is somewhat limited. However, there are two major reasons why this is not the case. Firstly, the more administrators attempt to control content, the more likely it is that an editor will eventually comply. Secondly, attempts made to control content by a funding/administrative body illustrate the attitude held by the elite class toward the student press.

However, it is important to note that the structure of student papers allows for greater freedom of speech and freedom from administration. Both Will and Rachel stated that the official guidelines on disciplinary action are minimal, and working for a student paper is generally either an unpaid position or a minimally paid position. It is unlikely that any employee is living solely off his or her salary from employment at the paper. The stakes for student journalists just aren't as high as they are for professionals.

The structure of the student press works towards the ideals outlined by Will and Rachel for the mandate of the student press. The purpose of the student press is to continually push the envelope and to offer opinions not readily found in the professional press. It also serves to motivate students to get involved in the student community. The very nature of this mandate suggests that student newspapers should be critical of the policies and bodies that govern them. The situations of Will and Rachel illustrate that a student publication can operate relatively autonomously, even under the governance of an external funding/administrative body.

Conclusion

To further investigations into the issue of censorship and control in the student press, it would be beneficial to conduct studies with more participants, and with participants who have the same

years of experience in an editorial position. Also, in the midst of the booming digital age, it would be interesting to look at the relationship between censorship, student newspapers, and online versions of student newspapers. As illustrated in the controversy over *Spacemoose* at the University of Alberta, the issue of web space and ownership has become an issue all its own. The central question revolves around the notion of whether an online student newspaper should have to adhere to the codes upheld by the larger university web space.

Along the same lines, the issue of whether a student newspaper should have to adhere to codes set by its funding/administrative body comes into question. Both online and text formats are supposed to be about free speech, but by being connected to an external body, that free speech has the potential to be censored. Censorship and subjectivity have become inseparable from the professional press, but the level of censorship and control in the student press is less clear. This study took up issues surrounding news selection in university publications with the hope of shedding some light on questions of freedom of expression and freedom of speech. Ideally, universities should be places of knowledge, fresh ideas, and research. Its media should be a forum for free speech. Taras and Chomsky and Herman have argued that the professional press has failed to meet that mandate. A focus for future research would be to investigate whether it is fair to level the same at the student press.

Appendix A

Initial Letter sent to Editors, Requesting Participation in the Study Kristin Wozniak, Communications Studies Student
McMaster University 1280 Main Street West Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4K1

Dear Editor,

I am entering my final year of the Communications Studies programme at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. For my thesis, I am conducting a study to determine the level of and circumstances surrounding censorship in university newspapers across Canada. More specifically, this study will examine the role of the funding/administrative body in relation to news selection and bias in campus publications.

I need your help.

The study will consist of an editorial questionnaire. The five page editorial questionnaire will be completed by editors from campus newspapers province-wide. Because this study relies so heavily on editor feedback and opinion, participation from editors, like yourself, is essential. The questionnaire would take no more than 30-45 minutes of your time, and will be conducted via e-mail.

I have spent the majority of my university career as a member of the editorial board of *The Silhouette*, McMaster University's student newspaper. Although I am no longer a member of the staff, my experience with the paper acted as the motivation for this study. Through my experience, I have gained an emic perspective on student newspaper life, balancing the fine line between inappropriate/appropriate, subjective/objective, and forced/free content. I would simply like to know if my experiences match those of other editors nationwide.

To ensure the protection of your good-name and position at your publication, the final draft of the study will ensure anonymity. Any personal information provided will be seen and analyzed by only myself and my thesis advisor.

I would greatly appreciate your participation in this project. Please respond at your earliest convenience with any questions, concerns, comments, or acceptances/declinations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, Kristin Wozniak

Editorial Questionnaire

Conducted by Kristin Wozniak Communications Student,
McMaster University wozniakl@mcmaster.ca

Instructions

Please fill out the areas under general and administrative to the best of your ability. To ensure comfort amongst participants, this information (with the exception of the italicized categories) will be used only for research purposes and will not be exposed in the final draft of the paper. Then, please answer questions 1 through 11 in full. If you have any questions, concerns, or comments either express them in space provided in question 12 or, if you require an immediate response, please contact me via e-mail at wozniakl@mcmaster.ca.

Thank you for your time, patience, and participation.

General

Name (optional):
Position:
Publication:
University:
Name of funding body (apart from advertising revenue):
Name of administrative body / policy makers:
Months in this position:
Months/Years with the newspaper:
Briefly outline the duties of your position:

Administrative

Would you like your name and title to remain anonymous in the final draft of the study? Yes / No
Would you like to receive a copy of the final paper? Yes / No
Do you consent to said conditions and are willing to participate? Yes/No

Questions

1. (a) Do you consider your newspaper to be editorially autonomous? Please explain.
1. (b) Do you think your paper is censored? In your answer, please include your definition of censorship.

2. (a) Please explain an ideal relationship between the funding body and the process of news selection.
2. (b) How does this ideal relationship compare to the actual relationship between the funding body and the process of news selection?

3. (a) Have there been any incidents during your tenure with the paper when the funding body has suggested content for the news section? If yes, please outline the situation(s). If no, please explain why you think this is true.
3. (b) Do you think that press releases, advance copies of public addresses, etc. should be included in this category? Why or why not?

(4) Have there been any incidents during your tenure with the paper when the funding body has asked certain content not to be published? If yes, please outline the circumstance(s). If no, please explain why you think this is true.

5. (a) if you answered yes to questions 3 and/or 4, how often do you comply? Why or why not? Please explain any specific incidents.
5. (b) How does the funding body react to situations where they have been portrayed in an unflattering manner? Please address any specific incidents.
5. (c) Have you ever been part of or been witness to disciplinary action due to the publication of inappropriate content, as deemed by the funding body? If yes, please explain the inappropriate content, the context, and the action taken.

6. (a) Please summarize sections of your operating policies that address issues of censorship.
6. (b) Please comment on the validity of the operating policy to daily life at the newspaper.
6. (c) Please outline any consequences noted in the operating policy regarding the publication of "inappropriate" content.

7. (a) Please summarize sections of your operating policies that address the role of the funding body in relation to the newspaper (other than the obvious).
7. (b) Please comment on the reality of this relationship. Does the relationship outlined in the policy mirror that of reality?

8. (a) Have you ever published content you would consider to be controversial? Why or why not? In your answer please explain what you consider to be controversial.
8. (b) Have you seen published content in other university publications that you feel is inappropriate? Please explain.

9. Is your paper distributed to the community? If so, does the have an effect on published content? Please outline any examples.

10. Are there any topics that you, as the editor, do not feel comfortable addressing in your newspaper? Please explain.

11. (a) Please express what you believe to be the underlying purpose of campus newspapers.
11. (b) Do you feel your publication meets this mandate? Why or why not?

12. Please use this space to state any additional comments, questions, or concerns you feel are relevant to this issue. Please feel free to contact me at wozniakl@mcmaster.ca if you require a more immediate response.

Ontario's Student Newspapers: Initial Contacts
1) Brock University: *The Brock Press*
2) Carelton University: *Centretown News*
3) Lakehead University: *The Argus*
4) McMaster University: *The Silhouette*
5) Nipissing University: *The Hibou*
6) Queen's University: *The Queen's Journal*
7) Ryerson Polytechnic University: *The Ryersonian*

8) Trent University: *Arthur*
9) University of Guelph: *The Ontarion*
10) University of Ottawa: *The Fulcrum*
11) University of Toronto: *The Varsity*
12) University of Waterloo: *Imprint*
13) University of Western Ontario: *The Gazette*
14) Wilfred Laurier: *The Cord*
15) York University: *Excalibur*

Glossary

Authoritative Class / Elite Class: "A fragment of the dominant section of a social formation that exercises or claims social and cultural leadership by virtue of some assumed qualities of excellence which are held to belong exclusively to that fragment" (O'Sullivan et al., 1998, 103) The elite class generally is assumed to hold intellectual, social, political, and economic power over the masses. In a cultural context, the elite class is considered to possess intellectual, creative, and/or artistic excellence. In terms of media studies, the elite class is referenced as those who produce the mass media.
Oligopoly: A situation in which a few major corporations control the industry. (Compare to a monopoly in which one major corporation controls an industry.) Canada is considered to have a media oligopoly, as Thomson and Southam control the majority of media within the nation.
Operating policy: An official set of guidelines that direct the production of a student newspaper. Often, the operating policy is designed by the funding/administrative body.
Student/University press: Official university newspapers produced by students attending corresponding universities.

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