Convention Mania!

Teaching Ourselves How to Teach Others

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new adviser's workshop
Virginia Tech students remind us what journalism should be

By Chris Evans
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Like many of you, I watched the events of April 16 unfold at Virginia Tech through the lens of the media.

I saw Katie Couric on CBS don funeral black and head to the scene—which I appreciated—and ask students questions along the lines of “Didn’t you say you were angry about the way the university handled this situation?”—which I didn’t.

I got about five minutes into the ABC broadcast—in which Charlie Gibson appeared before a graphic of a gun scope, superimposed over the grainy footage of still-alive Virginia Tech students, as though preparing to kill them from a sniper’s vantage point—before turning the channel in disgust.

In those first 24 hours, viewers of CNN saw the cellphone video again and again and again.

For media comfort, I turned to the Web page of the Virginia Tech newspaper, The Collegiate Times, where undergrads began posting updates at 9:47 a.m.—“Shots were fired on campus in West Ambler Johnson Hall in the early morning hours.” — even as the horror played itself out on campus.

What I saw on the Web site that day and in the days that have followed represented some of the finest collegiate journalism I’ve had the opportunity to experience in real time.

These young journalists, many coping with their own shock and grief, brought me into an incredibly important story without schlock, without exaggeration and without an overblown sense of their own importance.

They simply did their jobs. They were professionals—or, at least, they were what we want to mean when we use the word professional, which is to say they were better than the grown-up news anchors.

When I went to teach a news writing class at the University of Vermont the day after the killings, my students and I debated the merits of the ABC and CBS approaches: Couric’s black vs. Gibson’s bulls-eye.

I chafed when my students, who I’ve been training to be a little more hardened than they might always want to be, denounced what I perceived as Couric’s compassion as nothing more than “Barbara Walters make-them-cry shit” and lauded Gibson’s “objective” reporting, sniper’s scope and all.

And yet they kept bringing me back to the reporting of the Collegiate Times, the link for which I’d sent them the day before.

“That’s the best I’ve seen so far,” one said.

Why? It was compassionate. Sensitive to the grief of those involved. And yet objective, too: Just telling the story and letting readers receive it. Showing, not telling. Adding no spin.

Doing what great journalists are supposed to do.

My students are young and I’m getting old: reading a story of massacre for the first time with the eyes of a father. (That’s my 5-year-old, Maddi, there with me in my mug shot.) As I watched the news, I took it in for the first time as someone who felt for those parents out there who had suffered the worst loss imaginable, and in such great numbers.

And as that person—as a parent who spends so much of time watching the media—I thank Collegiate Times editor Amie Steele and managing editor Joe Kendall for their leadership, Saira

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The Spring Convention: By the Numbers (and by the People)

By Ken Rosenauer
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It’s not always obvious, but CMA conventions really are all about people. Thus, the Spring National College Media Convention held last month in New York City is a story of people.

In all, about 1,500 people attended the convention, down about 100 from last year’s meeting.

About 40 people — fellow advisers and some of their students — volunteered to assist at convention registration, making that task as quick and painless as possible. For their contribution, ranging from two to six hours each, they got a goodie bag — small compensation to those people who made things work well for the other 1,460 attending.

Twenty people were responsible for organizing convention programming. These CMA program chairs lined up about 225 sessions that filled the two and one-half days and covered topics that ran the gamut.

And all their planning would have been for naught if each one of those 225 sessions hadn’t been presented by one or more CMA advisers, students or outside professionals: people who didn’t get anything for their time and trouble except, perhaps, the appreciation of those who came curious and left more knowing.

A small, dedicated band of people from SUNY Rockland Community College handled media tours for the convention. Led by their adviser, Genie Abrahms, those students spent Wednesday evening, most of the day Thursday and Friday morning connecting people to several dozen of the best media tours in the country.

Add to that the hours spent lining up the tours during the three months preceding the convention, and their investment was considerable.

Of the people who made a difference at the convention, Mike Koretzky surely was one. Dressed as a younger, thinner, and shorter Fidel look-alike, he coordinated on-site critiques again this year.

I received one of the cigars he handed out. It made it home in one piece, and I’ll enjoy it one cool evening this summer, along with some wine coolers.

Another one of the people who helped make this convention successful was Bill O’Connell, a hardworking adviser from Ohio Northern. During two long hours on Friday of the convention, he was in charge of receiving the entries, which he hauled up to the Presidential Suite for judging.

He earlier had lined up 12 other people — professionals, advisers and journalism educators — to judge entries for the 12 categories of Apple Awards.

Following the Saturday morning hoopla in the hotel with St. Patrick’s Day revelers drinking in the bar and bagpipers by the dozen piping in the lobby, more people representing the staffs of those dozen Apple Award winners took to the stage in the Grand Ballroom to snatch the coveted crystal apple.

Working usually behind the scenes in business and planning sessions, were other people comprising the CMA Board. Led by President Lance Speere, they met for hours each day, beginning Tuesday and ending on Sunday after the convention had adjourned.

One of the people most responsible for making sure those attending knew what was available, when and where was Jody Strauch from Northwest Missouri State University. She designed all the pre-convention promotional materials and whipped together the convention program.

Other Northwest Missouri State people included a bunch of Bearcats: journalism students who pitched in before and during the convention to handle a multitude of tasks and tie up all those loose ends. Megan Switzer, of course, was a standout there.

Finally, the kingpin (er, queenpin) who made it all work was convention director Laura Widmer. In addition to coordinating the efforts of all those above, she jumped in this year and handled the sale of convention sponsorships.

As a result, CMA had more spring sponsors than ever and brought in record revenue.

That leaves one. Yours truly, who is officially closing out his responsibilities for the 2007 Spring National College Media Convention with the act of writing this article, due to CMA Newsletter Editor Chris Evans on April 1. No foolin’.

Thanks to all the people who made this convention a wonderful experience. See you in D.C.
From Newsweek to Online
An editor shares his secrets

By Sally Turner
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For Mark Whitaker, the future of print media boils down to one thing: Surviving by focusing on what it does best.
That was a theme in Whitaker’s keynote speech March 15 in the Grand Ballroom of the Roosevelt Hotel at the CMA spring convention.
Whitaker, former Newsweek editor and now vice president for Washingtonpost.Newsweek Interactive, told a packed crowd that although the media industry produces lots of duplication, eventually the Internet will force all media to focus on what they do best.
“They can’t be all things to all people,” he said.
For example, Whitaker said the media can focus on great local coverage and create community for their readers.
It will give readers a chance “to communicate with each other,” he said. “And it has the potential to create big groups of people.”
Just as Facebook allows college students to talk with one another based on interests and commonalities, similar social networks can be created through the Internet for other experiences after college.
He noted that the Internet is “turning the world into a vertical place.” While as readers may have been used to having all information under one umbrella, now vertical sites are devoted to individual subjects.
And more media outlets are creating Web sites that focus on specific areas of content.
He said multi-media possibilities “can cover things and find an audience,” and any of these “offerings … can contribute to your Web traffic.”
Many of these trials are made possible because it has become easier to launch things, to try out sites without risking finances, he added.
And finances, of course, are part of the problem. Whitaker said we are living in an era where people expect to get their news for free. The content online is free but people still pay to have their newspaper or magazine delivered to their home.
“Revenues for print are down,” Whitaker said, and “the industry is … in turmoil.”
Newspapers used to be the most efficient way for people to get all the day’s important information, and they were willing to pay for that distribution.
Now readers can get that information on their computer.
Now search engines like Google control the distribution.
Which brings us back to survival.
Whitaker said a new generation of media organizations is using tools to create search functions and interactive databases that give information that is much deeper and better than the information the big search engines generate.
He pointed to sites dissecting the Supreme Court justice nominees and political advertising as examples.
“It makes for great journalism,” he said.
And if advertising revenue is one of the keys to financial survival, advertisers can be happy that these mechanisms allow online readers to comment and have discussions.
“Advertisers look for engagement, which this is,” Whitaker said.

The Top Five Tips

Whitaker offers five suggestions for the survival of the journalist and the industry:

Be multi-faceted. While writing and reporting are still vital, “Be a good, fast writer, but develop other skills,” Whitaker said.
“Learn to record, video, etc.” He recommended developing audio skills such as radio and podcasting, as well as incorporating blogs and video with traditional stories.

Be open to the idea of working at a lot of different kinds of places that do news. He said the old route of first working at a smaller paper and working your way up to a metro daily is not necessarily the only career path. “It is still important to get experience,” he said. “But look at other opportunities.”

Be entrepreneurs about your career, he said, and consider starting your own Web business.

Be open to different business models.

Print has a future, but it will survive by focusing on what it does best. In the magazine world, for example, the long form works best. “The strength is in the cover [story],” he said. “It gets an interesting conversation going for a week.”
New York Times Expands Web Presence

By Sally Turner
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Vivian Schiller is excited about the future of journalism, true journalism. And the first step is changing the way of thinking.

“We’re a news organization instead of a newspaper company,” she said. “We have to give [the news] to you any way you want it. We are in the business of expanding our journalism around the world.”

To that end, Schiller, in her position as senior vice president / general manger of NYtimes.com, said in her CMA keynote address March 16 in the Grand Ballroom of the Roosevelt Hotel, that her Web site is investing heavily in digital efforts and “is introducing a lot of cool stuff across the range of news.”

The survival of news organizations depends on using the multi-media available. She said while print is far from dead, it’s the growth rate of the digital media that has surpassed print media.

The Web gives readers information, and Yahoo (the No. 1-visited news site in the world) aggregates the news from the mainstream media.

“These are exciting times and amazing tools,” Schiller said. “We need to put these to use.”

But as long as the name The New York Times is on the nameplate, “We want the brand to represent what’s useful and informative to readers.”

And it comes down to the content, Schiller said.

“As long as journalism is solid,” she said, “you can’t screw up.”

The most important things are still fairness, accuracy, bravery and “dogged reporting,” Schiller said. “We have to be a beacon of fact.”

With bloggers becoming a part of the content landscape, she said it is more important than ever to protect the lines between fact and opinion and fiction. Blogs are a platform, but they don’t imply anything about journalism, she said.

“[People are missing the fact that bloggers don’t report the news. They talk about the news and they refer to The New York Times.”

That said, The New York Times has launched 30 bloggers this year.

Whereas there used to be a 24-hour audition period in journalism, now “bloggers keep stories alive. It’s a wonderful contribution to journalism,” Schiller said.

She added that there is more navigation today to find news. To that end, all Times Select content on the Web site is available free to students. She said she hopes students will use it with their work.

“We want to inspire you – to get a dialogue going,” Schiller said.

She noted that the site adds 30 pieces of original video a week, as well as user-generated content in terms of video, comments and reviews.

“All these things,” Schiller said, “make legitimate journalism in the 21st century something we’ve never seen before.”

What must young journalists do to succeed in today’s marketplace?

Schiller says there are two simple points:

1. Study and practice the fundamentals of journalism.
2. Learn the technology.
Bringing Our Keyboards to Music City

By Ralph Braseth
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More than 100 students and advisers from 30 colleges and 17 states met in Nashville March 29-31 for the first ever Center for Innovation in College Media’s (CICM) New Media conference.

The workshop was held at the First Amendment Center on Vanderbilt University’s campus.

Active participation is what made this conference different from most others. Students and advisers spent two full days getting hands-on training in audio, video, mapping, blogging, crowd sourcing and open source software.

Teaching faculty included Jason Levine, Worldwide Evangelist for Adobe; Lee Clontz from Emory University; Jack Lail, managing editor/multimedia at the Knoxville News Sentinel; Angela Grant, multimedia journalist at the San Antonio Express and Jim Hayes, broadcast adviser at Vanderbilt University.

Gannett’s Vice President of New Media Content, Jennifer Carroll was the event’s keynote speaker and told students about the realities of new media and helped explain Gannett’s Information Center.

Carroll is one of the chief architects of Gannett’s new media efforts.

Journalism legend and founder of the First Amendment Center, John Seigenthaler, made a surprise speech to participants and expressed his belief that journalism’s golden age is yet to come.

Seigenthaler, who energetically embraces new media said, “I wished I was 18-years-old and starting my journalism career all over again.”

Chris Carroll, Vanderbilt adviser and Jennifer Carroll, VP-Gannett (and allegedly no relation) mug for the camera at the conference. Photo provided by Ralph Braseth.
For New Advisers:
This summer workshop will shed light on skills vital to surviving (and perhaps even excelling in) the job

By Laura York
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New student media advisers often ask, “Where do I start?”

CMA is here to provide the answer to that question and more during our New Adviser Workshop, June 24-27 at the Seelbach Hilton in Louisville. For more than 20 years, this workshop has helped shed the light on information vital to successful advising.

Designed for advisers with zero to three years of experience working with college student media, this workshop addresses the needs of large and small, public and private schools.

During this intensive, two-and-a-half-day immersion course we’ll cover topics that include the organizational, legal, ethical and pedagogical foundations of student media advising.

Here’s a sampling of what last year’s attendees had to say:

“This is one of the few conferences where I feel I have learned more than I hoped to! Everyone’s expertise made me feel like I was getting great advice and that the advice was useable and valuable.”

“Legal and Ethical Issues for Advisers was a great session. I had no idea of the complications involved.”

“Online technology session was very informative. This is a specific area I have had a difficult time finding the information I needed.”

We encourage all professionals who work with student media—advisers, directors, managers, publishers, trainers, student affairs directors, deans, and their assistants—to attend.

The setting encourages both discussion in breakout sessions and personal consultations with the facilitators, all of whom have many years of experience themselves.

Workshop participants will come away with extensive resources including CMA’s New Adviser’s Handbook and as well as a connection with their peers as well as the workshop facilitators.

The early registration rate, which is good until May 11, is $240 for CMA members and $290 for non-members.

Registration details are available at www.collegemedia.org or by contacting Laura R. York, CMA vice president-member services at laura.york@gcccks.edu or 620.276.9500.

Virginia Tech ...
Continued from Page 3

Haider and Kevin Anderson and so many other writers for their gripping, factual reporting, and every other student and adviser who played a role in making this happen.

I teach journalism, and most of the time I feel as though I complain about the way journalists behave.

These Virginia Tech students give me hope that the ship might yet be righted.

Virginia Tech’s student newspaper can be found online at CollegiateTimes.com.

In our next issue:
• Mathew L. Cantore of Hudson Valley Community College tells a tale of advising—possibly fiction, possibly not.
• James Simon of Fairfield University reviews “The Student Newspaper Survival Guide” by CMA member Rachele Kanigel.
• Hillary Warren of Otterbein College returns to the newsroom trenches and lives to write about it!
The 411 ...

June 24-27
New Advisers Workshop
Louisville, Ky.
www.collegemedia.org

August 2-5
ACP/CMA College Summer Journalism Workshops
Baltimore
www.studentpress.org

Oct. 24-28
ACP/CMA National College Media Convention
Washington, D.C.
www.collegemedia.org

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