

Indiana State University

Student Publications

**A Report Analyzing
Learning Outcomes Surveys
Conducted After Students' Attendance at
National College Media Advisers
Media Pro Workshops • March 12-15, 2008
Submitted June 20, 2008
By Marcy Shonk, Assistant Director of Student Publications**

Introduction

Student Publications took six students to the National College Media Convention Media Pro Workshops, held prior to the National College Media Convention, in New York City, Spring 2008.

Student Publications' primary goal for its students' attendance at these pre-convention workshops was to give them means to expand their knowledge and skill in journalism and student publications work beyond what is offered on campus, in the classroom or the newsroom.

Specifically, sessions our students registered to attend were: Advanced Design for Newspapers, Copy Editing, Narrative Writing, Advertising Sales, Advertising from Concept to Execution, Illustrator Typography, New Media, Coaching Writers, Advanced News Writing, Associated Press Photo Workshop and "Visual Diaries."

A second goal for our students' attendance was to give them the opportunity to network with their peers, as well as professionals, from across the country, sharing each other's perspectives on best practices, successes, challenges and problems.

And, a third goal is to offer them the experience of New York, one of the world's leading cities in terms of history, cultures, arts, media, politics and business.

To help Student Publications gauge the educational value of this experience, the students were asked to complete a survey, in which they reported their reactions to the convention trip. Among the topics addressed in the surveys was the perceived effects those experiences might have on these students' future efforts for the publications and on their view of such topics as culture, history, diversity and lifestyle.

An overview of the students surveyed

- Six students attended; three students (50%) were attending a national convention on behalf of ISU Student Publications for the first time. Three students (50%) have attended a national convention on behalf of ISU Student Publications more than once; one (17%) has attended once, and two (34%) have attended twice.

- Of these six students, five were female and one was male.

- By class: one freshman (17%), two sophomores (34%), one junior (17%) and two seniors (34%).
- One of these students was current editor in chief of the Indiana Statesman. One other has been selected to be the Statesman editor for fall semester 2008.
- Others of the students who have taken part in this surveys have served as news reporter, senior reporter, managing editor, news editor and assistant news editor.
- Two (34%) had, at the time they were surveyed, worked for the Statesman for four or more semesters.

Why these students desired to attend the convention

Using the ranking formula described below, these were the top five factors cited by survey respondents as reasons they desired to attend the convention:

1. Desire to perform better in my current job(s) with the Statesman, **average ranking of 2.17**
2. Interest in journalism as a career, **average ranking of 2.67**
3. Complements my academic major, **average ranking of 2.75**
4. Wanted to visit New York City, **average ranking of 3.3.**
5. Preparation to be editor in chief of the Statesman and/or a Web publication, **average ranking of 3.5.**

Ranking formula: To determine, by rank, the top five of these factors, a point system was used. One point was awarded to any item ranked first on a survey, two points for any item ranked second, three points for third, etc. To arrive at an average ranking for that item, the sum of the combined points was then divided by the number of occurrences the item was ranked. (Example: If an item were ranked first, third, fifth, fourth, second, first and seventh, the total points for that item became the product of $1 + 3 + 5 + 4 + 2 + 1 + 7 = 23$ divided by the number of occurrences the item was ranked, which was seven, for an average ranking of 3.29, rounded to the next highest one-hundredth.) The lower an item's cumulative "score," the higher it's ranking.

How these students hoped they would advance their knowledge

Using the same ranking as described in the immediately preceding item, these are the top five subject areas:

1. Writing/Reporting (news, feature, sports, entertainment, etc.), **average ranking of 2.80**
2. New media (Web, etc.), **average ranking of 3.20 (tie)**
2. Computer software, **average ranking of 3.20 (tie)**
4. Photography/Videography (news, feature, sports, entertainment, etc.), **average ranking of 4.00**
5. Copy editing, **average ranking of 5.25**

How well these students believe they actually advanced their knowledge

These were the top nine areas in which students believed they advanced their knowledge from having attended the conventions:

1. Understanding of page design, **average ranking of 2.33**
2. Understanding of journalistic ethics, **average ranking of 2.50**
3. Ability to edit copy, **average ranking of 2.50**
4. Ability to write/report a story, **average ranking of 2.75**

5. Ability to take photographs or video, **average ranking of 3.0 (tie)**
5. Understanding of software, **average ranking of 3.0 (tie)**
6. Understanding of new media (Web, etc.), **average ranking of 3.25**
7. Ability to lead, coach, manage, **average ranking of 3.50**
8. Understanding of media research, **average ranking of 4.0**

What these students valued about experiencing New York City

To gather impressions of the value of experiencing the culture, art, diversity and history of New York City, we asked two open-ended questions:

9) Other than the convention itself, which two experiences (cultural, for example) in New York City were most meaningful to you? Why?

and

10) How do you believe you can apply those experiences to your college journalistic work and to your academic major at ISU?

Here are representative anecdotal responses:

- “I would say networking and the workshops [were the best experiences]. Most of these people we worked with might be working with us in the future. Then, we met different people from WTHR Channel 13 in Indy to an ISU alum that I randomly ran into that used to work at the Tribune Star.”
- “Visiting Ground Zero – I came face to face with a place in America that represent a tragedy and a war that are now interwoven into the history of our country.”
- “Seeing the Statue of Liberty – again, it’s a symbolic monument; it’s a part of who we are as Americans, and to be able to see her with my own eyes was amazing.”
- “I definitely liked the Broadway stuff the best. I also really liked Central Park.”
- “I really bonded with a fellow Statesman staffer in a way that I had never had a chance to in the newsroom. It was good for me to hear things about the newsroom that she (amazingly!) hadn’t voiced in the newsroom. It also gave me some insight into the photo department’s strengths and weaknesses.”
- “I also responded as journalist and a person to Strawberry Fields in Central Park. The presentation we saw, combined with the Dakota [building] being across the street and the inscriptions on the park benches made me think about life and people in a new light.”
- “Trying to find deals in NYC. For example, I found a NYC classic 99-cent fresh pizza. I didn’t go any tourist places to eat and I had wonderful, cheap food.”
- “Empire State Building – I’ve always wanted to go there.”

What these students suggest as ways to improve ISU’s student publications

The survey asked students to reflect upon knowledge and perspectives gained at the conventions and then to offer ideas for improving the Indiana Statesman or a Web publication that they believe should be begun, re-examined, altered, stopped (etc.) based upon that reflection.

15) Based upon information and perspectives gained at the convention, list here three things about the Statesman or a Web publication that you believe should be begun, re-examined, altered, stopped (etc.):

These were some of their suggestions:

- “Re-examine how our Web publication is handled.”
- “Add video production to the Web publication.”
- “Photo slideshow would be a really nice addition to the Web publication.”

- †“Think about possible funding.”
- “Beef up our reporting, going deeper into stories.”
- “Consider benefits of going tabloid size.”
- “In-depth training on the Web site.”
- “[Holding] a session with the copy editors could be useful.”
- “Editors need to be more accountable.”
- “[Employ] Web refers.”
- “[Offer] exclusive Web content.”
- “[Offer] fun, interactive sites, such as Facebook for the community to respond to and be a part of.”
- “All reporters should learn basic storytelling.”

Discussion, analysis and conclusions

What value have the six students who responded to the surveys gained from pre-convention workshops in Spring 2008?

In analyzing the students’ responses, those values seem to fall into four general areas:

1. Expanding their view of journalism

Student Publications’ main goal in making possible these students’ attendance at these pre-convention sessions was to expand their journalistic horizons in ways that would serve to improve the quality of the Indiana Statesman or a Web publication.

The students’ responses to this survey suggest that the overall goal was met, that they did gain significant knowledge and perspectives by attending these sessions. Further, their survey responses seem to show that the conventions have given them opportunities — †whether fully acted upon or not — to improve their journalism, individually and collectively, when they returned to campus.

These students’ reasons for applying to attend the pre-convention workshops arose, they said, from their desire to improve their job performance, to meet their interest in journalism as a career, as a complement to their academic major, to visit New York City, and to prepare for being editor in chief of one of the publications (in rank order). In specific terms of expanding knowledge, these students hoped, in advance of the workshops, to improve their abilities as writers and reporters, to expand knowledge of new media and computer software, and to advance knowledge in the areas of photography, videography and copyediting.

The survey results support the conclusion that the respondents, indeed, did expand their knowledge of journalism skills to be used in print and web-based publications.

The survey results also show that the students in fact learned much in areas they had little forecast before the event. Specifically, survey results show that the students ranked as first, among the perspectives gained, their understanding of page design, understanding of journalistic ethics, and ability to edit copy.

Other areas of importance to the students included (by ranking): ability to write/report a story, ability to take photographs or video, understanding of software, understanding of new media, ability to lead and understanding of media research.

2. Expanding their ideas for improving the publications

As noted in the section headed “What these students suggest as ways to improve ISU’s student publications,” the survey asks respondents to list three ideas for improving the Statesman, or a Web publication or both. Many of those responses are listed in that section of the report.

This listing of suggestions, it turns out, will

be more than an exercise. Many of the ideas stated will, in fact, be put into action, especially in regard to the Web publication as Student Publications works toward development of a stronger Web presence.

Students made suggestions to “re-examine” our Web publication, to add more video and slide shows, and consider funding possibilities. In-depth Web training, Web refers, exclusive Web content, and fun, interactive sites were also suggested.

Related to the print edition, students remarked upon “beefing up” reporting with more depth to stories and basic storytelling, and to consider benefits of tabloid size.

4. Expanding their worldview

These students gained, they say in their responses, a greater cultural understanding of New York City. Specifically, these students say they gained from experiencing visits to Ground Zero, Central Park and the Empire State Building. One student noted to have especially gained great appreciation of Broadway musicals.

Many direct quotes from the students can be found in the section headed “What these students valued about experiencing New York City.”

Those responses, it seems, are significant evidence that the exposure to cultures, art, society and history have served to expand these students’ perspectives on the world beyond Indiana State University, Terre Haute and Indiana. There also is evidence that this exposure held promise to affect these students’ college careers, their work on the publications and their lives after college.