

Indiana State University Student Publications

Learning Outcomes Surveys Conducted After Students' Attendance at National College Media Conventions, 2003-2007

Introduction

Over the course of the last five academic years, the office of Student Publications at Indiana State University has taken 28 students to national conventions of the College Media Advisors organization, conducted each March in New York City. Some 1,200 students, faculty, and advisers from across the country attend this three-day convention, which consists of more than 200 separate workshop sessions, covering the gamut of college media issues.

Student Publication's primary goal for its students' attendance at those conventions has been to give them means to increase their awareness of issues in journalism and student publications work beyond what we are able to offer on campus, either in the classroom or in the newsroom. Specifically, this convention offers workshops in writing, editing, graphic design, photography, online publishing, computer technology, ethics, diversity, staff leadership, teamwork, job searches, media research, media law and the First Amendment. Another goal for our students' attendance at these conventions is that these students will have gained comparative perspectives based upon their being exposed to other university publications' best practices, successes, and challenges and problems. A third goal is to have them experience 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 the conventions have provided to these students, we have asked them to complete, after the convention in each of the last five academic years, a survey in which they report their reactions to the convention trip. Among the topics addressed in the surveys has been the perceived effect is 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

Over the course of the five years covered here, 33 surveys have been completed. Some facts about those 33 responses include;

Twenty-eight separate students have attended; four students have attended more than once; one has attended three times

Of these 33, 20 (60.6%) have been female, 13 (39.4%) have been male

By class, the 33 break-down as: three freshmen (9.1%), nine sophomores (27.3%), 14 juniors (42.4%), and seven seniors (21.2%).

Twenty (75.8%) were attending for their first national convention for ISU Student Publications, eight (24.2%) were attending for their second or third such convention.

Ten (35.7%) of these students have gone on to be editor in chief of the Indiana Statesman. One other has been selected to be the Statesman editor for the Fall semester, 2007.

Four (14.3%) of these students have gone on to be iQ magazine editor in chief

One (3.6%) went on to be student advertising manager

Others of the students who have taken part in these surveys have become, for one or both of the publications, managing editor, sports editor, opinion editor, photo editor, news editor, entertainment editor, lifestyle editor, chief copy editor, or design editor. Together with the editor in chief, those positions are the top news/editorial leadership positions on the staffs of the Statesman and iQ. All 28 students who attended these conventions over the last three academic years were either then or have since gone on to become an editor of some type on one (or both) of the publications.

Nineteen (67.9%) had, at the time they were surveyed, worked for the Statesman for four or more semesters.

Four (14.3%) had, at the time they were surveyed, worked for iQ magazine for four or more semesters.

Why Students Desired to Attend the Conference

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

Desire to perform better in my current job(s) with the Statesman and/or iQ Magazine: average ranking of 1.79

Interest in journalism as a career; average ranking 2.93

Wanted to visit New York City: average ranking 3.90

Preparation to be editor in chief of the Statesman or iQ: average ranking 3.92

Wanted to see how ISU publications compare with counterparts from other schools: average ranking 4.07

The ranking formula used above to determine the top five factors employed a point system where 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 divided by the number of occurrences the item was ranked. (Example: If an item was ranked first, third, fifth, fourth, second, first and seventh, the total points for that item became the sum 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 on-hundredth. The lower an item's "score," the higher its ranking.

How Students Hoped they would Advance their Knowledge

Employing the same ranking method described above, students' highest ranked objectives for attending the conferences included;

Objective	Average Ranking
Staff leadership and management	2.87
Writing (news, features, sports, entertainment, etc.)	2.96
Page design (newspaper and/or magazine)	3.09
Reporting (news, features, sports,	3.15

entertainment, etc.)	
Technology (other than software and online journalism)	4.33

How well Students Believe the Actually Advanced their Knowledge

The following table presents students' perceptions of the degree to which they feel they advanced their knowledge as a result of attending the conference.

Objective	Average Rating
Understanding journalism ethics	2.03
Ability to manage and lead staff	2.04
Understanding of page design	2.08
Understanding of staff diversity	2.27
Understanding of media law	2.31
Ability to take photographs	2.33
Understanding of technology	2.37
Understanding online journalism	2.53
Ability to conduct job searches	2.55

Students' Perceptions of the Value of Experiencing New York City

To gather impressions of the value of experiencing the culture, art, diversity, and history of New York City, two open-ended questions were asked of participants. Those questions along with representative responses are presented below.

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

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

"Being in Times Square for the beginning of this War [Iraq] and seeing the protest blew my mind. I was amazed at how everyone in Times Square virtually stopped to listen to President Bush [on the big screen television]. The protest was the most radical and definitely most scary experience for me. I've never felt so out of control of the situation around me. It gave me a sense of just how radical people can be and how strong some truly are in their beliefs."

"Seeing 'Ground Zero' was very meaningful for me as I'm sure it is to most Americans. I remember seeing tons of news coverage and pictures of September 11, but nothing compared to the impact of actually experiencing the site."

"The most devastating thing I was in New York was the amount of homeless people. In Indiana you hardly ever see people sleeping in a box at night of begging for change. It was a real culture shock to see that. It made me feel lucky and blessed to have all the things I have because these people have nothing."

"Visiting Ellis Island and touring the museum was very interesting. My family originated in Ireland and seeing what immigrants went through to become Americans was mind-boggling and made me appreciate being an American even more."

"Going to Harlem was something that I will never forget. The history and culture of the people that live there is something so different than you would find in Indiana."

"The culture of the people of New York. It ranged from race and nationality to financial classes that were meaningful to me. I was able to see different cultures outside Indiana's box of Blacks, Whites, and Hispanics. The atmosphere was extremely different than what I was used to here in Indiana."

"I feel so much more cultured and experienced now. The many different aspects of New York City I encountered have opened my eyes to the work and its cultures. I feel I will now have a better understanding and be able to identify better with foreign students and professors at ISU."

"Touring The [New York] Times just reaffirmed my drive to become a professional. Talking to the employees reminded me that they are ordinary people and that I could be there someday if I continue to work hard. The ferry tour [of New York harbor] made me appreciate the freedoms that we take for granted every day, such as the First Amendment. In my work, I plan to take advantage fully of these rights and be proud to do so."

"The experiences I had in New York will forever impact me as a journalist and as an American. Getting to learn more American history and visiting all of the sites just reconfirmed my love for journalism. My experiences made me realize that there is a story behind every person, place or thing. My visit to the New York Times will always be etched in my mind. The opportunity made me realize that I can do anything I want with determination."

"I think I can apply these experiences to college journalism by becoming more daring and willing to think and interact outside my comfort zone. I think these experiences will and have opened up my mind to want to learn new things. I learned so much every day that it has made me more observant journalist by just being in New York. These experiences I've learned will help at the Statesman and develop me into a greater writer and editor."

"Navigating the subway system. Originally the subway served to show me just how out of place I was. Toward the end of the [convention] time, though, I was able to figure the thing out and felt less awkward. It was a good lesson on picking things up quickly."

"I think [this experience] taught me that I shouldn't judge people based on preconceived notions of stereotypes. Diversity, in its extreme as in these cases, isn't something that is common in Terre Haute, and I think I miss out of some interesting opportunities for stories by not taking time to really consider people from different cultures and backgrounds – and the fact that they are essentially just like me."

"We were in this Middle Eastern shop for all of five minutes, and during that time we heard one of the workers barter in a Middle Eastern language I didn't recognize, then turn to another customer and barter in Chinese and then barter with us in almost accent-less English."

"Our van driver was extremely chatty, helpful and kind. I had always heard that New Yorkers were mean and rude to tourists, but this man made it his duty to educate us about NYC and Manhattan."

"[On St. Patrick's Day] I saw the difference between people who celebrate to get drunk (a bunch of them) and those with reverence to Ireland and the saint (very few)."

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 and iQ magazine based upon that reflection with the following question. Representative responses are then presented.

Based on information and perspectives gained at the convention, list three things about the Statesman or iQ that you believe should be begun, re-examined, altered, stopped, etc.

Review equipment and software

We need to try to give international students places on staff.

Staff handbook update.

Computer system updated to OS X.

InDesign purchased.

iQ and the Statesman should re-examine their designs to fit the ideas of Tim Harrower, a speaker at the convention.

iQ should examine its photography and have stronger pictures.

Do more stories that students will care about. Make the content more diverse and make it relate to students.

I think we need to learn how to work as a team and make decisions together more often.

I think we need to work on bringing new people into the paper and retaining them for the future.

I think an ethics statement or handbook is a good idea.

Copy editing handbook.

I heard a lot of talk about making the newsroom a "community" or "family." I want more of that at iQ.

Job shadowing.

Expanded online footprint, i.e., blogs.

Some form of podcasting.

We need to make a policy declaring our paper a public forum.

Our staff needs to go through more training at the beginning of their jobs so the job is easier to perform.

The newsroom needs to be fun so that people come up here on their days off.

People need to be rewarded for doing a good job. If nothing else by just saying "good job."

More cooperation in the newsroom. Other newsrooms are fun. Ours isn't because everyone goes into "iPod world" and no one talks.

Much larger focus on feature stories, real feature stories.

The use of graphics in addition to pictures.

Seriously consider dropping entertainment coverage and converting to news, sports, and opinion.

Fall '06 iQ was better than anything else I saw. Keep the same format.

We need fewer photos of the backs of people's heads, white guys shaking hands and podium shots.

Discussion and Analysis

What value have the 28 students who responded to the surveys gained from the convention trips to New York City in 2003-07? Those values seem to fall into four general categories.

Expanding Students' View of Journalism

Certainly, Student Publications' main goal in making possible these students' attendance at the New York conventions has been to expand their journalistic horizons in ways that would serve to improve the quality of the Indiana Statesman and iQ magazine. If that goal was not met, the time and expense involved in these trips would have been wasted.

The students' responses to these surveys over the five-year period suggest that the overall goal was met, that they did gain significant knowledge and perspectives by attending these conventions. 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 conventions arose, they said, from their desire to improve their job performance, to meet their interest in journalism as a career, to prepare for being editor in chief of one of the publications, to visit New York City and to see how ISU student publications compared to those at other schools (in rank order). In specific terms of expanding knowledge, these students hoped, in advance of the convention, to advance their abilities in staff leadership and management and to become better writers, reporters, page designers, photographers and copy editors. The survey results support the conclusion that the respondents, indeed, did expand their knowledge of journalism skill areas such as page design, writing and reporting.

But the results also show something more significant, we believe, than skills enhancement, something beyond learning how to improve in gathering, preparing, condensing, drafting and presenting stories, photos and page designs. What the survey results show that is even more significant is 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 journalistic ethics, based on several sessions on that topic at the conventions. In the international context of rising concern about media ethics, these students' attention to that topic as being most important appears significant.

Two related items — "Ability to manage and lead staff" and "Understanding of staff diversity" — were second and fourth in these students' rankings of most significant knowledge gained. These are obviously areas of great importance to these 28 students, all of whom were then editors or who went on to become editors. Third was "Understanding of page design," a reflection of the need to visually attract readers to print publications.

"Understanding of media law" was the fifth-most-cited area of knowledge, an area of increasing emphasis (made so even more by the *Hosty v. Carter* ruling in June 2005).

Aside from quantitative findings, anecdotal feedback contained in the survey responses analyzed here affirms the value of these convention trips. Four members of the 2005 group initiated a visit to The New York Times' newsroom for a personal guided tour from a sub-editor (whose duties, by the way, include recruiting college graduates to The Times). For them, that was a seminal moment. Said one, "Touring The [New York] Times just reaffirmed my drive to become a professional. Talking to the employees reminded me that they are ordinary people and that I could be there someday if I continue to work hard." Said another: "It was amazing and a dream come true to see The New York Times. While in the newsroom, we spoke with a photographer who was in the midst of Sept. 11, 2001. It was humbling to hear his stories of the tragedy and cool to see The Times' Pulitzer-Prize-winning photos of that terrible day."

Enhancing Students' Abilities to Lead Student Staffs

As noted in "An overview of the students surveyed," 14 of the 28 students surveyed either were an editor in chief at the time they attended a convention or went on to become editor in chief of the Indiana Statesman (10) or iQ (four). Another student went on to become Statesman/iQ student advertising manager. Of the other 14, all either were then or went on to become a secondary-level editor, such as sports or photo editor.

Said another way, the knowledge and perspectives gained during these conventions were experienced by the students who were either then leading the publications or were later selected to hold the most responsible student leadership positions on the two publications.

"Staff leadership and management" was the top-ranked area in which, pre-convention, the students hoped to expand their knowledge, outranking expanding knowledge in the areas of writing, reporting, page design, photography and copy editing. (See section headed "How these students hoped they would advance their knowledge.")

Post-convention, these students' interest in management and leadership remained obvious: They listed "Ability to manage and lead staff" as the second-highest area in which they in fact advanced their knowledge and listed another staff management issue, "Understanding of staff diversity," as fourth-highest area in which they advanced knowledge from having taken part in the conventions. (See section headed "How well these students believe they actually advanced their knowledge.")

Expanding students' ideas for improving the publications

As stated in the introduction to this report, one of Student Publications' goals for sending students to these conventions has been to expose them to the work done at other universities' student publications, some of which are directly comparable to the Statesman and iQ, others of which are either much larger or much smaller in terms of size of university, number of journalism majors, scope of publication schedule (many are daily papers, some are monthly papers) and size of publication staffs. As an outgrowth of those comparisons, Student Publications hopes its students will return to campus filled with ideas for improving ISU's student 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, iQ or both. Many of those responses are listed in that section of the report.

This listing of suggestions, it turns out, has been more than an exercise. Many of the ideas stated have, in fact, been put into action. For instance, Student Publications has, since the first convention covered here (2003), reviewed and updated its computers, photo equipment and software. As part of its summer 2003 remodeling, it purchased G5 and eMac Macintosh computers. In the five-year period covered here, Student Publications has purchased four professional-quality digital cameras; converted to InDesign page

layout software; upgraded its Photoshop, Illustrator and Acrobat software; and upgraded its newer computers to Mac operating system X.

Among other suggestions acted upon have been a re-examination of Statesman and iQ graphic designs and their levels of photography. How much those areas have improved (or not) are subject to qualitative judgments. A direct outgrowth of the 2004 convention, by the way, was a personal contact with newspaper design guru Tim Harrower, which resulted in his visit to ISU for a one-day workshop in October 2004.

Related to staff management and development, several Statesman editors in chief in a row have made good on these two suggestions: 1) "I think we need to learn how to work as a team and make decisions together more often." 2) "I think we need to work on bringing new people into the paper and retaining them for the future." It now has become part of the culture for the editor to conduct a brief staff meeting before each issue of the Statesman, injecting staff input into content decisions. Editors also have worked, with varying degrees of success, to identify students, many from journalism classes, to attract to the staff.

Anecdotally, one student, reflecting on the process of comparing ISU's publications with those from other schools, wrote, "I saw other publications and realized that the Statesman is much better than I thought. I also was able to gauge myself against other college journalists. I also gained a slew of ideas for recruitment and organizing my staff." (This student went on to be a Statesman editor in chief.)

Expanding students' worldview

The surveys from each of the five years — and the results taken together — provide ample anecdotal and qualitative evidence that the students chosen for these convention trips gained much more than greater perspectives on journalism at a college media convention conducted inside the four walls of a Midtown hotel.

These students gained, they say in their responses, a greater worldview, outside, as one student described it, "Indiana's box." Specifically, these students say they gained from experiencing Times Square at the very moment in March 2003 when the war against Iraq began (and seeing President Bush speak on the gigantic-screen TV); from visiting Ground Zero; from a Sunday trip to Harlem, where most were members of a racial minority for the first prolonged time in their lives; from finding that soul food in Harlem is not that much different from southern Indiana "home cooking"; from touring Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty; from experiencing the mix of cultures, races and ethnicities that gives New York City its fabric; from experiencing the pace of life in "The City," including traversing its subway system; from visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art and attending Broadway plays; from eating in Brazilian, Afghan and Irish restaurants (the latter on St. Patrick's Day!); and, yes, from seeing homeless persons sleeping in cardboard just yards from the most exclusive addresses in America.

Many direct quotes from the students can be found in the section of the full report 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.

Conclusions

Both the quantitative results and the anecdotal feedback gathered through the five-year process of conducting these post-convention surveys seem to indicate that the experiences have been of great value to the 28 students who have taken part — value to them both as fledgling journalists and as citizens of the world.

Certainly, Student Publications expected, even before conducting the first survey, that the convention would inform the students of ways to become better journalists and better at journalistic skills. This expectation arose from the adviser's having attended several such conventions previously and seeing the effects the workshop sessions had on students and how those conventions inspired them to rise in the profession. Those conventions were conducted in cities other than New York — cities such as Washington, Atlanta, Kansas City and St. Louis.

New York, being one of the world's capitals, took the experience to a much higher level. Advancing their journalism remained the core reason for taking students to conventions, but experiencing one of the world's most cosmopolitan cities has risen each of the five years surveyed here as a reason for taking the group to those conventions.

The students' survey responses seem to substantiate the value of both the immersion into three days worth of journalistic perspective and three days (and nights) worth of experiencing the cultures that are New York.

One survey respondent perhaps said it well:

"...[N]ot only did my development as a professional journalist benefit from the conference, but also from the city itself. Simply walking around NYC gives me such a wider perspective of the world. Experiencing different cultures in different settings help me in understanding the cultures here at ISU and the ones I will encounter in the future. The entire experience in NYC was absolutely invaluable to my development as not only a journalist but as a person."