

Journalist calls for stronger ethics

Blames profession for credibility loss

By MARY BETH ALLEN
Of the Emerald

David Behrendt, Milwaukee Journal editorial writer, called for "stronger ethics and better performance" from journalists and blamed the profession for "dwindling credibility and public support" of the press in the annual Ruhl lecture Monday night.

The audience of about 75 included journalism instructors and students, as well as area professionals in the field.

"I think the press does a good job most of the time, and a great job some of the time," said Behrendt, the journalism school's Ruhl visiting professor. He added that the journalist's job is to address the problem of "the bad job they do too much of the time."

Behrendt expressed concern about the "present uncertain health of the First Amendment." He said that the current Supreme Court justices have not been overly eager to rule in favor of the press in First Amendment-related cases. "We have very little freedom to gain and a lot to lose," he warned.

Behrendt sees public support of the press as vital to its unfettered survival, and he says that support is currently at a low point. Practicing journalists are the ones to blame for that lack of public confidence, Behrendt maintains.

"If we keep chipping away at our own credibility, we can't expect to retain citizen support," he said. "It would be naive to think the courts are not influenced by public sentiment," he stressed, "and we are surrounded by increasingly vocal and effective press critics."

The reaction of many newspaper people to such criticism, is a "disgustingly self-serving defensiveness," said Behrendt. Often editors will feel a false sense of security in the support their own papers receive and ignore public attitudes toward the press as a

whole, a tactic Behrendt compared to "rats scurrying to leave a sinking ship."

One of the "creeping chips" in the credibility is an abundance of reporters with tremendous egos, who feel they are "better and brighter than anyone else." Behrendt says "readers detect such arrogance and react against it."

Another chip is reporter's tendencies to hobnob with powerful public officials and become "too cozy with powerful people," said Behrendt. He also criticized newspapers' willingness to cater to special interest groups and "sacred cows," as well as the press' tendency to sensationalize street crime while ignoring white collar crime.

Behrendt came down hard on advocacy journalism, saying such slanted articles are "often very readable — but are they credible?" He says he does not believe, as advocacy journalists do, that objectivity in reporting is a myth. He said there are such things as "controlled biases."

Behrendt is especially strident in, and according to the question and answer session after his remarks, the area where he met the

most disagreement, his contention that journalists should steer clear of any public office or political controversy.

"Stay the hell out of public life," he advised. "Such detachment is essential." Behrendt said if people want to be "movers and shakers," fine — "go move and shake. But don't come back."

The quest for the Pulitzer Prize has been as detrimental to good journalism as it has been helpful, said Behrendt. He lambasted what he called "the current fetish for investigative journalism," saying the old-timer who "vacuum cleans the courthouse for 30 years" is more valuable than the "young punk journalist" who approaches his beat with the attitude that all public officials steal.

Behrendt ruefully called his speech a "litany of laments." He said, "It is time for some extra efforts at self-policing," and that "touching, informed independence, stronger ethics and human decency" are overdue and a cure for loss of press credibility.



David Behrendt

Photo by Alan AuYeung

Students must apply soon for overseas study

Students who wish to participate in the Study Abroad Programs in London, Avignon or Cologne next year are reminded to submit their applications before June 1.

Courses are conducted in English and are open to students of sophomore standing and above. For more information on this and other programs, contact International Student Services, 172 Oregon Hall.

THERE IS A DIFFERENCE! **OUR 40th YEAR**

PREPARE FOR

MCAT
LSAT · GMAT
GRE · VAT · DAT
OCAT · SAT
NAT'L MED BDS
NAT'L DENT BDS
NURSING BDS
ECFMG
FLEX
VQE

Stanley H. KIPLAN
EDUCATIONAL CENTER

TEST PREPARATION SPECIALISTS SINCE 1938

Visit Our Centers
And See For Yourself
Why We Make The Difference

Call Days, Eves & Weekends
Classes now forming for
the upcoming LSAT, DAT,
GMAT, & MCAT.

Eugene
343-2618
Portland
222-5556

CHINA BLUE RESTAURANT
featuring vegetarian dinners:

Buddha's Feast
Most famous Chinese vegetable dish. Black mushrooms, bean curd, sheet black wood ear and many, many more in a special sauce.
\$4.25

China Blue
879 E. 13th Ave.
343-2832

Hours
Mon Thurs. 10 to 10
Fri. 10 to 11
Sat. 5 to 11
Sun. 5 to 10

EMU Cultural Forum Presents

**BIG ROOM—A COLLABORATION
IN MOVEMENT AND SOUND**

by Dancer Simone Forti
and Composer-Performer Peter Van Riper

Sunday, May 21 - EMU Ballroom - 8 p.m.
\$1.50 - UO Students
\$2.00 - General Public

Tickets for performance available at EMU Main Desk

Dance Workshop (Forti) May 21, Gerlinger Studio, 8 p.m.
Lecture-Demo (Forti & Van Riper) May 22, Gerlinger Studio, 8 p.m.
Free of Charge