

Press ethics improving, encouraging, says prof

By ANN PORTAL
Of the Emerald

Journalistic lapses and defects still abound, but hopeful signs of a renewed integrity among journalists also can be found, Stanford communications prof. John Hulteng said Monday night.

Hulteng, a University journalism professor emeritus and former writer, editor and foreign correspondent, presented the keynote lecture of the sixth annual Ruhl lecture series.

The award-winning author of numerous articles and books, Hulteng said his research of journalistic ethics has convinced him that the press can be viewed as either a half-full or half-empty glass of water.

But a renewed ethical vigor among journalists at all levels may be enough "to persuade us to view the glass as half-full," he said.

"There has been a sensitizing, a consciousness-raising among journalists generally.

In the wake of the "tumultuous and momentous" decade that demonstrated the power of the press through Vietnam coverage and the resignation of a president, press critics and observers "raised voices in alarm," Hulteng said.

And the resultant self-scrutiny and examination of motives have continued and intensified, he said.

"There is, I believe, a good deal more self-criticism and cross-media analysis going on than was the case a decade ago."

Hulteng cited several examples of the soul-searching occurring among journalists, including journalism publications that are devoting more articles to press performance analysis, candid media investigations of media transgressions and daily corrections columns to deal with errors.

But another reason for the continued improvement of the press is "found in the motivations of the men and women who staff the news media," he said.

Although journalist's motivations "vary widely," Hulteng said he believes the majority are attracted by the opportunity to perform a public service.

However, even as ethics seem to improve, Hulteng said he is concerned about two trends that may work to diminish the effectiveness of the public service journalists.

One of these trends, the concentration of news media ownership by chains, groups and conglomerates could mean the dilution of public service journalism "as the decision-making center becomes more corporate and more remote," he said.

Quality control is crucial in journalism, Hulteng said, although group ownership is not "always and inevitably a bad thing."

Some group-owned papers — such as those in Medford and Salem — are admirable examples of papers owned by chains, he said. Nearly two-thirds of American daily newspapers now are group-owned, Hulteng said, and one New England editor has predicted that "all dailies will be in chains by the year 2,000."

The other trend, still at an early stage, is the movement toward the replacement of present-day information media by a home communication center.

Hulten said such centers could allow viewers to select only those areas of information that they are interested in.

But if the viewer only knows what he has asked to be told, how does he know what to ask in the first place?

Hulteng quoted Richard Salant of NBC as saying, "Smaller and smaller groups may come to know more and more about less and less."

Yet Hulteng said he is convinced that in spite of the awesome technological changes to come, as long as there are journalists who believe in their convictions, the cause of ethical journalism will continue to survive and be well served.

Higher ed cuts look inevitable

Analysis
By GREG WASSON
Of the Emerald

SALEM — Whether for or against higher education cuts, both sides agree on one thing: there won't be enough money next biennium to continue the programs at current levels.

The major contention now has shifted from "will cuts have to be made?" to "who will make them and by what process?"

University Pres. Olum has said that if further reductions are called for, it will mean the closing of three professional schools and six to eight departments.

T.K. Olson, executive director of the education coordinating commission agrees.

"As a generalization, the commission would support that kind of a specific approach," Olson says. "Targeting the reductions at those things which are less central to the mission of the University of Oregon is exactly the right approach."

But, adds Olson, the University doesn't exist in a vacuum.

"Depending on the nature of the schools to be closed, there are some considerations which transcend the University of Oregon. That is, it isn't appropriate that the decision be made only by the University, nor by the University and the (higher education) state board."

As an example, Olson points to the business administration program. Given the way higher ed funding works, that program generates proportionately more money for the state system than other programs at the institution.

"What that means," points out Olson, "is that the other colleges and universities would have their dollars affected by the loss of that program."

So, legislators like Rep. Vera Katz, D-Portland, a member of the committee dealing with the higher ed budget, are demanding some concrete answers from the state board of higher education.

"I want to know now where the cuts are going to occur. I don't want to go home and then have them make the cuts."

But, responds Chancellor Roy Lieuallen, that request is impossible to comply with.

"I've told them repeatedly that those decisions will have to be worked out cooperatively between the institutions, the board's office and the board. And it will take some time. You just don't eliminate programs overnight."

Lieuallen warns that unless usual academic processes are followed, "You are going to do irreparable harm to the institutions."

"By usual academic procedures I mean discussion within the institutions, development of proposals — with those proposals coming to the board's office for review — and finally to the board. This is the way that it's always been done and I believe this is the way it has to be done."

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