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In my opinion

'Unfair' and 'Unbalanced'

Earlier this month, more than a dozen people were killed in Afghanistan during riots that resulted as a reaction to a fallacious and incendiary article in Newsweek, which unwisely relied on an anonymous source.

As is inevitable when Americans feel betrayed by the press, this ghastly incident has brought the media's failure to live up to its obligations to the forefront of public discussion. The prognosis does not look good.

A decade ago, pundits pointed to the rise of cable news as a sign that people were losing faith in traditional journalism. A few years ago, talk radio was the soon-to-be bane of the media establishment. And now bloggers are supposedly going to drive a stake through the heart of print media and the big three broadcasters.

All the while, circulation and revenue for newspapers have ticked steadily downward. I am troubled by the declining circulation of newspapers. Not just because it's my livelihood, but because I feel it's indicative of a decline of reading in general.

As reading declines, the ability to critically engage a text is gradually being lost. Instead, we are becoming accustomed to having prepackaged infobites served up ready for immediate consumption between commercial.

The decline of the American newspaper heralds the death of nuance. Broadcast journalism just can't cover certain subjects with the same depth and attention as print journalism — the business model doesn't allow for it. With Internet journalism, the rampant lack of accountability leads to a corresponding lack of credibility.

During this downward slope of readership, print media resort to sensationalism more and more in a desperate attempt to keep or increase readership. Or they become the unofficial PR



GABE BRADLEY
THE WRITING ON THE WALL

departments for the media conglomerates, as entertainment news becomes an increasingly larger part of the newspapers and magazines.

So the print media have to debase themselves just to survive — they're fighting for their lives. This uphill struggle, though, is slowly leading print media to a place in which they will no more represent truth than reality shows represent reality.

I am glad to see, however, that the myth of objectivity is finally starting to crack in American journalism. The relatively recent (and relatively foolish) notion of objectivity is that journalists will simply find the news and report it.

If this were the case, there would be no discernible difference in media outlets. If the news is the news and reporters just go out and get it, all media should basically be created equal.

But in the gathering and reporting of news, there are dozens of subjective decisions that need to be made: what counts as news, who to interview, which words to use to describe particular situations. The reality is there's very little about news gathering and reporting that is objective.

Now I certainly believe that reporters should never let their personal biases conflict with indisputable facts. But a respect for the truth is not the same thing as objectivity. Not by a long shot.

As I said, this faulty notion of journalistic objectivity is a fairly recent conception that arose partially as a reaction to the abuses of the so-called

"yellow journalists."

Up until this time, journalists had never feigned objectivity. Editorial comment was never restricted merely to the opinion section. Newspapers were explicitly partisan — splitting on ideological and political lines.

If you were a Democrat, you could read your Democratic newspapers. If you were a Whig, you could read you Whig newspapers (or later Republican newspapers). Even before that, there were Loyalist newspapers and Patriot newspapers.

These days, we're seeing a return of ideologically driven media. We can choose between blue state radio or red state radio. We can choose FOX News or CBS News. We can choose the New York Times or the Wall Street Journal. More locally, we can choose the Oregon Commentator or the Oregon Daily Emerald (though I would recommend both).

That's why I have to laugh when I hear people call talk radio stations to complain about the increasingly brazen lack of objectivity in the media. By calling talk radio, these people are participating in the single medium that has been most responsible for the return of ideological concerns in American media.

As ideology once again takes a greater place in our media, I can only conclude that slogans such as, "We Report, You Decide" and "Fair and Balanced," must surely be meant as ironic. As an opinion journalist, the return of ideology in the media can only mean more job security for me. So I have no complaints.

Seriously, though, I see this as a positive move for the American media. Bias has always been there. Now we're just being honest about it again.

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Editorial

Students' voices should be heard in conduct code

his year, the University decided it was time to revise its Student Conduct Code, and a draft of new rules was presented May 11 to the University Senate. The code is not yet finalized. Charged with drafting an updated code is a panel of four students and four faculty members termed the University Senate's Student Conduct Code Committee.

Unfortunately, it seems the committee's atmosphere while drafting the new code was not one of cooperation. An Emerald article last week indicated the new rules reflect more faculty than student influence. Among contested issues were students' right to legal representation and an array of violation definitions that could make it easier to find students guilty of code violations. According to student committee member Corey Harmon, "the students made more of a compromise than the faculty did."

Some University staff members have responded to these claims that the revised code reflects faculty rather than student opinions or needs. Director of Student Judicial Affairs Chris Loschiavo said the existing code doesn't hold perpetrators of violent crime as accountable as possible because students shy away from reporting crimes because they don't want a defense attorney to cross-examine them in a hearing.

All of these points are legitimate, and it is easy to see the validity of both student and faculty opinions within the University Senate's Student Conduct Code Committee. Less understandable, however, is the fact that faculty opinion apparently trumped student input at the end of the day.

It may be expected that students and faculty differ on their viewpoints, but it is absolutely reprehensible that when students are asked to share their opinions on important University policy, that opinion is ignored. There is no reason students should have to compromise their wishes; it is those four committee members who best represent the University at large.

Ex-officio committee member Hilary Berkman questioned the faculty argument that lawyers can hinder a victim's likelihood to seek prosecution. Berkman said "what's important is that the conduct code process gives students a fair opportunity to present their side of things ... limiting students' access to procedural rights doesn't necessarily further that goal."

Berkman makes a critical point, but there is little evidence that student arguments such as these have received much attention from the faculty committee members thus far.

Student committee member Michael Sherman said that, in general, students on the committee did not agree with the conduct code revisions.

Luckily, there is still time to remedy these faults. The committee has not yet voted on the entire code. Before that time comes about, the voice of students should be heard, loud and clear, in the proposed changes.

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