

EDITORIAL

It's Never "Objective"

The uncanny thing about news is that it is an artificial construct shaped and defined by the socio-political concerns of a given community. Western thought has so permeated the world, that with the increase in mass media vehicles there has been a growing common-ground of assumptions as to what constitutes "the news." Thus editors and producers worldwide repeat the same basic instructions to their reporters as to what makes a good news story as distinct from fluff or filler material. Despite this appearance of homogeneity which is supported by hundreds of standard texts on media communications, any newspapers, radio station or television station has to accept the fact that what we define as news has as much to do with our own ideological framework as it has to do with any tried and proven generic definition of the term. News telling is a highly subjective exercise because it combines the nebulous factors of selectivity and language nuance. Thus the much vaunted claim of objectivity made by most media head is not only a myth but an impossibility.

The workers in media need to confront this fact in order to be self-conscious about the implications of their choices and views as they are expressed in news stories. The decision as to what constitutes news is an editorial and censorial decision based on the aims and objectives of the medium in question. The process of articulating what constitutes news should be shared by those who make use of the medium as well as those who are employed by the community to produce the information. Unfortunately, in a setting like the University this kind of shared decision making process is usually carried out through what becomes a trial and error mechanism. The students interested in the medium put out papers and wait for the readers to respond. The continuous exchange, which may often be full of friction and confrontation may be seen as a positive democratic dynamic at work. A dynamic that will ultimately bring about a tacit consensus as to the mandate of the paper. This process invariably repeats itself at least once every three years because of the necessary changeover of the community that benefits from the papers as well as the yearly change over of personnel in the news papers office.

This observation, therefore demands some stated positions on the objectives of the new editorial unit of the Brunswickan which may start the dialogue rolling on the mandate that is has. The paper is primarily a service to the student population of the campus; a service committed to the conveying of information that has the interest of students at heart. News entails that which the editorial unit thinks the student would want to know about their society. However it may be expanded to include the more censorial and subjective element of that which the editorial unit believes the students should know. It is also a vehicle for the promotion of student activity, but such promotion must meet the criteria of necessary and useful information. The dimension of distraction and amusement is fundamental to the paper if only because students acknowledge the entertainment value of literature. However, the ideological focus of all this information is never going to be "objective" as the values and opinions of those working in editorial positions will obviously (and I dare say necessarily) impinge on what is published. This does not preclude good sense, fairness and a respect and concern for the interests of the community at large.

Students will find that the media is a powerful political tool that must be handled responsibly and efficiently. Political power rests squarely in the hands of those who hold editorial positions, but the staff: the writers, artists and photographers, are also powerful figures in that they work on certain major issues concerning the paper while at the same time influencing the tone and focus of those who work with the paper. The interplay is dynamic and exciting, but relies on a wide cross-section of participation to be most effective. The paper, therefore would be failing somewhat if it shied away from potentially controversial issues, but by entering into the fray the most important question to ask is "Is this worth fighting for?"

Faculty and the administration are not far removed from the process of shaping direction in the media but they remain secondary players in the game. In as much, then, as faculty and administration rally to dictate in sometimes short-sighted ways, rules and regulations as to what goes on the poster boards in a department, there is a great onus on students to respond through the vehicle of the media. Both the radio station and the Brunswickan are services paid for by students to achieve this end. We should use them well.

Finally, it should be said that I have thus far enjoyed my brief time as Editor-in-Chief. As a point of principle, I think I may be forced to resign from the post since (as of March 22nd) as a Graduate Student I am ineligible for the standard honorarium offered to this position by the Student Union. Since I am not inclined to seeing the Student Union save money at the expense of some able undergraduate student, I would rather leave the post open for someone else. But perhaps this is exactly what the student council hopes to achieve by this motion. Tut, tut, tut: One less Graduate student to deal with.

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Canada's oldest official student publication

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