

Foundation offers networking opportunities for student journalists

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Starting out in Harrisburg

The room was brimming with faces of journalistic experience and inexperience. Lively chatter bounced from the walls. Ideas and possibilities were flying. A love for journalism was the common bond.

On Feb. 28, a mixer at the PNA headquarters in Harrisburg, kicked off the first of four networking receptions designed to bring together Pennsylvania's newspaper professionals and student journalists and their advisers. Nine area colleges and universities, along with a host of local newspaper professionals – more than 75 people – attended this opening reception hosted by the PNA Foundation. The casual atmosphere was intended to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships.

Naturally student journalists were there to compare notes with fellow college newspapers. It's not a surprise that student newspapers tend to run into some of the same challenges en route to creating a finished product, and it's comforting to see that others can sympathize and offer suggestions.

"It's been a really good experience," said Dave Beitzel, editor in chief of **The Fourth Estate**, the newspaper for Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC)'s Harrisburg campus. "I met people from all over, and they kind of allay some of your fears that you have about your own paper, as well as give you some good ideas."

This was especially helpful to some of the newer college newspapers, such as **The Creative Cannon**, HACC's Gettysburg campus newspaper, which is only in its second year. Being such a young publication, the paper's adviser, Cristal Renzo, was excited to have her staff interact with other newspapers.

"Since we are on the smaller (HACC) branch campus, our students think, 'Oh, we're just a small campus newspaper with no real credibility behind us,'" Renzo explained. "I wanted to have us join the PNA so that we can come to events like this and [the students] can see that they really are equals to some of these larger colleges."

With the future of newspapers often portrayed as questionable, the evening was also an excellent way to reassure students that career opportunities in the industry do exist.

Eric Bohannon, editor of Mansfield University's **The Flashlight**, was interested in meeting "... different people in the business and seeing what their thoughts are on students getting jobs ..."

Luckily, students like Bohannon were able to interact with newspaper



Jordan Sanders, a sports editor at Shippensburg University's **The Slate**, gives a tour of her paper's Web site. (Erica Streisfeld/PNA)

professionals who are proud to be in the industry.

"This is a tough time in journalism, of course, and there are a lot of people who question whether this is the career for them," said Marc Charisse, editor of **The (Hanover) Evening Sun**. "I want to assure them that there are jobs out there for people who are passionate about what they do."

"Smaller newspapers, which are where everybody starts usually, are actually healthier economically right now because we're still very local and so there's still that market for local news," he said.

Southeast to Philadelphia

The next stop was Philadelphia on April 1, where over 80 students and advisers gathered for a reception and panel discussion hosted by St. Joseph's University's student newspaper, **The Hawk**.

As in Harrisburg, the reception was an ideal opportunity for many students to showcase their clips and portfolios. Patrick McNally, executive editor for **News Gleaner Publications**, noted that it was a way to meet young people with a passion for print journalism – the very types that would make great journalists.

After some quality networking time, the students, advisers and area PNA members engaged in an animated discussion on a unique topic: the merits and problems involved with publishing a spoof or parody edition of a student newspaper.

"We were able to have a constructive discussion that allowed for each of our different perspectives and situations to come through," said Alex Nassar, editor in chief of **The Hawk**. "While parody editions are made to have fun, they can raise serious issues, and I think we treated those issues appropriately."

Dr. Jenny Spinner, adviser of **The Hawk** added, "The forum provided an important opportunity for us to



Student journalists and college newspaper advisers mingle with PNA members in Harrisburg, at the first of four networking receptions. College newspapers exchanged ideas with each other and also networked with seasoned newspaper professionals. (Erica Streisfeld/PNA)

continue examining our rationale and practices for doing a parody edition. It's one thing to argue for a parody edition behind the closed doors of your newsroom and another to defend it in front of professional journalists and potential employers."

"I hope we can find more ways to bring together student journalists in the Philadelphia area," said Spinner. "It's valuable for them to meet one another, to see one another's papers, and to talk about the work they are doing."

West to Indiana

A third reception was held at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) on April 9, and co-hosted by the IUP journalism department and its chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. The annual IUP journalism symposium followed the reception.

Again, attendees thrived on this interactive environment, where students and advisers could not only develop ideas, but also build a network of resources. "This program was a good first step toward opening the lines of communication among college newspaper writers, editors and advisers," mentioned Dan Pinchot, co-adviser of **The Roar** at Penn State's Beaver campus.

"I especially liked the addition of the journalism symposium, truly making it an educational outing for our students," he noted. "The topic – convergence – was particularly relevant in today's media market."

Staffers at **The Indiana Gazette** were huge supporters of the evening's festivities, as student interns and others from IUP are key contributors to **The Indiana Gazette** during the summers and throughout the year.

"Our staff really enjoyed the opportunity to meet with the students and get to know them in a more casual setting," said Mike Donnelly, president and publisher of Indiana Printing & Publishing.

North to Mansfield

Finally, an April 10 reception was held at Mansfield University, and co-hosted by its newspaper, **The Flashlight**. While this was the smallest reception in terms of attendees, students from Mansfield University and Lycoming College took advantage of prime networking time with PNA members from Coudersport, Lock Haven, Wellsboro and Williamsport.

"What a pleasure it is to meet budding journalists, to answer their questions and, most importantly, to listen to them talk about what they hope to accomplish in the future," said Bob Rolley, publisher at **The (Lock Haven) Express**. "I can't tell you how many young people I've been fortunate enough to work with and help along with their careers as a result of these kinds of events."

More than anything, these networking receptions show promise for the newspaper industry in Pennsylvania. "The news you hear in the business is kind of depressing these days," said John Hilton, city editor at **The Sentinel** in Carlisle. "So it's good to hear from some enthusiastic young minds." ▮

— For more information about how your college newspaper can partner with the PNA Foundation and participate in similar events, contact Janet Bevan, manager of outreach and partnerships, at (717) 703-3004 or janetb@pa-news.org.

Participating Schools

- Cabrini College
- Community College of Allegheny County
- Delaware County Community College
- Gettysburg College
- HACC, Gettysburg
- HACC, Harrisburg
- Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- Lebanon Valley College
- Lycoming College
- Mansfield University
- Misericordia University
- Northampton Community College
- Penn State, Beaver
- Penn State, New Kensington
- Shippensburg University
- St. Joseph's University
- Temple University
- Widener University