

EXPLORING OPTIONS TO BUILD TRUST BETWEEN  
JOURNALISTS AND AUDIENCES IN COLLEGIATE  
COMMUNITY JOURNALISM EDUCATION

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Abstract: This case study research explored options for improving trust between journalists and their communities within the boundaries of collegiate community journalism education. Data collected from students who completed a community journalism class, the instructor of that class, and journalism professionals who engaged with the class was analyzed using a two-step qualitative text analysis coding process. Data collected from students included both written reflections and in-depth interviews; data collected from the class instructor and the journalism professionals included in-depth interviews. Findings produced four dominant themes that participants spoke of most frequently including: journalists being part of the communities they work in, journalists working to meet community needs, the multiple elements and requirements that lead to doing journalism right, and finally, with all three preceding themes relating to a final overarching theme that practicing journalism is quite hard. Conclusions from the findings included: student journalists do understand that trust is not easily gained from an audience, and while they seem to understand reliability and credibility as related to trust, they have less of a grasp on the element of responsiveness; students understand and have a desire to implement community journalism practices across multiple platforms, including digital; political divisiveness continues to increasingly shape how journalists think of trust in the journalism profession; students somewhat understand that improving the relationship between journalist and audience is more of a responsibility on the journalist, but they tend to blame audience members for shortcomings in the relationship; and, although seasoned professionals and educators understand that younger journalists operate in a different media landscape than a decade ago, they may not fully understand how those differences have shaped the younger journalists' thoughts about trust and the relationship with their audience.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Americans have strong opinions about journalism and journalists, and the majority of those opinions are not favorable. Journalists, along with car salespeople, lobbyists and telemarketers, are among the least trusted professionals, according to a 2015 Gallup Poll asking the public to rate the level of ethics and honesty for certain professions (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015). As of the summer of 2017, another Gallup Poll showed only 27% of people reported high confidence in newspapers, with even lower scores for television news at 24% and news on the internet with 16% (Swift, 2017). The public's lack of trust toward journalists is not a recent development, nor is the study of this phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to explore options for improving trust between journalists and their communities within the boundaries of collegiate journalism education. The research questions are:

1. What is the relationship between journalists and their audiences regarding trust?
2. What measures can be taken at the college level to improve trust between journalists and their audiences?

A: specifically, through a college course in community journalism?

B: in general, through the curriculum for a journalism degree?

This research uses the following definitions for the three elements of trust most commonly studied in media research: 1) reliability—likely to be correct and behave ethically based on history; 2) credibility—ability to be believed; and 3) responsiveness—

reacting quickly and appropriately to the public and events (Brants, 2013 p. 17). Critiques of journalism's trustworthiness are not limited to the public looking in on the profession, but come from those practicing it and looking out. Famed investigative journalist Carl Bernstein (1992) criticized the transformation of his profession, showing disdain even in the title of his article, "The Idiot Culture." He wrote, "The lowest form of popular culture—lack of information, misinformation, and a contempt for the truth or the reality of most people's lives—has overrun real journalism" (Bernstein, 1992, p. 25). Push ahead nearly 25 years to a few months before the 2016 U.S. presidential election, and Gallup reported the lowest levels of audience trust for media in its polling history with only 32 percent of respondents saying they hold a "great deal" or "fair amount" of trust for the media, down eight percentage points from a year earlier (Swift, 2016).

However, despite low levels of reported trust, people still rely on journalists and journalism. Furthermore, Americans associate journalism with democracy and often use journalism to measure the health of their democracy (Ryfe, 2012). A majority of people, across every age group, consume news on a daily basis (American Press Institute, 2014). The relationship remains alive, but not always well. Additionally, older generations of news consumers worry the younger generations do not care about news nor read it. However, research published in 2015 from the Media Insight Project shows that 85 percent of individuals ages 18-34, referred to in that study as millennials, report that keeping up with news is important to them, 69 percent of this age group said they consume news at least once per day, and 40 percent pay for at least one news application or digital news subscription (American Press Institute, 2015). These younger readers are consuming news, just maybe not in the same way their parents and grandparents do. So,



U.S. audiences, even its younger members, clearly consume news, but they do not trust the majority of those professionals providing it to them (Pew Research Center, 2011; Brants, 2013; Swift, 2016, 2017).

Also problematic, journalists view themselves quite differently than audiences view journalists. In a book focused on journalists perceptions of themselves, data from more than 1,000 full time print and broadcast journalists indicated the following themes: 1) journalists said producing quality journalism was their highest priority; 2) nearly two thirds of those surveyed said despite facing cutbacks and financial struggles, the quality of journalism was on the rise in their news organizations; 3) more than 70 percent reported the watchdog function--the media checking up on government activities--as the most important function of journalism; 4) and the majority said getting the story right was more important than getting it first (Willis, 2010, p. 40). Audiences, however, remain unconvinced that the majority of journalists and the media in general have community members' best interests at heart (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015), and journalists-to-be learn this lesson early in journalism school.

Part of collegiate journalism curriculum includes guiding students in understanding and evaluating the relationship between journalists and their audiences, including elements of trust. Historically the public shows dissatisfaction with some component of journalism in every era, and journalism students study these past and present points of contention in the profession. Journalism instructors have a responsibility to train highly competent future journalists in order to keep journalists functioning in their integral roles in a democratic society. One way they can do this is through the content of the curriculum they teach. For example, many journalism schools offer classes

or content in the practice of community journalism or similar journalists strategies. Community journalism practices aim to foster trust between journalists/publications and their audiences by being transparent and encouraging open-door policies for the community to interact with staff as well as by talking to members of the community often and in depth (Lauterer, 2006). Journalists practicing community journalism tactics often work in direct contact with their communities in a local or even hyper-local capacity (Reader, 2012); these journalists support their community with their journalism work, but also work closely with community members to construct the community (Steiner, 2012). Community journalism tactics differ from traditional journalism tactics which encourage a stricter objective observer role for the journalist.

The study explored options for improving trust between journalists and audiences within the perimeters of community journalism students' collegiate education using data collected from: journalism students' written reflections about community journalism; interviews with students who recently completed a community journalism class; and interviews with individuals involved in the students' community journalism education process.

### **Audience Distrust of Media**

The breakdown of trust between journalists and audience can discredit the role of credible journalism in citizens' minds, leading to a weakening of journalism's function in a democracy. Therefore, practices that improve trust and foster connections between journalists and citizens are helpful to the overall state of journalism's function in a productive democratic society—this function being one of the normative functions of journalism (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1963). In collegiate journalism education

challenges such as attempting to improve the relationship between future journalists and their audiences are left in the hands of journalism educators who use a variety of pedagogies and are guided by varying philosophies as they educate future journalists. Additionally, there is not always a clear direction for successful undergraduate journalism education. In a 2012 survey, 134 directors of university journalism programs across the country shared opinions concerning collegiate journalism curriculum. The directors' opinions indicated "no clear consensus" when they responded to a question concerning which core *courses* they would ideally include in undergraduate journalism curriculum (Blom & Davenport, 2012). Although many directors shared overlapping opinions on which *topics* were of essential importance in teaching journalism such as ethics, storytelling abilities, news gathering, critical thinking, and multimedia skills, they disagreed about which courses should take precedent in the curriculum (Blom & Davenport, 2012). This can leave instructors of collegiate journalism uncertain of the focus for successful journalism curriculum. Journalism instructors and professional journalists alike worry that the downfall of their profession would lead to the downfall of democracy; however, suggestions for fixing the problems are widely varied and at times not realistic (Ryfe, 2012). Journalism professionals also disagree with each other about the direction journalism should take to keep and strengthen its place in democracy (Myburg, 2009), and this is of concern to journalism educators who are trying to best prepare their students for the future. "Teaching students attitudes and skills that fit a journalism of the past is a disservice to the industry, to students, and to the credibility of the university (Mensing, 2011, p. 17).

This uncertainty in curriculum development and among professionals, along with more than 50 years of community journalism tactics seemingly not contributing much to improve the public's overall view of journalism and journalists, made an exploratory qualitative case study of community journalism education, such as this one, appropriate. This study focused on journalism students—the next generation of journalists. This study aimed to provide a detailed picture of one group of community journalism students' education in relation to the professional challenges they will face going into their future careers, specifically concerning their relationships with their future audiences, in order to inform both curriculum and practice.

### **Problem Statement**

Since the establishment of the Society of Professional Journalists in 1909, journalists have employed a variety of tactics to improve their relationship with the public. Despite these efforts, many in society continued to view the profession and its members with distrust (Broersma and Peters, 2013; Swift 2016, 2017). This is certainly a concern for professional journalists, but also for the journalism professors who prepare future journalists. In a democracy one journalistic role is to foster “participative and informed political discussion,” and this requires a trusting relationship between the audience members and the journalists (Myburg, 2009, p. 1). Community journalism tactics encourage audience/journalist interaction and trust building (Rosen, 2005; Reader, 2012). Courses in community journalism began appearing in individual journalism schools in the 1970s, surged in popularity after 1996 (Lauterer, 2006) and remain well represented in the curriculum today. Six of ten top ten-rated U.S. journalism schools (Gilbert, 2014) include a community journalism class in the curriculum or an instructor

specializing in community journalism on the faculty. Given that this strategy has been widespread in journalism schools for more than 20 years, it is logical to think the strategy might have fostered more public trust of journalism/journalists, as those who learned this style of journalism are now established in the profession, but academic research and public opinion polling both show it has not.

Journalism is required for a functioning democracy; however, audiences lack trust in journalists and journalism despite a variety of efforts since the 1960s to improve this relationship. Breakdowns in the relationship between audiences and journalists threaten democracy. This issue has become increasingly apparent following the 2016 presidential election. What remains uncertain is if the journalism profession can do anything to change this relationship, and if so, what this might be.

Low levels of public trust in journalism and of journalists do not have a uni-causal explanation. One area of scrutiny is the education received by journalists in training. Directors of journalism programs across the country disagree on how to best train future successful journalists as well as which courses should take precedent in journalism curriculum (Blom & Davenport, 2012). This disagreement, along with the failure of tactics of community journalism to improve the public's general view of journalism and journalists, made an exploratory qualitative study of journalism education, such as this one, appropriate.

### **Social Responsibility Theory of the Press and Community Journalism**

Journalism and mass communication researchers regard the social responsibility theory (SRT) of the press, one of four guiding theories of the press, as part of the normative theories of the press and media. Normative theories focus on the right and

wrong, the ethical and unethical, the desirable or undesirable standards in society; in journalism studies, this translates into questions about what the role of journalism is and should be (Christians, et. al, 2009). A detailed explanation of the development of SRT is included in the literature review; however, the theory's basic tenets are useful in the introduction, as the theory informed the idea for this study. SRT of the press developed from the public's and the government's beliefs that the press was deficient in three tasks: servicing the public system, enlightening the public, and protecting individuals' liberties (Siebert, et al., 1963). The idea that journalistic ethical codes are self-imposed by members of the press and not government regulated keeps the press free, as established in the First Amendment. Critics view elements of SRT as a *government* intrusion suggesting the media should be socially responsible. However, when journalists lead the accountability to their publics, as they often do when practicing community journalism, they are operating under the social responsibility rationale of journalism while making full use of their First Amendment protections. Social responsibility, operating within the framework of the First Amendment, can play a role democracy that provides citizens with information they need to make informed decisions about their lives and communities (Tedesco, Kaid & Melton-McKinnon, 2000). Community journalism tactics often involve journalist-led responsibility. Additionally, the social responsibility rationale of normative journalism theory describes journalism as a service to the community (Siebert, et al., 1963), similar to the concept of community journalism.

### **Overview of Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore options for improving trust between journalists and their communities within the boundaries of collegiate journalism education. As a reminder, the research questions are:

1. What is the relationship between journalists and their audiences regarding trust?
2. What measures can be taken at the college level to improve trust between journalists and their audiences?

A: specifically, through a college course in community journalism?

B: in general, through the curriculum for a journalism degree?

This exploratory qualitative case study explored the training grounds of journalism in higher education with data collected from: written work and interviews with college students who completed a community journalism class; an interview with the instructor of that class; and from interviews with journalism professionals who had interactions with the community journalism class and frequently hire college interns and new journalism graduates. A community journalism class is an appropriate setting from which to gather data concerning trust within journalism. Community journalism goals, both at the level of higher education and in the profession, include improving trust between journalists and audience. Data from the students, instructor, and journalism professionals were then transcribed, pulled together into a case record, and analyzed using a two-step qualitative text analysis coding process (Kuckartz, 2014) in order to draw out potential themes related to improving trust between journalists and audiences.

### **Significance**

In broad terms, because journalism is crucial to a healthy, functioning democracy, any study designed to produce information on how to improve any part of journalism is significant to democracy itself. But, more specifically, this study is significant in practice for both journalism educators and future journalists, as well as to the policy of journalism education. Previous studies of community-oriented journalism in collegiate curriculum mostly focus on student learning outcomes. These outcomes are important; however, the research can go deeper into connections, or lack thereof, related to trust between journalists and audiences. Any meaningful findings concerning the relationship between journalists and their audiences in the context of a college class of journalism majors could benefit those teaching community journalism or similar practices in the classroom, professionals currently working in journalism, and those who will practice it as a professional after graduation. Also, significant to collegiate journalism education, this work produced deep description from student journalists' written reflections and conversation during interviews after they engaged in a community journalism course which can inform journalism instructors in their classroom practices.

Concerning significance to policy, accrediting bodies, such as the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the accrediting body for the college of journalism described in this study, produce guidelines and criteria for successful journalism education. Findings from this study could be used to inform policies concerning the importance of community journalism in curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

The public reports low levels of trust for and confidence in journalists (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015; Swift, 2016, 2017); however, the majority of the public still relies



on journalists' work for news consumption (American Press Institute, 2015). Journalism graduates will work in a profession which historically plays an important role in U.S. democracy (Siebert, et al., 1963; Ryfe, 2012) yet receives little confidence from the public. Journalists have engaged in community-oriented journalism tactics since the 1960s, and these tactics continue today (Lauterer, 2006; Ferrucci, 2017). The journalists involved in these tactics are leading responsible efforts in their communities, connecting deliberately with their communities, and attempting to help community members find solutions to community problems through their journalism practices. Despite these efforts, the public still generally distrusts professional journalism.

Based on the following three statements, an exploratory qualitative research was appropriate for this research: 1) Professors teach community-oriented journalism tactics in current journalism curriculum, but studies on this topic have mainly focused on student learning outcomes, not on the specific issue of trust between journalists and their audiences. 2) Additionally, directors of journalism programs across the country do not agree on the most important curriculum goals for future journalism education (Blom & Davenport, 2012). 3) Finally, after 50 years of community journalism efforts to foster trust in their communities, journalists still do not garner much of the trust they seek; without trust between journalists and their audiences, journalism does not function to its potential in a democratic society (Carey, 1999; Myburg 2009).

The following chapters of this research include a literature review, methodology, results, and discussion. Chapter 2, the literature review, includes sections on the history of the journalism profession since the 1900s, an expansion on the public's current distrust of journalism and journalists, clarification of terminology similar to community

journalism, community journalism in the profession, community journalism in college curriculum, and a background of social responsibility theory of media as it relates to community journalism. Chapter 3, methodology, includes an expanded look at the purpose of the study along with the research questions, an overview of epistemology and theoretical perspective as it fits within the study design, the design of the study, ethical considerations, and a discussion of trustworthiness. Chapter 4 presents the findings organized by dominant themes and an analysis of the results. Chapter 5 provides a discussion based on the results, the final conclusions drawn from the results, and implications for research, practice and policy.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While the public reports low levels of trust for journalists (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015; Swift 2016, 2017), the majority of the public still relies on journalists' work for news and information (American Press Institute, 2015). Journalism historically plays an important role in U.S. democracy (Siebert, et al., 1963), yet the profession receives little confidence from its consumers. Journalists have engaged in community journalism tactics since the 1960s, partly as an effort to foster trust with their communities (Reader, 2012), and these tactics continue today (Ferrucci, 2017). Despite these efforts, the public still generally distrusts journalists and the profession (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015). Journalism students find themselves studying a profession they know is not perceived well by the general public. Many journalism instructors teach community journalism, but much of the research concerning collegiate community journalism focuses on student learning outcomes as they relate to institutional and accreditation standards. This study, however, focused on the question of how journalism can improve its relationship with the public, specifically, increasing trust between journalists and audiences, within the perimeters of community journalism in higher education. Without trust from the audience, journalism cannot function to its full potential in a democracy (Carey, 1999; Myburg; 2009).

The literature review includes the following sections: a brief history of the journalism profession starting in the early 1900s, a background of theory of social responsibility of media as related to community-oriented journalism, the public's distrust

of journalism and journalists, community-oriented journalism in the profession, and community-oriented journalism in college curriculum.

### **The Evolution of Journalism in the United States since the Early 1900s**

To arrive at the current state of journalism practices and issues concerning trust between journalists and their communities requires a review of historically significant moments in the profession's history starting with the first broad attempts at professionalizing American journalism. The late 1890s - early 1900s is often regarded as a time wrought with sensational journalism practices in the United States. In the wake of the Hearst-Pulitzer rivalry--a time when increasing circulation and ad revenue overshadowed truth and accuracy--journalists, including student journalists, moved to professionalize their work. A group of 10 journalism students established Sigma Delta Chi, a journalism fraternity, in 1909, for students interested in journalism careers and upholding high professional standards (Society of Professional Journalists, *Code of Ethics*, 2016). Sigma Delta Chi would eventually add professional charters in 1921, and later become known as the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) in 1988. The 1920s and '30s proved a popular time for journalism education, with many "top college students who enjoyed writing" gravitating to journalism (Olasky, 1991, p. 120).

In another example of professionalizing journalism, a group of newspaper editors formed the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) in 1922 and wrote a code of ethics. The ASNE's initial mission, in part, was to ". . . establish ethical standards of professional conduct, to interchange ideas for the advancement of professional ideals . . . and to work collectively for the solution of common problems" (ASNE, 2016). ASNE's standards of professional conduct became a set of guiding principles including being

responsible, defending freedom of the press, assuring truth and accuracy, being impartial and playing fair, or upholding common decency (ASNE, 2016). In 1926, Sigma Delta Chi leaders borrowed language from ASNE's principles and developed their own code of ethics; in 1973 Sigma Delta Chi developed its own code. This code has been modified four times, three times since Sigma Delta Chi became the SPJ, and journalists today still follow the four umbrella principles in the SPJ Code of Ethics: seek the truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently, and be accountable.

In the decades that followed the initial professionalism of the industry, journalism took a variety of turns as it responded to public desire and new technologies. In the 1910s newspapers often served as a place of activism for political parties and social movements, and the differences in the American elite and Americans in poverty were clearly showcased. While 1920s journalism can be partly categorized by a rise in tabloid style journalism focused on sex and crime, sound practices based on facts and ethical reporting also took hold at many renowned publications such as *The New York World*. Literary critic and journalist for the Baltimore *Evening Sun*, HL Mencken, wrote in 1924 that despite the uptick in tabloids, there had been a general improvement in American newspapers since the turn of the century. He credited the improvements to diminished petty competition between numerous competing papers in each city as many papers converged and became financially stronger, and he noted the move away from yellow journalism. “. . . most of them [newspapers], I believe, are decent, as decency goes in this world. They are not for sale. They cannot be intimidated. They try to report the news as they understand it, and promote the truth as they see it,” (Brennen & Hardt, 2011, p. 149).

In the 1930s, the public's fascination with radio emerged, and President Roosevelt became the first president to make use of electronic media as a political tool, placing himself (or at least his voice) in the living rooms of the American people who grew to trust him in a way few politicians have experienced. Although radio gained popularity and credibility in this decade, it also distinguished itself as a medium for entertainment, and Orson Welles' "War of the World" prank, in which his radio show convinced listeners of a Martian invasion inciting panic, did nothing to help solidify radio as the serious medium of objective factual information. Although print journalism had to adapt to radio, both mediums remained strong in the 1930s. The United States of America emerge in the 1940s as a global power in the wake of the Japanese surrender in World War II. The general population, along with journalists, started thinking more globally. However, with the advent of television and success of radio, newspapers started to show weaknesses in timely reporting, as evident in the infamous *Dewey Defeats Truman* issue of the Chicago Tribune, in which the newspaper called the presidential election for Dewey, printing their edition before Truman was officially announced as the winner. However, while television and radio journalism succumbed more easily to government pressure to send out pro-war and patriotic messages, newspaper journalism did not bend to these demands as readily. Furthermore, print publications enjoyed more First Amendment protection, as there was and is no equivalent of the broadcast regulating body, the FCC, for the print medium.

Television rose to prominence as a true mass medium in the 1950s, and it surpassed radio as the favorite electronic medium and contributed to what would be the slow decline of newspapers. But broadcast journalists like Edward R. Murrow became

integral to exposing political scandals, most notably with his takedown of Joseph McCarthy during the *Red Scare* era of Communist fear. Following Murrow, Walter Cronkite solidified himself as the most trusted reporter in America after his fiercely credible, yet emotional coverage of President Kennedy's death. Journalism in all its mediums played a crucial role in exposing atrocities of the Vietnam War, fueling the public's discontent with politicians. At the same time, politicians were openly and wildly critical of the press accusing them of unethical practices in pursuit of their stories and having agendas to take down certain politicians. The 1960s also produced a time of critical media studies under the leadership of Marshal McLuhan and his research on media's role in culture. This era of critical studies would lead to the press examining its practices, which in turn, produced the idea of community journalism.

Journalism Professor Ken Bryerly coined the term community journalism in 1961, describing it then as the "friendly neighbor" approach to journalism (Lauterer, 2012, p. ix). This was in stark contrast to how many in the public viewed journalists: elite individuals reporting in a cold, detached manner on communities as an outsider. Journalists doing community journalism work in direct contact with their communities, as opposed to a more hands-off, strictly objective observer approach of traditional journalism, often in a local or even hyper-local capacity (Reader, 2012). The professionals working in community journalism environments support the community with their journalism efforts but also serve alongside the citizens to construct their community (Steiner, 2012). Media professionals today often practice community journalism with an intent to effect change around a particular community issue.

The era discussed up to this point from roughly 1890 to 1968 is considered the modern era of journalism (Carey, 1999), and the type of journalism practiced is considered “trustee journalism,” a practice that moved away from the “partisan journalism,” or aligning with a particular political ideology, practiced before 1890. Trustee journalism, or journalism as a trustee of the people, independent of a political alignment, refocused on a general, more objective public service (Carey, 1999). From this time period emerged beat reporting, the idea of watchdog reporting—a reporting tactic focused intently on government proceedings to encourage transparency—, and clarity of the extent of the press’s special rights under the U.S. First Amendment. Although researchers and media professionals often discuss this modern era as the “glory days” of journalism, a down side stems from the modern era practices as well. The public in general became more passive in its engagement with politics, more of an observer and less of an activist, and smaller and relatively helpless when compared to the two major players of the press and the government (Carey, 1999). This would eventually lead to the public outcry toward journalism and the public and civic journalism movements in the 1980s and 1990s.

The 1970s led to more political corruption exposure as Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein uncovered President Nixon’s involvement in the Watergate scandal. The press moved into what would become known as the *new journalism* era, distinguished partly by creative literary devices—first person narration, scene setting, dialogue—used in traditional objective news reporting that had once been reserved only for fiction (Wolfe, 1975). Additionally, watchdog journalism surged. The American government faced more public backlash after journalists leaked the Pentagon Papers exposing more U.S.



deception from the Vietnam War. Political cynicism along with a drooping economy led to a decline in consumer confidence, and politicians and journalists being at odds lead to a public distrust of both. Following this time period, the public began demanding transparency from government, and, understanding they were not favorable in the public's eye either, journalists begin to try new journalism strategies and philosophies to achieve this standard. Industry standards of professionalism had been officially in place since 1926 with ASNE's guiding principles and Sigma Delta's Chi's code of ethics based on the ASNE language. These practices contributed to the historical legitimacy of journalism; it also led to a mentality of cold objectivism, or seeing news as a concrete set of events that the journalist collects and simply presents without considering the responsibility or meaning of their coverage (Campbell, 1999). To consider the responsibility or a deeper meaning was seen as subjective. But the public did not necessarily trust the journalist as the completely objective dispenser of news.

**Civic and Public Journalism as Related to Community Journalism.** In the late 1980s through 1990s research surrounding the emergence of civic and public journalism, sometimes mixed with the idea of community journalism from the 1960s and 1970s, indicated that the people wanted journalists, especially local journalism, to help them solve difficult problems (Campbell, 1999) not to just be an emotionless provider of facts that the public was then left to interpret without guidance. The two terms, civic journalism and public journalism, are often used interchangeably, and some researchers group public and civic journalism, into one category or ideology (Voakes, 1999; Rauch, et al., 2003; Voakes, 2004) while other researchers and journalists vehemently defend the differences (Merritt, 1998; Haas, 2000; Nip, 2006).

Some of the top voices in journalism have described civic journalism as: “helping the public find the solutions to problems” (Glaberson, 1994, 6D); a type of journalism that can improve the quality of public life (Steele, 2007) and “the public capacity to solve problems” (Merritt, 1994, p. 17A). One early champion and adopter of civic journalism said it was journalism with a “stronger public philosophy . . . a movement of people and institutions” (Rosen, 1995, p. 35). Concerning the definition for public journalism, it has been described as a movement within the profession created to strengthen democracy (Friedland, 2003), and the journalists facilitating public journalism work to connect with the community, engage individuals as citizens, and help public deliberation in search for solutions (Nip, 2006). Public journalism has its roots following the 1988 U.S. presidential election, after which citizens espoused disgust with both politics and the press; public journalism committed itself to local democracy, community and citizenship (Carey, 1999). Literature on public journalism ties it heavily to the idea of the common good (Carey, 1999; Christians, 1999).

More recent research describes public journalism as a “valuable framework for how journalists can be a catalyst for change . . . in a way that enables citizens to regain political agency and work together to address the problems they face.” (Myburg, 2009, p. 3). Additional research describes public and civic journalism as tenets that grew from community journalism (Reader, 2012), and due to the nature of overlapping key components, from this point forward this study will use the term *community-oriented journalism* as an umbrella term when referring to more than one of these journalism movements: community journalism, civic journalism, and public journalism.

The community-oriented journalism surge of the late 1980s through the 1990s, while well intentioned, did not lead to a major growth in trust between journalists and their publics. There were a variety of success stories, such as the at the Wichita Eagle and the North Dakota Star whose editors widely touted the usefulness of reaching out to the community to be more involved in the newsroom processes. And while these and other similar situations around the country led to short periods of revitalized trust within targeted communities, the larger picture remains that of citizens in general not trusting the majority of news publications. After more than 100 years of journalists working to be viewed as professionals with a specific skill set and social contract aimed at ensuring the public trust, the research still shows that the majority of the public does not view journalists favorably nor trust much of the work they do (Brants, 2013; Swift, 2016; Swift, 2017). Yet, journalists still cite that building trust with their audiences is integral to their profession (Reader, 2012).

**Summary of History.** Since the late 1890s to the present, journalists have worked to professionalize their field. The consumers' increasing and decreasing trust of journalists often aligns with times of political strife and government corruption. However, even during times when journalists were seemingly the champions of transparency, such as Woodward and Bernstein's investigative reporting of the Watergate scandal, the consumers' overall trust for journalists never increased exponentially. From the 1960s forward, journalists began embracing community-oriented journalism tactics. These efforts grew partly from audience and journalists' distrust of government proceedings in the 1940s and 1950s, and afterward, U.S. journalism started to move from its foundation of libertarian ideology into social responsibility (Siebert et. al, 1963).

## **Social Responsibility Theory of the Press**

The social responsibility theory of media, which emerged after World War II, informed this study; community-oriented journalism practices engage thoroughly in social responsibility. SRT is perhaps most recognized through the report from the Hutchins Commission in 1947. This government-created commission formed with the goal to answer the question, “Is the freedom of the press in danger?” (Shedden, 2015). The commission evaluated print and broadcast media and motion pictures; their final report, "A Free and Responsible Press," which became known as the Hutchins Report, declared that freedom of the press was in danger (Shedden, 2015).

The commission also suggested that people with special measures of freedom, like journalists, have an obligation to use that freedom in a socially responsible manner (Straubhaar, LaRose & Davenport, 2009). The press does indeed have special freedoms through the First Amendment, but the amendment does not require a *responsible* press. When the Hutchins Report was first introduced, members of the press quickly criticized it as a threat to First Amendment rights (Nieman Reports, 1947). However, if social responsibility remains in journalists’ care, not the government’s, it can and does operate inside full First Amendment protection of a free press. The language of the First Amendment does not address *responsibility* of the press, only its *freedom*. Therefore, discussions concerning social responsibility and the press often results in two conclusions: 1) Members of the profession self-impose the responsibility on themselves. For example, news publications most often choose not to release the names of sexual crime victims, even though it is legal to do so. They are acting responsibly to minimize harm to the victims; or 2) A government agency requires responsible behavior and

defines what is and is not responsible. This second discussion of social responsibility makes journalists nervous, as it implies an unconstitutional government control, defying the First Amendment. So, while many media practitioners have criticized social responsibility of the media as discussed in the Hutchins Report as a potential threat to First Amendment rights, journalist-led social responsibility functions well in journalism practices, especially community-oriented journalism.

For example, professional codes of ethics and guiding principles, such as those the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the Society of Professional Journalists developed, are examples of the profession placing responsibility on themselves. The SPJ Code of Ethics asked media professionals to 1) seek truth and report it, 2) minimize harm, especially to vulnerable individuals, 3) act independently by avoiding conflicts of interest or accepting favors or gifts, 4) and be accountable by admitting and correcting mistakes and exposing unethical behavior both inside and outside their organizations (SPJ, *Code of Ethics*, 2016) The idea that SPJ guiding principles are self-imposed and not government regulated keeps the press free, as established in the First Amendment. Additionally, media professionals practicing social responsibility contribute to a democracy that provides citizens with information they need to make informed decisions about their lives and communities (Tedesco, et al., 2000).

Journalists engaged in community-oriented journalism also engage in social responsibility. For example, these journalists might research what issue(s) their audience is under-informed about and seek ways (often through non-traditional journalism efforts) to provide them with enough information to make decisions or take action concerning the issue(s). Christians and Nordenstreng (2004) note a connection between social

responsibility theory of the 1940s and the move toward civic journalism, one type of community-oriented journalism, in the 1990s: civic journalism intended to reexamine a press that many citizens distrusted while including more citizen involvement media coverage.

SRT developed from libertarian ideology (Siebert, et al, 1963), and many U.S. journalists embraced the SRT ideology with the understanding that the responsibility should remain at the hands of the journalists, not the government. From the journalist's perspective, social responsibility ideology should encourage trust from audiences, as the ideology seeks to give a voice to all who want to participate in media, seeks to raise matters of conflict to the level of public debate and forbids invasion of citizens' private rights (Siebert, et al., 1963). However, audiences still do not show high levels of trust for journalists (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015), despite journalists believing themselves quite trustworthy (Willis, 2010).

### **The Public's Distrust of Journalism and Journalists**

Journalism has an historical role in the United States as outlined in the First Amendment as an integral part in a functioning democracy. However, despite journalism's crucial role in the pursuit of truth, (Siebert, et al, 1963), the public majority continues to distrust the press (*Honesty/Ethics*, 2015, Swift, 2016, 2017). In order for a representative relationship of the journalist and the public to work, three conditions are required: 1) the public must believe the press is "authentically their representative and therefore in a responsible and fiduciary relation to it [the public];" 2) the public must believe the press is not partnered with the state or other powerful interest groups, and 3) the public must believe the press is capable of giving an account of the world that is

“reasonable, unbiased, true, and factual,” (Carey, 1999, p. 57). However, Pew Center research and Gallup polls from the past several years show the relationship between journalists and their audiences at odds.

Gallup has been surveying the American public about its level of trust for the media since 1972; in 2016 Gallup reported its lowest numbers for audience trust in its history, with only 32 percent of participants reporting a “great deal” or “fair amount” of trust in the media (Swift, 2016). The falling level of trust in 2016 has been attributed partly to the media’s skewed projections leading up to Donald Trump’s Republican nomination for presidential candidate and his eventual victory as president. Looking specifically at newspapers in 2017 Gallup reported that 27 percent of people had “high confidence” for newspapers (Swift, 2017). This number for newspapers actually took a slight jump in 2017 from 2016, but is still much lower than trust in newspapers in the 1970s - 1990s. Ironically, Donald Trump’s complaints against the media since 2016 likely contributed to this slight increase in confidence for newspapers in 2017 as leading newspapers like the New York Times and the Washington Post pushed back against Trump’s claims they publish fake news. Going back a few years earlier, a Pew Center poll found that 66 percent of news consumers said news stories were often inaccurate, 77 percent thought that news organizations favored a political side, and 80 percent said news organizations are frequently influenced by powerful people or organizations (Pew Research Center, 2011). The public’s distrust of national news media might be understandable, as national news providers could be seen as distant from the common person; however, community members often do not trust the journalists who work in local media either (Reader, 2012). Or if they do trust certain members of their local

media, this local level of trust does not appear to affect their lack of trust for the broader media.

The public rates journalists low on the list of trusted professionals (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015). While journalists are not quite at the bottom of this spectrum, with 27 percent of respondents rating them on a high or very high level for ethics and honesty, the profession remains far from trusted compared to other service professions (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015). The average news consumer may not think of journalism as a service to the community, but journalists do think of themselves this way (Willis, 2010). Other service professions such as police officers rank at 56 percent, high school teachers at 60 percent, medical doctors at 67 percent, and the top-trusted profession of 2015, nurses, at 85 percent (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015). Looking at this particular data spanning 2000-2015, the highest percentage for journalists earning a high or very high rating for ethics and honesty was 29 percent, and the lowest 21 percent, with an average over 11 years of data collected at 26.1 percent (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015).

Two years earlier, a 2013 Gallup poll showed 21 percent of American respondents rated newspaper reporters as honest, and fewer, 20 percent, rated TV reporters as honest (Taibi, 2013). Indeed, those polled indicated lower levels of trust in both TV and news reporters than in local politicians, with 23 percent of respondents rating politicians as honest (Taibi, 2013). According to a third Gallup poll in June 2014:

- 1) News consumers indicated their trust in newspapers was down to 22 percent, falling significantly since consumers' trust peaked in 1979 at 51 percent;
- 2) Consumer trust in TV news was at 18 percent in 2014, down from its high of 46 percent in 1993, the first year Gallup polled about TV news along with newspapers;
- 3) Consumers responded



concerning trust of *internet* news for this first time in 1999 at 21 percent followed by a slight decline to 19 percent in 2014 (Dugan, 2014) . Further complicating the relationship between those reporting and the reported, journalists view their professional pursuits quite differently and more favorably than the public views these pursuits (Willis, 2010). This dissonance remains a major problem in the trust factor between the reporter and the reported. Despite the public-service role of journalism being its “definitive mission,” when people talk about their faith in current media, clearly, “public trust is waning,” (Broersma & Peters, 2013, p. 11).

### **Community-Oriented Journalism in the Profession**

As stated in the history section, public journalism, civic journalism, and community journalism are different but overlapping practices, and some researchers refer to the practices interchangeably or refer often to their similarities. Due to the commonalities of the practices, all three will be included as examples in this section and one more following, and when referring to the three terms collectively, the term *community-oriented* journalism will be used.

Community journalism is often tied to work in or with small rural newspapers or struggling urban newspapers, but increasingly the tactics of community journalism can be found in a variety of mediums such as magazines, TV and radio broadcast productions and digital publications. Two prominent themes in the study of community journalism include: journalists who practice it often curate a deep relationship with the people they report on, and journalists interact with imperative players within the community structure (Rosenberry, 2013). Early examples of grassroots community journalism projects include passionate journalists starting up newspapers in towns with no previous publications and

uniting the community to build the publication together. For example, a small community startup paper in Forest City, North Carolina in 1969 enticed the local high school band to take over subscription sales for a portion of the profit, resulting in success for both the community group and the publication (Lauterer, 2006, p. 387-89). This example shows how community journalism often “makes the community and the newspaper more real to each other,” (Lauterer, 2006, p. 19).

In another scenario, an energized journalism graduate, who had grown up in the U.S. South, headed to Skagway, Alaska to start a newspaper in 1978, despite locals telling him he would need “a set of brass knuckles and a bodyguard,” to do so (Lauterer, 2006, p. 89). However, the community eventually accepted the journalist and his efforts to report on this small community, and the *Skagway News* still publishes in 2017 and has since added an online edition. Community newspapers often satisfy “the affirmation of the sense of community, a positive and intimate reflection of the sense of place, a stroke for our us-ness, our extended family-ness and our profound and interlocking connectedness. . .” (Lauterer, 2006, p. 33).

In the 1980s and 1990s, public and civic journalism practices became common in newsrooms around the country. Both public and civic journalism have been described as tenets that grew from the early community journalism movement of the 1960s (Terry, 2011; Reader 2012). The *Wichita Eagle* newspaper and its editor Davis “Buzz” Merritt experimented openly with public and civic journalism, and his methods would become a standard in the industry for both best practices and learning from mistakes. Merritt believed traditional journalism discouraged the audience from civic participation, which in turn elevated suspicion from the audience of both journalism and politics (Voakes,

2004). Merritt and those editors who followed in his wake shared a belief that “because journalism has made a significant contribution to the decline of civic engagement, it can now make a significant contribution to its revival as well,” (Voakes, 2004, p. 29).

Community-oriented journalism tactics have an interesting role in current media as well, as journalism has essentially gone global, but media consumers continue to crave local connections, and public demands drive media content. Media publications also require money to flourish, and financial concerns amid increasing competition—there are more publications now than at any time in history—has led to more sensationalism. However, despite the challenges that have come with technology, the Web 2.0 era--the era during which online content is not merely a replication of print publications but produces unique content--has “given the traditional media an opportunity structure, an incentive and perceived coercion to connect with the public,” (Brants, 2013, p. 18). In the Web 2.0 era the people are not satisfied with mere representative democracy, an elected official representing their interests, even when it offers transparency and accountability; they want a participatory voice (Broersma and Peters, 2013). This directly affects journalism, as the nontraditional, less objective forms of community-oriented journalism seem to align with what audiences currently want. Additionally, while community journalism practices may have started out as a phenomenon in small town print publications, recent community journalism practices appear in electronic and online media showcasing the importance of local radio stations and the hyper-local abilities of online and mobile news sites (Rosenberry, 2013). Community no longer has to be defined by geography, but can be defined by shared interests, causes, or experiences.

Community journalism puts emphasis and value back on the consumer's concerns, and community journalists describes their publications as having *personalities* reflective of the community and the ownership (Lauterer, 2006). Additionally, journalists engaging in community journalism ask the question, "If our stories don't add up to doing good [for the community], then what good are we?" (Lauterer, 2006, p. 130). Similar guiding questions appear in research describing public and civic journalism and in community-oriented research concerning collegiate student journalists.

### **Community-Oriented Journalism in Collegiate Media Education**

Community journalism classes and projects became common in collegiate journalism curriculum in the 1970s and remain common today. The presence of community journalism in college curriculum has fluctuated historically, with less representation in the 1980s as major journalism schools, competing to increase their rankings and credibility, overlooked community journalism lessons (Lauterer, 2006). Before the mid 1990s community journalism was often thought of as something that only small-town journalists at small town newspapers did. As journalism colleges shifted away from the traditional print news medium to embrace more online technology and platforms, community journalism was left behind in many journalism programs' curriculum (Lauterer, 2006).

However, after about 1996, media professionals rejuvenated community journalism, perhaps after professionals and professors realized many small newspapers had survived and were worth working for and studying. And because the small newspapers survived Web 1.0, students would continue interning at them or working for them after graduation. Journalism researchers and professors also started to note that

community journalism could be practiced across all types of media platforms (Novek, 1999), not just newspapers. So, community journalism returned fairly prominently to journalism education, and in 2004 a group of journalists and journalism professors established the first ever “Community Journalism Interest Group” composed of 24 journalism educators (Lauterer, 2006). The CJIG continues today as part of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), with a mission to “identify and present original, meaningful research that advances the understanding of the role of journalists and news organizations as members of communities, be they geographic, topical, or digital,” (Meyer, 2016). Certain universities and programs have become known for their community journalism curriculum such as South Dakota State University, Oswego State University, Texas Christian University, and University of Kentucky (Lauterer, 2006).

More recently, combined efforts from the Kettering Foundation and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) led to a special research initiative called “Revitalizing the Bonds of Journalism, Citizenship, and Democracy,” calling for research that tackled the relationship between journalism education and “democracy in the digital age,” (Rosenberry, 2017). This led to a special publication of the top five submitted research projects, and a general evaluation of those five projects indicates that new approaches in journalism classrooms are needed and will make a difference in potentially fixing what is broken concerning the current state of journalism’s role in democracy, and exploratory studies within this area of concern, “offer tantalizing prospects for where journalism might go in support of democracy,” (Rosenberry, 2017).

Much of the research to date concerning community-oriented journalism in college education focuses on student learning outcomes after engaging in a class or project. One of the most involved and carefully documented collegiate civic journalism project studies currently available shows how college students can successfully implement a large-scale community project and produce tangible civically engaged outcomes. The end result was a book-length document of students work disseminated to the public providing research on key community issues and ideas for possible solutions. The author called the document “an important tangible outcome,” (Franz, 2004, para. 14) and explained that students learned about the changes and challenges facing their town. Understanding the issues in a community is integral in a journalist’s career. Without this, the reporter cannot gather meaningful data, may not know how to start a relevant story. Additionally, though many recent studies mention that today’s students are not engaged in their communities, Frantz (2004) claims the students involved in this project were more engaged in the community than any group he had seen in 17 years of teaching.

Another study of a simulated civic journalism project in a college media course showed an increase in students’ interest in seeking out innovative ways to practice journalism in their post-graduation careers (Anyaegebunam & Ryan, 2003). Simon & Sapp (2006) also documented success with student community engagement in a journalism class. Using pre-project and post-project surveys, the results showed that students had an increased awareness of Freedom of Information Act noncompliance, identified more positive traits of journalism as a profession, and were engaged with the course content (Simon & Sapp, 2006). “Community-based teaching in journalism and mass communication combines citizenship education, caring, community building, and

active pedagogies in which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized experiences” (Simon & Sapp, 2006, p. 133). A teacher researcher who embarked on two civic journalism projects in two journalism classes, one high school and one college, found that both projects engaged students to write about their communities and that civic journalism encourages civic participation (Novek, 1999). The high school students reported that their efforts were a “genuine public service,” and the author concluded the results of the study indicated the project “supported promising opportunities between the young people and their community . . . (Novek, 1999, p. 149-50). For the college students, post-project reflection writings show the college students had increased sensitivity to the at-risk high school students they worked with and the majority reported they were more likely to do additional community service work in the future after the civic journalism experience (Novek, 1999).

In some of the most recent research on community journalism in university curriculum, one study on a 10-year-old master’s program in community journalism found that its graduates aid the “process of community” in three particular ways: negotiating community structures and processes, helping lead their communities, and listening to citizens, and that while the graduates value all three of these dimensions, they especially value the dimension of listening to citizens (Lowrey & Daniels, 2017, p. 335). In asking what journalism curriculum would look like if it better aligned journalism practice and citizen democratic practice, Robinson (2017) tried new designs for traditional classes in a college journalism program that put students in more direct contact with community issues and community members. In the results of this research the author concludes that students became more aware of their bias which helped them produce

more fair and balanced and transparent stories, the role of the “sources” for their stories became more real to them--more relational due to increased direct contact, and students worked to build trust in neighborhoods that were known to be marginalized in the local media (Robinson, 2017, p. 315). This last study touched on the concept of trust, but it remains a concept that has been sparingly studied in the context of community-oriented journalism in college journalism education.

The collective research described in this section produced the following summary of outcomes for students who engaged in community-oriented journalism in college curriculum: students are aware of and more sensitive to difficult and important issues in their communities; students often want to do more positive work in their communities; they show potential for engagement in community in the future; they show innovation in practicing journalism strategies; they show an increased awareness of the strategies and tools of journalism; they identify more positively with the profession; they are more engaged in the coursework; and these practices don't automatically lead to activism or agenda pushing. These outcomes are important and show a variety of positive impacts that practicing community-oriented journalism in college impart have on students. However, more in-depth study on how student journalists think of trust and audiences and how they potentially foster trust could add to the body of knowledge concerning overall improvements to journalism and its relationship with audiences; this impaired relationship remains a concern due to journalism's role in a functioning democracy.

### **Conclusion**

The public does not have high levels of trust for journalists (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015), but the majority of consumers continue to rely on journalists'



work for news and information (American Press Institute, 2015). Journalists have engaged in community-oriented journalism tactics since the 1960s, partly as an effort to foster trust with their communities (Reader, 2012); however, the public still distrusts the majority of journalists (Gallup, *Honesty/Ethics*, 2015, Swift 2016). Student journalists are entering the journalism major and the profession under these conditions. Journalism instructors teach community-oriented journalism tactics, but much of the research on this teaching centers on student learning outcomes of community-oriented journalism in the classroom rather than on a focused investigation into what students know and learn about matter of trust between journalists and their communities. Therefore, an exploratory qualitative case study on this topic was appropriate.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for this case study. This includes the purpose of the study along with the research questions, an overview of epistemology and theoretical perspective, the rationale for the study design, the details of the study design, ethical considerations, and a discussion of trustworthiness.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore options for improving trust between journalists and their communities by means of the preparation that occurs in higher education. My research questions are:

1. What is the relationship between journalists and their audiences regarding trust?
2. What measures can be taken at the college level to improve trust between journalists and their audiences?

A: specifically, through a college course in community journalism?

B: in general, through the curriculum for a journalism degree?

This research explored the scenario of community journalism collegiate education with the intention to discover, describe, and interpret what can be learned about improving trust between journalists and their audiences within that scenario. This case study explored the training grounds of journalism in higher education from three perspectives: students who took a Community Journalism course, the instructor of that course, and journalism professionals who had engaged with the course and practice community journalism in their careers. I have selected a qualitative approach as I wish to pursue “a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants,” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, location 511), in this case, the area of community journalism. This research is based on a postmodern perspective that “there is

no absolute truth,” because truth is “contingent on context and multiple perspectives” (Saldana, 2011, p. 23). This case study is framed in a constructivist paradigm, specifically an interpretivist perspective in which the researcher looks for “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). I intended to expose multiple perspectives within the phenomenon of community journalism within collegiate curriculum, as I put myself in close interaction with participants, and generated themes and drew interpretations inductively from the data (Stage & Manning, 2003, p. 21). The goal of this research was to provide some insight and understanding on the issue of trust between journalists and their audiences. With an interpretivist perspective, I assumed each participant would have various interpretations of their experiences (Stage & Manning, 2003) during their time learning, teaching, or working in the arena of community journalism.

### **Methodology**

I selected a case study methodology for my study, as it focuses on a single unit of analysis, which could be one person, one group, one event, etc., with the case study “in and of itself is valued as a unit that permits in-depth examination,” (Saldana, 2011, p. 8). Exploring community journalism in a college setting, I was interested in “isolating the phenomena in order to trace the unique development in a setting” (Crotty, 1998, p. 68). As case studies are also bound within certain confines of time and space (Creswell, 2009), the boundaries for this study included factors of time, location, certain descriptors, and the types of data collected.

**Research context.** All students who provided data, either through their written work or in interviews, completed the Community Journalism course between the spring

2014 and spring 2017 semesters. The course is part of the curriculum at a journalism college housed at a Carnegie tier-1 research university. The Radio Television Digital News Association ranked this journalism college nationally in 2014 as a top-10 journalism program (Gilbert, 2014), and a ranking system combining ratings and information from College Media Matters, US News & World Report, College Factual, College Magazine and USA Today, also ranked this college as a top-10 journalism program (Robinson, 2015). The college is accredited by the Association of Education for Journalism Educators.

The Community Journalism class is part of the journalism-track bachelor's degree within the college at the university research site. It is not a required course, but it is part of the college's journalism-track conceptual core. Journalism students are required to take two out of a package of four courses as part of this core: Business of Media, Media Ethics, Community Journalism, or Race, Gender and Media. In addition, they are all required to take History of Journalism as part of the core. As of fall semester 2017, the journalism college's enrollment was 1,198 majors, with 316 of those specifically on the journalism track. Students in this journalism college can also choose tracks in other media areas such as advertising and public relations. Students outside the journalism track and those in other majors across campus can take the Community Journalism course with special permission of the instructor, but no students outside the major participated in this study. The average semester enrollment for the class since 2014 has been 14 students, and the class has been offered every spring semester since 2009.

In order to declare a journalism major in this college of journalism, after their freshman year, students must have a 2.5 GPA and have passed a Language Skills Test

with a 70 percent or higher. Before taking the Community Journalism class, students must pass two prerequisite courses: Introduction to Media and Introduction to Media Writing and Storytelling. A description of the Community Journalism class from the official course offerings states: *The meaning of community is evolving with the importance of new media in the cultural mix. While geographical communities continue to define media consumers, so do online communities, ethnic and racial communities, gender communities and other ways of grouping together to find and exchange relevant information through the media. Explores a variety of forms of community journalism from its roots in the small-town newspapers that have provided a verbal/visual town square for centuries to current redefinitions of the concept of community and the media manifestations of those redefinitions.* The instructor's additional description and goals for the class are listed in full in appendix A.

**Data Collection.** The multiple sources of data and the choice to include student, professor, and professional participants were necessary in this research in order to provide “a spectrum of diverse perspectives for analysis and representation” and to add depth and dimension to the findings (Saldana, 2011, p. 76.) Additionally, combining data-gathering methods can compensate for limitations any one method may encompass and can enhance a study's credibility and trustworthiness (Saldana, 2011). Rationale for each of the data gathering technique follows.

Students' reflective writing provides a path to self-actualization (Rohman & Wlecke, 1964; Leggette & Jarvis, 2015). The writing process helps students refine their thoughts and assumptions, improve analytical skills and reflect on their feelings, (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Leggette & Jarvis, 2015). Additionally, studying students'

reflections can also reveal what is not learned in a course, (Sharon 2012) which can be equally as important as what is learned. Because this phenomenon belongs to the participants, particularly the student participants, it was important to include at least one unobtrusive style of data collection, one in which the researcher has no influence on the data collected.

The students' reflective statements come from a 12-15-page research paper, an assignment in the Community Journalism class, requiring an in-depth interview with a community journalism practitioner from academic year 2013-14 and 2014-15. This assignment in its entirety is attached in appendix B. However, the data specifically comes from a 1-2 page-reflection statement the instructor asked the students to write after they completed the assignment. The reflection writing did not require formal academic structure; the instructor simply asked the students to put their honest thoughts about community journalism on paper. Course enrollment for spring 2014 and spring 2015 totaled 25 students; the course instructor provided me with the written reflections from all students enrolled in these two iterations of the course. In this context, use of the students' reflection papers was an unobtrusive measure, and unobtrusive measures can increase confidence in a researcher's data (Stage & Manning, 2003).

This study involved two steps of data collection. First, I collected students' reflective writing described above. According to IRB, collection of preexisting data, especially with a request that the papers come to me with all identifying information removed, was exempt for the IRB process. After the conversation with both OSU and OU IRBs, I asked the instructor for copies of the students' work. He had their writing stored electronically, so he removed all identifying information and printed copies for me.

Second, I used one-on-one interviews with journalism students, a journalism instructor, and current journalists to gather their feelings, opinions, values, attitudes, beliefs, and facts (Saldana, 2011) about community journalism in general and specifically related to trust between journalists and audiences. The interview protocols are included as appendix C. The students involved in individual interviews (and one pair who interviewed together) took the Community Journalism course in either spring 2016 or spring 2017. The pair who interviewed together and one additional individual interview took place in a small conference room in the building where students take their journalism classes. Because it was summer and many students who had recently finished this class were involved in internships across the country, the other six students' data was collected via phone calls using individual interviews. The professor was interviewed in his office at the research site, and the three journalism professionals were interviewed by phone. All interviews were recorded on my password protected iPad, using the Voice Record Pro application.

I developed three lists of interview questions appropriate for students, professionals, and the course instructor, while keeping the overall research questions in mind. Each interview question set is attached in the appendices. All interviews were designed in a semi-structured nature, so that the researcher could keep some control of the proceedings, but participants were able to "pursue their own interests" (Hesse-Biber, 2004, p. 277) with the discussion, allowing them to speak on topics they believed to be most important. If participants started speaking about information that covered a future question, I let them continue and then shifted of the order of questions. Depending on the participants' responses, I asked probing questions. I explained my research to each

participant before interviews began. I gave each participant an IRB-approved consent form (appendix D), and each participant signed it to indicate their willingness to participate in the research and be recorded during the interview.

**Sampling.** Patton's (2002) concept of purposive sampling suggests the ideal selection of participants will be "information rich" (p. 46), participants who have the knowledge and experience with the phenomenon the researcher is studying (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Sampling in this study was purposeful, in that prior completion of the community journalism course was required for the student participants to have the knowledge of the phenomenon I researched. Additionally, the instructor of the course and the journalism professional participants also required experience with community journalism as a professional to assist in gathering "information rich" data for the study. For recruitment of student participants for individual interviews, I started by obtaining a list, with assistance from the journalism college's office of student services of students who had taken the community journalism class in the last two academic years. This included 36 students from spring 2016 and spring 2017. I eliminated any student I have taught in class or had a working relationship with. This left 27 students. I sent these 27 students the IRB-approved recruitment message (Appendix E) and of these, 12 replied, and, I was able to schedule interviews with nine of these students. Of these nine students, all were journalism majors and were a mix of second-semester sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

The instructor of the course has 41 years of professional journalism experience between three newspapers with 25 of those years steeped heavily in community journalism work. His most recent professional journalism position was for a major



metropolitan newspaper that boasts one of the top-10 circulations in the United States. He began teaching part-time in 1978 and did so off and on for both community colleges and universities until he took his first and only full-time teaching position in 2009 at the university where this research took place.

Three journalism professionals were chosen as participants based on their known work with publications that practice community journalism in the state of Oklahoma. All three have been guest speakers in the Community Journalism class during the past two years, and all three are in an editorial role at their respective publications. Despite efforts to recruit diverse professional participants, all three professionals in this study were white males, but their ages range, with one professional each in his mid-40s, mid-50s, and mid-60s. Each of their publications hires college interns, and two of these publications frequently hire interns from research site in this study. All three employ recent college graduates on staff. The choice to include professional participants provided a needed perspective on the effectiveness of collegiate journalism training to the profession.

**Researcher as instrument.** Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) explain that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative research. In keeping with this tradition, I was the main instrument for data collection in this study. In a constructivist paradigm, it is understood that the interaction of the researcher and the participants are part of the knowledge construction process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). I interacted with my participants during interviews as I collected data for the study.

*Positionality statement.* As a qualitative researcher, I cannot separate myself from my research process, and my background as a former journalism student, a professional

journalist, and an instructor of journalism cannot help but inform some of the interpretations of the findings in this work. I shared common knowledge, frustrations, and ideas of journalism with all the participants, especially the instructor and professional participants. However, I tried to stay aware of my biases.

I believe trust between journalists and their audiences suffers for multiple reasons including the non-stop news cycle that requires television news to often fill time with conjecture and opinion, the reliance on social media as a news source, political leaders who write off ethical and well-researched journalism as fake news, and financial struggles of journalism outlets leading to staff shortages and overworked employees. Additionally, I have taught community-oriented journalism in courses at my previous institute of employment, and I believe it can have a positive impact on students and the community. To these ends, I kept my positive opinions about community journalism and critiques about trust to myself when participants were talking to me. This attempt to keep one's biases from impacting results is something I have years of practice engaging in, as this is the constant struggle for a professional journalist. Journalists may speak of remaining "objective," but what most actually mean, including me, is to remain as objective as is possible for a human who has inherent life experiences and biases that cannot be escaped. In order to do this, we must examine and admit our biases and be transparent about them to those who will read our work.

As a journalist and a journalism educator, I believe journalism can make positive changes in society, like informing the uninformed and giving a voice to those who do not have the means to speak for themselves; this potential for positive change is the reason I majored in the field. I align philosophically with the social responsibility rationale within

the social responsibility theory of the media, one normative theory of the media. I believe the First Amendment is worded well and that laws interpreting it should not embellish what is not there with matters of responsibility. Rather, journalists have the duty to practice responsible journalism from within their personal ethics and within the profession, which sets guiding philosophies and codes of ethics. Community-oriented journalism places a responsibility on journalists to seek opportunities to connect with their audiences and work together with them to create better publications and better communities; this aligns community-oriented journalism practices with the social responsibility theory of the media, and therefore, this theory was considered in the design and the findings of this study.

### **Data Analysis**

As with the data collection in this study, the data analysis also involved a two-step process. Previous to conducting interviews with participants, I analyzed students' reflective writings from the community journalism class from the spring 2014 and 2015 semesters. Using this data, I followed an approach outlined first by Lamnek (2005) and expanded on in Kuckartz's (2014) description of qualitative text analysis, also referred to as one type of qualitative *content* analysis. Analytic options for qualitative research usually fall into one of three categories, one of those being categorization strategies like coding and thematic analysis (Maxwell, 2005); qualitative content analysis involves creating categories and coding data and is an "interpretive form of analysis in which the codings are completed based on interpretation, classification and analysis" (Kuckartz, 2014, pp. 33-34). Specifically, qualitative *text* analysis places a high level of importance on understanding and interpreting the text being analyzed (Kuckartz, 2014). The steps of

qualitative text analysis include: careful reading and rereading of data, developing case summaries, constructing categories, coding data by assigning it to categories, developing sub-categories, secondary coding to solidify themes within the findings, analysis of findings, and presentation of findings.

For the first data set, I began by reading and then rereading each student's reflection writing thoroughly to familiarize myself with the data; at this stage I was engaged in the process of open coding—the point at which a researcher is starting to “compare, conceptualize, and categorize data” (Kuckartz, 2014, p.23). The initial insights a researcher gathers from this process of open coding are the first steps toward identifying patterns and themes within the data (Warren & Karner, 2010). Next, in subsequent readings I began to highlight the text most relevant to the research topic focusing first on text related to community-oriented journalism in college curriculum and trust between journalists and audiences based on my knowledge of existing empirical data. At this phase I also started to take notice of the frequency of certain words, descriptions, phrases, and ideas; at this point I was engaged in a more focused style of coding. This process led to developing broad thematic categories informed by my previous knowledge and study of the topic, using my research questions as a guide with the goal to understand my participants' statements (Kuckartz, 2014). During this time of subsequent readings, I also wrote memos and produced short case summaries of each students' writing, which further helped with developing categories and, later, subcategories. A case summary helps to “provide an overview of the spectrum of individual cases included in the study,” (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 54). Four broad categories were established, three related directly to the research questions included: 1) Descriptions

of Community Journalism, 2) Relationships between Audience and Journalist, 3) Discussions of Trust, and the fourth category was established based on a literature review of professional practices of community-oriented journalism: 4) Benefits of Community Journalism.

With an established set of initial thematic categories, I then coded pieces of data into the categories using highlighters to color code directly on the paper copies. After this initial round of coding was finished, the next step was look through all the data within each established category and, returning to an inductive process, search for potential sub categories. Combining deductive and inductive approaches to categories and coding is appropriate when researchers encounter “unexpected elements in the data” (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 63) that are not derived from the existing literature and theories surrounding the current research area. For example, this set of data did not produce much direct information in the broad category of “Discussions of Trust.” This was unexpected based on previous research and literature on community journalism. However, in the inductive process of creating sub categories, followed by a second round of coding to move data into the more narrowed subcategories, additional, but more nuanced data concerning issues of trust emerged. After a second round of coding into subcategories, three clear themes emerged from students’ reflective writings including 1) usefulness of community journalism, 2) challenges of community journalism, and 3) potential improvements to community journalism. Within both the second and third themes, small amounts of data showed the students’ reflecting on issues related to trust between journalists and audiences, but it was not enough to fully answer the research questions. Thus, this first round of data collection and analysis would inform an additional round of data collection.

Often in qualitative research the data collection and data analysis are not inherently separate from one another and are often “intimately interconnected processes” (Warren & Karner, 2010, location 3396). Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) describe this process as iterative, “a continuous movement between data and ideas” (location 649). This is the case for the students’ reflective writings influencing the questions I would eventually ask during interviews. For example, in their reflective writings, nearly all students wrote of the need to be correct and thorough in reporting. Correctness and thoroughness are *parts* of credibility and reliability, therefore part of trust. So, I took examples like this from their reflective writings and developed more specific questions for the interviews with participants in the second round of data collection.

The second set of data came from transcribed interviews with nine students who took community journalism in spring 2016 or 2017, the instructor of the course, and three community journalism professionals. After I transcribed all data, I again followed the approach used for the first data set, outlined in Kuckartz’s (2014) description of qualitative text analysis. Qualitative text analysis is an appropriate analytical approach for existing sets of data, like the students’ reflective writing in the first data set, as well as data collected by researchers, like my transcribed interviews (Kuckartz, 2014). During this second round of analysis, I engaged in data reduction, sorting what I perceived to be trivial information from the significant, and identifying patterns among the significant information (Patton, 2002). I started the analytic process with the student participants’ transcribed interviews by writing notes of interest and memos, starting with simple analytical descriptions such “description of credibility” or “listening to audience.” After several read-throughs and the initial notes of interest, categories were beginning to

emerge inductively, but I also decided on certain thematic categories deductively based on previous research, my experiences teaching community-oriented journalism, and from the research questions and some interview questions. The six initial categories included: 1) describing community journalism, 2) problems with the journalism professions, 3) reliability, 4) credibility, 5) general matters of trust, and 6) digital or online journalism.

With an established set of initial thematic categories, I then color-coded pieces of data into the six categories using highlighters on paper copies. Some information fell outside the scope of these categories, and I labeled it as “other.” I read through the “other” data several times to determine if pieces did belong in one of the categories, or if another category needed to be established. I determined another category was not necessary. After the initial round of coding I looked again at all the data within each established category and worked toward potential sub categories. The process of creating sub categories allowed for differentiation of the data within the broader, previously established categories. This was followed by a second round of focused coding data into subcategories, which then allowed narrowed and meaningful themes to emerge from the data. Next, all steps performed with the students’ interview transcripts were repeated with the instructor’s transcript and the journalism professionals’ transcripts.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I completed the Responsible Conduct of Research online training required of graduate students at Oklahoma State University, along with a similar training at the research site, which is also my place of employment, required of all faculty members conducting research. Both certifications are on file as the respective institutions. Before beginning the study, I spoke with both OSU and the research site’s IRB offices, and they

came to the agreement that the official IRB process should go through the research site's office, because the student participants involved were enrolled at the research site institution; however, I should keep OSU IRB informed. I followed this agreement, and I received approval for my study from the research site's IRB. I prepared recruitment messages and an informed consent form that explained the study to participants, outlined how interviews would be conducted, ensured confidentiality, detailed the participants' rights, and gave them access to my contact information as well as my committee chair's information. I collected signed consent forms, which indicated participants agreed to be audio recorded, from all participants before starting an interview, signed the forms myself, and gave each participant a copy either in person or via email. After recording, I sent the audio file to an email account which required two sets of passwords to access the file—one to get in to my email, and an additional password to open the audio file.

I transcribed all audio data myself. I sent all participants the transcripts of their interviews via email and gave them the opportunity to read over the transcripts for accuracy and let me know if any changes or deletions should be made. All three professionals responded and one student. Two of the professionals said the transcripts were fine as is. The third professional said the transcripts represented his words accurately, but asked that I refrain from mentioning anything in the data that would identify his publication, and therefore him. I had already agreed to this, but I responded to assure him I would maintain his anonymity. He was concerned that being from a publication in Oklahoma where a lot of people know each other, mention of certain stories or situations could identify the publication. I have thoroughly checked my work to make sure no identifying data has been included. The student who responded offered to



clarify answers to two questions that were hard to hear due to interference during our phone call. She expanded on her answers, and I added that information to the transcript.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of a qualitative study is often broken up into three areas of concern: credibility, dependability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Concerning credibility, or if I have accurately portrayed the participants' meanings, (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), I have presented the "discrepant findings," (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) or, findings outside the expected perimeters of the research, some which serve as points for discussion or suggestions for future research in chapter five.

Additionally, I used "peer debriefing" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) in which I asked two colleagues knowledgeable in community-oriented journalism and media trust to examine my assumptions and assist me in considering alternate ways to look at the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

To ensure dependability in this study, I created an audit trail by tracking the process and procedures used to collect and interpret data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). To ensure transferability, I focused on thorough and detailed writing of the research design and reporting "rich description." Additionally, the choice to use multiple methods of data collection, using reflective writing and interviews from different sources provided triangulation, which enhances credibility and trustworthiness in a study (Saldana, 2011, p. 76). Triangulation provided a more holistic look at one particular slice of the students' journalism education.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter provided the purpose of the study along with the research questions, an overview of epistemology and theoretical perspective, rationale for and the design of the study including sampling, data collection methods, and data analysis. The chapter concluded with ethical considerations and a discussion of trustworthiness. Following, Chapter 4 includes the findings from the data analysis.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from this case study and provides a discussion of the findings of the research. The findings came from analysis of reflective writings from: 25 students who completed the community journalism course, in-depth interviews with nine students who completed the course, an in-depth interview with the instructor of the course, and in-depth interviews with three journalism professionals who practice community journalism and interacted with students in this course. The participants spoke often about journalists getting out into the community they work for to talk with people in multiple capacities, but also about journalists being *part of* and really *living* in that community. They also described how talking with people in the community and taking part in community life can make journalists think about, ask about, or, start to understand a *community's needs*. Additionally, this group talked at length about various tactics and skills required to do journalism *right*, and they also described a host of reasons that doing journalism *right* is often quite *hard*.

In the following sections, I discuss the participants' responses based on dominant themes and different dimensions of those themes that emerged from interviews with the students about their experiences in the community journalism course, and from reflective writing after completing the community journalism coursework. The dominant themes are: being part of the community, community needs, getting journalism right, and why journalism is hard. The first three themes build toward and relate to the fourth and final

theme. Following the presentation of themes, I then analyze the relationship between these themes.

### **Being “part of the community”**

Participants’ frequently spoke of going out into the community and just talking to the people. This included journalists being *part of the community* they work in, getting to *know people*, and *listening*. One student, responding to what she learned in the community journalism course, said, “We talked about relating to the people that you are reporting on. And how maybe that can be a little easier to do if you are *part of the community* you report on.” This notion of journalists being part of the communities they work in surfaced in student participants’ responses to a variety of questions and often involved an element of talking with an individual, a group of people, or a source for a story. For example, another student who chose to write about a radio station as her news outlet for the course described watching the on-air talent interact with listeners when they set up live remote events. “People will flock to those areas just to go to that establishment to meet the staff. To get free concert tickets and free [merchandise] for sure, but also just to have face time [with the radio talent]. She continued to describe how the radio staff seemed “genuinely upset” if they ran out of tickets or merchandise, leaving listeners empty handed. “They [radio staff] would say, ‘I’m so sorry! Here’s the next place that we will be. What’s your phone number so I can get more information to you?’ It was very personable. It’s not ‘sorry you missed it.’ It’s ‘Dude, we will get you some tickets [at the next event], don’t lose hope.’” The radio professionals the student described seem to care about the people in the community who came out to see them. The live remote events are a community activity, and the radio journalists are out in the

community and interacting with their audience members in a way the student participant was compelled to explain.

Being “part of a community” also surfaced from the student participants’ interactions and conversations with the professional editors and journalists they spoke to or worked with while gathering information to write their papers for the course. One student said, “It was really cool to see that upward momentum,” referring to a small town’s newspaper staying in business when many other small newspapers around the country have folded. This student credited the “upward momentum,” to the editor of the paper: “So she [editor] has been at that paper for 40 or 50 years. She’s been with it, and living in that community for such a long time. She used to be a part-time proofreader, and now she is the editor of the paper.” Several students also spoke of being “part of the community” in response to questions pertaining to gaining or building trust. One student said the audience just has “to know you.” She elaborated on this answer: “They [audience] just need to get to know you and to be around you again and again.” The conversations about being part of the community often focused on journalists making physical appearances often at events they were covering, but at times included the journalists just living their lives out in the community.

A few student participants mentioned being part of the community as related to publications or journalists in small towns. “If your community is so small that you’re going to interact with the reporter at the grocery store, I think that adds a level of trust. It’s like, ‘yeah, I [a news consumer] trust you as a reporter, because I . . . know you as a person and trust you as a person.’” The student went on to describe how this might be an advantage of working as a journalist in a small community. In what way? Another

student shared a similar sentiment about journalists in small towns possibly connecting easier with people than journalists in larger cities:

“But I think that a lot of what we learned in class that I'm able to apply to other places is just how trust is sort of this most basic level that's kind of your foundation for everything else. To get to the really high levels [in a journalism career] that you want to go to, you have to start with trust. And you have to get people to understand that you are human. That's a really important part of community journalism. And I think at those smaller papers, it's easy [for the audience] to see that you're human. Because it's only eight people making this whole thing [a publication] happen . . . and you see them out and about. And they've talked to you probably.

However, she also noted that getting to know a journalist in a bigger city is possible:

“[People can just see you [the journalist] as a person . . . if you can find something [*sic*] to connect with them [audience] and give them a reason to trust you.” Although community journalism *originated* as a small-town newspaper practice, it is practiced outside of that setting. The instructor of the course makes a point throughout his curriculum to indicate how community journalism can also be practiced at larger publications and in various mediums beyond print. This student and several others spoke of being part of a community in both small and large outlets/towns.

Being part of the community also involves *getting to know people*, and participants spoke of this activity as well, both the angle of journalists getting to know people in the community, but also community members getting to know the journalist. Three students talked in depth about who the audience was for particular publications and

attributes of the audience. One student spoke about both the audience for the outlet she wrote her paper about for class and the audience for the university student newspaper she had worked for. She asked herself the question in regard to the nonprofit, online outlet she studied for the class, “How do you write for an audience that is the whole state?” – summarize her answer here. She also shared thoughts about who the audience is for the student news outlet:

“... you’re covering a pretty small, focused audience. We know we are writing for students, and we get them intimately, because we are also students. We know the alumni readers will like nostalgic things. We know our readers like football. There are certain things we know because we are so steeped in the [university] community, we just know the things that are going to piss them off or get them excited.”

This student’s response indicates not only that a campus newspaper can practice community journalism and think of their audience as a tight, focused community, but that she is doing community journalism outside of the traditional starting place of community journalism in the small-town print newspaper. In recent years, this particular campus newspaper has transitioned to a more digital focus and reduced printing from six times per week to three.

Additional students’ responses about getting to know people involved the use of social media in their journalism work. As one student said that the social media followers who trust a journalist “aren’t just following you [for a short time] and then unfollowing you. People are coming and staying because they respect what you do.” Another student spoke of her own following on social media as she became more active on Twitter as a

sports reporter. She said she believed readers started to trust her “when I started gaining followers on social media . . . and they were asking me questions. . . and quote tweeting me, basically using what I tweeted out as a fact.” Concerning the social media use of the audience members, another student commented, “We live in the day of social media, so [you know people trust you] when they [followers or audience members] share your work or continuously subscribe.” An additional student shared these sentiments, saying, “When people trust your work they like to share it with other people [on social media]. When you trust something, you want to tell other people. Because either it’s important to you or it impacts your life.” This last student’s assertion that people share information they trust aligns with findings from a recent Pew Research Center study of Facebook users following the 2016 election; however, the accuracy of the information they trust is often up for debate (Anderson & Rainie, 2016). Information that people trust does not necessarily mean the information is true, but can often mean it aligns with their already-held beliefs (Anderson & Rainie, 2016). This issue is discussed more as an implication of the study in the final chapter.

Additionally, the participants talked about the work of getting to know people as something that involves asking people questions. Clearly a journalist’s job involves asking questions during interviews and in the information gathering process, but the participants’ responses in this section deal more with asking people for clarification or asking people for feedback in the journalistic process. For example, a student described a scenario with the small-town newspaper he both wrote about for the class and also interned at for one summer. He explained that one of the two main writers for the newspaper provides commentary and announcements during the local school’s football



games. “He pronounces the names correctly. He makes a point *to seek people out and ask* so he can pronounce names correctly. I think it speaks to his credibility.” This particular example also shows how getting to know people relates frequently to journalists being part of the community.

*Listening* is also a factor in being part of a community, as it is the other half of communication; both talking and listening are necessary in successful communication. Journalists are used to talking with people, but good journalists listen as well as they talk. Carl Bernstein of the famous Woodward-Bernstein reporting duo said, “great reporters are great listeners,” and learning to listen often comes up in journalism lessons on interviewing skills. Two students discussed listening. One student mentioned listening when describing the general concept of community journalism toward the beginning of the interview. “Community journalism . . . means being a good listener to whatever community you are serving.” S/he seems to be repeating something akin to what the instructor described telling his classes. Along with accuracy and honesty, he explained, listening to people is key to gaining audience trust: “When you are meeting with people, listen to what they are saying and don’t just blow them off.” In this sentiment, the participant aligns with the instructor and at least one of the media professionals who expressed general concerns about what s/he saw as “a major [cultural] problem.” Americans in general do not have well-developed listening skills. Indeed, the instructor worried, “students don’t understand how close they have to listen. This will be a bigger problem the further they get into their careers. How do you tell the students to put their damn phones down and just listen?” He might be heartened to know that the other student who spoke to this topic focused on *not* listening as a potential problem near

the end of the interview after being asked how journalism in general could improve: “A lot of times we think we are good listeners, but we really just hear what we want to hear.”

The instructor and professional participants discussed additional topics within the theme of being “part of the community,” that indicate whether, from their professional perspective, the students are doing well or need more work in certain ways. For example, the second professional, whose community newspaper consistently hires young journalists out of college who stay for a year or two and go on to larger publications, described a recent young employee as “open-minded and resilient,” when the employee was out in the community. Say more about how he valued these characteristics. He also talked about a recent intern who was able to get a story from a tight knit, often close-mouthed group within the community. “Because of his openness and wiliness to go hang out and get to know these people, he was welcomed into that group after a while.” Although the professionals and instructor each discussed how this generation of young journalists have a tendency to rely too much on the Internet and digitally-mediated communication over face-to-face communication, two of the professionals also complimented this age group with being “resilient” in the quest for good sources.

Within the first dominant theme of journalists being *part of the community*, participants spoke about getting out into the community and talking to people and discussed a variety of elements that facilitate talking to people in the community. Participants’ responses indicate that being out in the community helps journalists relate to their audience, and being part of a community entails getting to know people, but also letting the people know you. Additional responses indicate that asking questions to clarify meaning or information is important, as well as critically listening to people in the

community. A variety of elements and actions foster journalists being part of their communities, and being part of a community can allow journalists to think of a community's needs. Participants spoke often about *community needs* as detailed in the next dominant theme.

### **Community Needs**

A section of data in the first theme of being *part of a community* involved the physical presence of journalists being in public spaces within their communities, talking and otherwise engaging with people. Several students mentioned that the journalists at the outlets they wrote about for the course were consistently present for community events, and that being seen often at events could yield positive reactions from community members. One student participant's description of the photographer for the newspaper she studied showed this connection between being or becoming part of the community and developing a strong understanding of community needs: "I definitely think the parents [in the community] like the paper, because there is a really good photographer there who is very interested in all the sports in the area. He is basically at any game there is, any sport. They [the paper] do a lot of galleries and pages dedicated to pictures of kids in the paper. And that's really what people in small communities pick up the paper for—to see pictures of the kids." This response indicates that this photographer is recognized as a member of the community he works for, but also that through his work, he likely understands the community members who read his publication enjoy seeing their children represented in the newspaper. This example provides a connection between being part of a community and thinking about or understanding the needs of that community. Beyond simply maintaining a physical presence at community events, participants spoke of *being*

*useful* or helpful to a community and bringing *their stories*, the audience's stories, to the community.

**Being useful.** A well-known adage of the journalism profession, “news you can use,” refers to reporting on information that people can employ to help them live their daily lives. Student participants spoke about this concept of providing useful information. Answering a question regarding gaining trust from readers, one student said, “The thing that comes to mind is being necessary. Part of that is *being useful* . . .” He explained that while interning at a small-town newspaper, he was encouraged to “find the things people were actually at,” and report on those events. This student said this outlet did not do much of what he perceived to be “hard-hitting journalism.” Instead, “printing school lunches” was useful to this particular community. Additionally, this same student equated trust with usefulness: “I think they [audience] trust them [newspaper] because they are useful.” Comparing national coverage to coverage of a specific community, another student noted that the community a person lives in affects them on a daily basis, and that “community journalism is one of the big ways that people know what’s happening around them.” A second student made a national/local comparison regarding community needs. “It’s not always about the national stories. It’s about doing what matters to the people you are writing for,” he said. However, a third student who said that in her opinion community newspapers usually have good values, also noted that community journalism tactics can be applied at any type and size of publication. “At the end of the day regardless of what the media says—any political nonsense—it [journalism] is really about what a community needs. It’s about how a community needs to be informed. [You have to ask yourself] is this story something that is relevant in this particular community,

or are we just doing this for the shock value, or so we can get the most clicks?” Most students in this study were speaking about experiences with either the campus student newspaper or their internship, but two of the nine student participants had graduated before the interview. One was preparing for law school and not currently working in journalism, but the other was starting his own podcast and in the process of gathering advertisers for that podcast.

This student, who graduated in May 2017, had been working on his own podcast during the summer following graduation and described a lesson from the course he has been able to apply to his work. “When I work on that [podcast] I think about . . . how many people will it affect and what will the effect be on them. [Things like] a podcast can be much more focused on presenting the most relevant information to the people who need it most.” Another student suggested that being useful is one reason many newspapers survived as others folded. “It [the course] really taught me that in a world where we have so much technology the way those [print] newspapers survive is by being inherently useful.” One student noted that her internship in community journalism helped her see the “need for the reporting,” in a small community. “People in the community were happy to know what was going on, and it gave them a sense of community with one another.” Several students talked briefly about usefulness, but one expanded on the idea. In a particularly detailed description of an outlet meeting a community’s needs, this student detailed how a local radio station “gained a lot of trust” from its community following a major tornado that resulted in a lot of destruction. This student explained that the radio outlet built up trust due to “consistent and helpful” coverage during and

following the destructive tornadoes. She stated the station continued to broadcast helpful information the community needed in the hours, days and weeks after the event.

“I even heard people from the community say [the radio station] was the only station that didn’t stop telling people what do to and where to go if they needed help, or shelter, or food. The DJs kept announcing things like ‘if you need provisions, come here or go there or do this, do that. Whereas [a competing station] and other radio stations just maintained regular coverage.”

She concluded that because of this coverage the younger radio station “is more popular than their competitors who have been established for more than 30 years.” This student participant’s example indicates that being useful and meeting the needs of a community can lead to increased trust from an audience. Another student mentioned consistency from the audience while talking about how to know if her journalism work was useful: “When they come back again and again. When they come back and just consume [your work].” The participants data concerning the elements of being useful included giving people what they want to know, as well as what they need to know. In addition to reporting useful information, participants also made note that audience members are a source of news themselves as detailed in the next section.

**Bringing *their* stories.** Participants also discussed meeting a community’s needs by giving audience members the opportunity to bring *their* stories to the journalist or outlet or in other ways representing the voices of audience members. These discussions described community members coming to the journalist before the journalist come to them or of the journalist being approachable. For example, a student said she could tell audience members trusted her “when they continue to bring you feedback, but they also

continue to bring you information.” This student then gave examples of people calling up the publication during her internship and saying, “hey, can you look into this?” Another student said having a two-way relationship between reader/viewer and journalist is important. “If they are willing to bring you their story and that information, that is a lot of trust.” A third student discussed how he felt after writing some audience-initiated stories at a newspaper during his internship. “I feel as if there is an overall humanity in small towns. You [meaning himself] are able to click with the group [audience]. You are able to click with some stories [they tell you] that are incredibly powerful.”

Community needs can be difficult to gauge and meet due to the variety of people in a community. One student participant indicated this concern when discussing print and digital versions of a newspaper as “a constantly-changing medium . . . “[With] community journalism you have to not only gauge what your readers want, but make sure your readers are your top priority . . . and still be able to adapt [update technology]. Which is really difficult. Because not everyone is going to want to read their paper online. And then some would love to go online.” The people in a community will obviously have different needs and wants concerning the news outlets they consume, but by being part of the community as mentioned in the first theme, a journalist is more likely to understand those needs and wants, as discussed in the second theme. Additionally, when journalists pursue journalism in the “right” way, as participants’ responses cover in the next theme, this helps in the pursuit of meeting those community needs.

### **Doing Journalism “Right”**

Both the student participants and the instructor and professional participants talked frequently of various strategies, rules, and actions needed to do journalism the

*right* way. Doing journalism right included discussions of accuracy, transparency, and personal attributions of journalists. Additionally, the element of the *time* it takes to do journalism *right* was threaded throughout the participants' conversations.

**Accuracy.** Student participants mentioned accuracy frequently in response to questions on a variety of topics including credibility, reliability, improving trust, and improving journalism's reputation in general. A student who works for the campus student newspaper focused on accuracy in relation to objectivity. "I don't think you should ever cover something that you are not able to be objective with. So, I think objectivity has a lot to do with being credible. But also providing well-sourced, accurate stories on a constant basis. Because if you have one fact error, if you misspell one person's name, suddenly people don't trust you anymore." An additional student also discussed how a simple mistake can follow a journalist and hinder trust with the audience. I asked if he thought the news outlet he wrote about for class was trusted by its community. He said yes, but also mentioned how his grandmother, a member of this particular community, talked often about old misprints in the paper. "When I was talking to her [his grandmother] she was just like, 'well, they misprinted the time of someone's funeral.'" He went on to emphasize, "and that [the misprint] was *years* ago." A common lesson in journalism education is referred to as the ABC's of journalism referring to accuracy, brevity and clarity. The lesson purports that a good news story should be accurate, brief, and clear. Each of these elements can be broken down further; for example, in this common lesson, accuracy can include being factual and being precise/correct in language use, (as many of the previous responses indicate), but accuracy also encompasses *completeness* of a story. Two students equated being accurate



to being factual: “I think the most important thing is to make sure you are factual. You put in the time and you dig through different things and make sure everything is factual—written in a very correct way,” one student said. The second student noted, “I think that [reliability] is what separates the journalist from the regular person [since anyone can make a news-like post online] . . . [but the] most important thing is make sure you are factual.”

Writing a *complete* story usually means to cover that story from as many perspectives as are relevant to the context of the story and to not leave out relevant information. Several participants spoke to elements of completeness. “You are looking for facts in multiple places. Usually avoiding social media [as a source]. I think it’s also kind of the gauge of who you trust . . . who you think is going to be most reliable.” This response also includes an element of *transparency*: vetting sources. Sometimes when talking about sources journalists may mean a physical source, such as a website, journal article, or even a social media page; other times they mean a human source; vetting is required of both physical and human sources. This student’s words suggest she is thinking of both types of sources as part of her own reliability as a journalist—she is responsible for the sources she uses in her work. The element of transparency in the data is detailed more thoroughly in next sub section.

Another student said she believed the audience trusted the publication she wrote about in her paper for the community journalism class because the journalists there are always asking, “is this story as complete as it can be? It’s like they [the journalists] have asked every single question . . . exhausted every corner you can think of.” Most student responses concerning accuracy arose after questions about reliability, credibility, or

asking the best way to gain audience trust. However, one student's reply came after I asked if he could apply lessons from the course to a journalism job in the future. He replied, "Yeah I think you can. You can take lessons about trust and about getting people to see you are human [engaging with audience]. And having them trust you, because you do good work—work that is accurate." Students also mentioned being *right*, or accurate, as more important than being *first* to report on a story. One student noted, "A lot of the competition in journalism is to be first . . . You can't be first all the time. Accuracy isn't about winning a race. Accuracy is about making sure every detail in your story is 100% correct." The two students who interviewed together shared an exchange relating the struggle between being first to report or being *right* in the report.

**Researcher:** What were some of the conversations [in the class] about credibility?

**Student 1:** I would rather be second or third and be right than be first and look like an idiot. Because then it doesn't matter if you were first—you were wrong.

**Student 2:** That really sucks though. Because now journalists are rated more on their speed than their accuracy. On CNN, you might be the top-rated journalist based on your Twitter followers.

I was not clear on the connection between speed/accuracy and number of Twitter followers, so I probed, asking about the consequences for being wrong in the Twitterverse:

**Researcher:** But then you are bashed if you are wrong?

**Student 2:** Yeah, but it seems on the Internet it [criticism for mistakes] is short-lived. Whereas when it is physical, like printed in a newspaper or magazine, it is easily referenced.

**Student 1:** Yeah, you [journalist] could just tweet something out and then just apologize, ‘I was wrong.’

**Student 2:** And then they [audience] would say, ‘oh, he is sorry.’

This exchange seemed to suggest these two students may have believed it is easier to admit and correct mistakes in an online medium, but also that consumers might not expect as much accuracy in the online medium or are more forgiving of mistakes if published online. A Columbia Journalism Review report a few years ago indicated that “fast and wrong” online journalism was doing better than “accurate and right” online journalism (Nyham, 2013). Although accuracy has always been a cornerstone of professional journalism (*SPJ Code of Ethics*), being accurate *and* fast seems to increasingly be the expectation, and those two tasks are difficult to accomplish together.

**Transparency.** Along with accuracy, *transparency*, or being open in journalistic pursuits, is another cornerstone of professional journalism. Participants frequently mentioned transparency or elements of transparency, such as vetting sources, citing sources clearly in stories, or openly admitting and correcting mistakes in their discussions of doing journalism right. For example, I asked one student participant to tell me the most important factor in “getting the audience to trust you.” She stated simply, “transparency.” Elaborating on the meaning of transparency she continued, “There are obviously hundreds of other ways to build trust, and those are all important, but to be transparent, in my opinion, is the most important. Letting your audience know who you talked to, how

you got your information, or even just adding a link into a story where you state a statistic can help build trust.” In describing what it takes to be a reliable journalist, another student said, “It means, do I have good information from vetted sources, and [am I] giving that information to the people who need it the most?” One student mentioned transparency as the first element after I asked what it takes to be credible, saying, “I think number one is transparency. Being transparent on how you are conducting research for your stories. The collection of facts . . . being transparent on how you do that process is a major way to build credibility.” Another student said that it is a journalist’s “responsibility [to be] thoroughly transparent and to consider the implication of how what they report will impact those who are being reported on. It’s our duty to not inflict harm where it is not needed and to clearly explain how/when/why we got the information we did.” Transparency in journalism is not only about the open style of gathering facts and information, but can also include any concerns after reporting takes place.

Admitting mistakes is also part of transparency in journalism. Five of nine student participants mentioned admitting mistakes as part of being either reliable, credible, or as a specific measure to improve trust with an audience. One student said, “I think it [credibility] also means that you will probably make a mistake, and you take responsibility for that.” Another noted that “transparency is especially important when a reporter will, eventually, make a mistake.” An additional student shared an example of a story she saw online stating that Donald Trump had ignored a child with disabilities, because a video clip showed Trump not talking to the child. However, several other outlets, which the student believed to be credible, confirmed that Trump spoke with the child at length before the cameras were rolling. She continued to check on the story that

indicated the president ignored the child, but it was never corrected. She noted both that she was not a fan of the president, and that the story should have been corrected. “I think we [journalists] need to adjust what our standards are. It’s about telling the entire truth, regardless of what that looks like.” This student’s and other participants’ statements about transparency indicate an element of responsibility on the journalist; transparency is not something the audience seeks out from the journalist, rather journalists have a responsibility to be transparent in their work. This self-imposed responsibility is also one of many attributes the participants use to describe what a good journalist should do or be.

**Attributes of the journalist.** Some participants’ commentary about doing journalism right focused on attributes of the journalists themselves. For example, one student mentioned that community journalists have a responsibility to “be authentic,” both in their reporting and in general in their personalities and daily actions. Also, the student participants did not shy away from the idea that being in the journalism profession comes with much responsibility, as this student’s response indicates: “When you have the ability to shape the conversation you shouldn’t abuse it.” Two other students mentioned that lessons in personal responsibility had started early in their curriculum; one of these two noted that by the time he enrolled in the community journalism class, “it was already drilled in my head that being a journalist means being responsible.” Concerning an additional personal attribute, two students spoke of the quality of being humble. One student noted that to improve their reputations with the public, “I think that they [journalists] can be humble. . . just continuously pushing ourselves to be humble, to be good listeners.” A second student said, “if journalists just continue to be humble and remain middlemen without a hidden agenda” that this could

go a “long way” in helping to “improve their reputations.” Another student noted that although many college students have an “ego,” internships and first jobs would help “get the ego under control,” as they did for him. The instructor also spoke of being humble. He noted, after talking with editors of a major U.S. newspaper, that those editors said, “Please teach the students humility.” The instructor continued, “if you can’t be humble about who you are, you are not going to get good stories.” The instructor emphasized this matter of humility when he spoke of visiting the prominent newsrooms around the country. Mastering the art of humility is apparently quite important to the leadership within these outlets; however, the age group of most college interns and new graduates is not a group known for humility, although one survey of 4,000 participants indicates Generation X, the oldest of which are around 19 (according to this study) may be slightly more humble than their Millennial predecessors, the youngest of which are around 20 (Kane, 2017).

**It Takes Time.** The idea that doing journalism right can take a great deal of time is threaded throughout the participants’ responses of both accuracy and transparency. All participant groups expressed that one or more elements of doing journalism *right* is a time-consuming process: For example, one student said journalists should go about “earning respect instead of expecting it.” Another student spoke of doing “your due diligence” when researching and vetting sources.

For example, one student’s response indicates that being reliable requires a lot of steps as well as to admit mistakes: “One of the most important aspects of the job [reporting] is to be reliable. Make sure you back up, that you double check. That you take the extra step. You put in the time and you dig through the different things and make sure

everything is factual. I think it also means . . . you probably will make a mistake and you take responsibility for that.” This student’s emphasis on double checking, taking time, digging through information, as well as taking responsibility for errors as part of transparency, indicated that to be reliable requires repetition and consistency of particular work, or in other words, to be reliable requires time.

Concerning the professionals’ and instructor’s responses as related to the theme of getting journalism right, all four spoke about the issues of accuracy, transparency, journalists’ attributes, and the time it takes to do journalism well. For example, the second professional’s laundry list of requirements for being a reliable journalist are representative of most elements of this theme. “[You have to] be transparent, document, attribute, cite, admit your mistakes and follow up. Also, allow people a voice, even beyond the news coverage. If they want to give their two cents, want to comment, give them the opportunity [beyond social media comments] in a civil forum, like your opinion pages online and in print.” This professional’s dialogue is representative of the way all the professionals and the instructor spoke about doing journalism right. Of all the themes, the student participants’ and professionals/instructor participants’ discussions aligned mostly closely within this theme. The students have learned or are learning many lessons of doing journalism right, and they can speak about these openly and critically.

Also related to the element of time, the instructor elaborated on the idea that improving journalism’s reputation would not be a short-term process and would also require time.

“We dug a hole that will take a long time to fill. It’s going to have to start at the community level. The community papers are still the most trusted, if you look at

your research on trust. Journalism, as a whole, needs to look to the community papers. And community journalists need to relate to their audiences that if you trust us, hey look, maybe you can trust some of these bigger organizations who are working ethically like we are.”

According to all participant groups in this study, doing journalism right is a multifaceted process. It is not only this third theme that indicates this thorough and challenging process. Both themes of being part of the community and trying to meet a community’s needs are additional factors of the third theme, doing journalism right. Furthermore, all three themes to this point bring the findings to the fourth and final theme: why journalism is hard.

### **Why Journalism is Hard**

All elements of being *part of a community*, working to meet the *community’s needs*, and doing journalism *right* coalesce into the narrative of the fourth theme: why *journalism is hard*. However, within this theme participants provided some discussion that is separate from the first three themes including: the business (mainly financial) of journalism, politics, the digital focus of modern journalism, and attitudes of both journalists and the audience.

**The business of journalism.** Many participants discussed that finances and other business issues can create difficulties in the journalism profession. “Journalism takes money,” one student said, and continued, “It’s really hard because . . . we need journalism in these small communities, but . . . it takes so much money to print copies and to pay people with benefits and to dive deep into research [for] the stories that need to be told. It really just takes so, so much money.” Another student noted, “A lot of what



we talked about [in class] centered around the business model that is used by a lot of smaller newspapers and how they have to work around the funding issues that may arise. . . They have limited resources, limited number of reporters.” Another student said, “What I found most difficult was sitting through lecture after lecture, guest speaker after guest speaker, telling me that newspapers and journalists will fail and only speaking about money.” One more student said in his class experience, “We focused almost exclusively on the business aspect of the papers and talked mostly about numbers and how the papers [print newspapers] were failing.” A student who wrote her paper on a nonprofit news outlet mentioned that although this outlet receives funding each year, “one of their biggest concerns, like kind of a constant thing, was just funding.” Partly, she noted this concern was that the funding is never a guarantee from year to year, but also that because of being funded by a particular organization some stories they write about “could be kind of a conflict of interest.” She also explained she was glad to understand how a nonprofit outlet works as well as “some of the criticisms about why a nonprofit might not be best for journalism.” Another student who also wrote about a nonprofit outlet said “there’s probably always a fear that the money could run out. It’s like, if that does run out, what’s your business model? If you have based everything of [donations] . . . I think they [could just be] in a precarious spot.” This same student also noted that the nonprofit outlets might not be in a place “as precarious as a traditional newspaper, where like, ‘Oh, man, we can’t sell digital ads for that much?’ What are you going to do?” One student worried that the business models they discussed in class might not be relevant for long: “I just kept thinking, I don’t know if this is going to hold up by the time I graduate. There were pieces I think you could adapt, and some that you couldn’t.” The participants’

statements here indicate a variety of financial woes they are concerned about and will need to remain concerned about once they enter the profession.

Professionals in the various mediums and platforms of journalism often disagree about the importance and difficulties within the different media jobs and about which tactics and platforms will succeed or die out. One student noted how the guest speakers perpetuated this debate: “It was also kind of hard when a print journalism guy comes in and he’s like ‘broadcasting is going to die,’ and I’m spending a lot of money on something I’m hoping isn’t going away.” Another student shared a similar sentiment about the guest speakers, “We had people coming from newspapers who would say that broadcasters [doing business a certain way] was wrong. We would have people from broadcasting some in and say that newspapers are doing wrong.” The journalism profession, like many professions, often has to think of “what comes next.” Sometimes they are right, like predicting that Twitter would change the way news was shared other times they are wrong, like the prediction that television would make radio obsolete in the 1950s, or that satellite radio would overtake locally broadcast radio.

**Politics.** Matters of politics also arose when participants described how various elements of journalism are hard or difficult. It is worth noting that I did not ask any questions relating to politics or make mention of the 2016 election during the interviews with participants. However, all three professionals and the instructor, as well as four of the nine students spoke about politics—all political comments arose from the participants themselves. One student, frustrated with what she considered Donald Trump’s low opinion of the media, had specific words for the president: “The news isn’t always what you want to hear. That’s not how the world works. Not everything is sunshine and

rainbows all the time.” This student’s frustrations with the president stemmed from a question about how to improve journalism’s reputation, indicating she believes the current president is interfering with that reputation. A second student noted very early in the interview that, “Trump has brought new light to media. He’s made media popular again,” after stating that the 2016 election was not an “ordinary” election. Later in the interview, she returned to the topic of the president. “Everything I learned in that class made me more excited about it [working in journalism] . . . and again, with Donald Trump, he’s really made journalism popular again.” While the student’s optimism was clear, it is also an indicator that the president has polarized this issue of the trustworthiness of the press, and although this can be exciting to those who take it as a challenge, it can also make the journalistic process difficult.

Additional commentary from participants about politics focused on divisiveness between the major political parties within the country. One student mentioned that political parties can lead journalists away from the objective middle ground and she believes that “journalism tends to have more liberal representation.” Another student explained that her age peers in the community might be put off by the “conservative Republican” publisher’s weekly column in his town’s newspaper. She said of her age group: “They don’t think the same [as older news consumers]. Whenever you read his column or some of the AP stories he chooses to pull . . . some people might not trust him [the publisher] because of that. Because of that political bias.” Another student noted that she was not sure that journalists can improve their standing in the public within the current political climate:

“If you are a conservative from Oklahoma, you are not going to trust anything that the New York Times says, just because they are the New York Times. So, I’m not sure journalists can really do anything. Just keep writing about important things . . . and just being honest and accurate as possible. And even then, people are still going to have their biases. And probably still not trust us.”

This student was describing the idea that many people do not trust an outlet that they *perceive* is aligned in opposition to their political affiliation. Student participants’ comments suggested that they were aware at least at some level of something Pew Research Center researchers have documented: The national partisan divide on political values spans wider in 2017 than at any point in the last two decades (Pew Center Research, 2017). Additionally, journalists as a group tend to identify as more liberal than the general public (Pew Research Center, 2006), and because the majority of participants were discussing news outlets in one of the most conservative states in the nation, political differences between journalists and their communities were likely to arise.

**Needing more “digital focus.”** Although the majority of large, well-known newspapers have made the transition to fully embracing the digital era, smaller publications can get left behind in this trend, either for lack of money, lack of digital skills among employees, or lack of desire for digital from their audience. Student participants spoke about problems news outlets can face when those outlets do not embrace the digital era. Several student participants said they would have liked to hear from guest speakers doing community journalism in digital media. One student stated this specifically:

I think we could have benefitted from more digitally-focused speakers. We heard a lot of people who just ran like a weekly paper in a tiny town. Like they didn't have a website or know what Facebook is. That's not really preparing us very well for what probably my job is going to look like when I graduate.

Another student noted that several of the guest speakers "either didn't have a [news website] or it wasn't [regularly] updated." Two students did note that one guest speaker from a smaller town "actually understood digital in a way that not everyone who came in and talked to us seemed to get. I have a lot of respect for [the editor] and their whole staff. . . they are doing something right." Student participants also discussed how the news outlets they wrote about or interned for were behind the times.

They [a student's hometown newspaper] aren't really moving into the digital age, and for small papers like that, and for papers in general, it's really important right now to have that online site and be active on social media. They are still very, very print focused, and that model just doesn't work anymore.

This student noted that this outlet has a website, but "they aren't posting stories as they happen. Their website is mainly PDFs of their print product." Another student mentioned a similar issue with two newspapers he compared in his paper for the class.

. . . neither of them were engaging in multimedia the way that somewhere like the New York Times or the Washington Post might be doing, where there is embedded video, embedded audio, and every story is multidimensional. These [websites] were very much like they had been copied from Word or whatever.

These two student examples are showing news outlets that are still working in the Web 1.0 era, when online versions were basic replicas of the print version, as opposed to the

more modern strategies of Web 2.0, in which online publications are unique from a related print product (Wiesinger & Beliveau, 2016)

Another student noted that an editor he talked with was trying to move the publication into the digital world, but the editor said many people in the community, including advertisers, were not on board with that approach: “He is trying to move more toward the digital age, but it’s hard whenever you are in a small community of people used to doing things one way. [It’s hard] to get them to see that maybe something else might work better.” Community journalism practices started in small-town newspapers and some media professionals only think of it in those terms, but the practices have spread to other news mediums and new media platforms (Reader, 2012). The instructor of this course teaches that community journalism is not limited to the print medium in small towns; this is made very clear in the course description and in his syllabus (Appendices \* and \*). However, the students still voiced complaints that they did not receive enough lessons in how community journalism can apply outside of traditional media. “I think if it [the class] had more of a digital focus I probably would have walked away and been more like ‘wow.’” Another student said:

The print-focused stuff just doesn’t appeal to me very much. I think if there were more in the class about how to do community journalism digitally, that could be really cool. When you hear about jobs like ‘engagement editors’ and things like that, that’s about community journalism. It just has a fancy digital name.

Student participants did not discuss many complaints about this course, despite questions prompting them to talk freely about their complaints. However, the issue of lack of digital focus was expressed by four of nine students. The students also talked at length of how

community journalism can be practiced outside of its print media roots, and some specifically mentioned online or digital publications. One student said, “Community journalism is bigger than the type of papers who have predominantly used its style. Those of us in this new generation of journalists should work to find ways to incorporate community journalism into an increasingly digital world.” Another added, “It doesn’t necessarily have to be at this little tiny newspaper in the middle of nowhere. You can do community journalism at a major metro paper or an online-only site.” This student continued, explaining that class conversations helped her think about, “How can you do community journalism at different levels?” Another said, “Most of the community newspapers have some really great values. And they put their communities first. So, I think bigger towns’ newspapers or radio stations, or if anyone else wants to adapt it, they really can.” One student who works for the university student news outlet indicated the class made her realize community journalism can happen with a digital-first outlet. “. . . we [at the student outlet] are doing community journalism. We are just doing it in a way where we care a lot more about our website than other things.”

The students’ attention on needing a digital focus in community journalism indicates a realistic hardship. Their first jobs after graduation will likely be at smaller publications that do not have excess funding. Monetary constraints can make it difficult to upgrade to new technologies. They likely see the value of digital focus in community journalism, but they could work at publications that are unwilling or unable to pursue a digital focus.

**Attitudes.** Attitudes of both journalists toward audience members and audience members toward journalists can make practicing journalism difficult. Although all nine

student participants spoke in various capacities about their responsibility in their journalism practices, several also criticized the audience or the general public's actions as the consumer. One student whose internship involved dealing heavily with social media comments expressed her frustration with readers seeming to want more stories about "cute puppies and less about hard news." A second student also mentioned puppies when talking about how readers comment on "fluff" pieces like photo essays of puppies saying "yes, more of this." She said this type of commentary makes her think, "OK. So, you don't want journalism. Got it." While the student's words here are likely an example of blowing off steam about one's profession, something employees do in every profession, when taken beyond a release of frustration it can reinforce the idea of elite journalists being superior to their audiences (Willis, 2010) which can place barriers between journalists and audiences. Another student spoke of "attitude adjustments" that need to happen on the audience's end: "Journalists. . . are not out to get you. And I think that's what a lot of people have been taught. I think from this standpoint it's an attitude adjustment—removing your [audience] bias that journalism is bad." An additional student said the way stories are presented sometimes, especially online, can be "unclear to the readers when something is pure opinion or factual," and that many readers will not bother to seek out information to clarify the categories. This student explained that he does not believe the general audience always knows the difference in an opinion section and news section or an editorial and a news article. This speaks to another long-running issue between journalists and audiences of a perceived gap of knowledge between the two groups (Willis, 2010).



Another issue involving *attitudes* is the conundrum that journalists believe themselves to be more trustworthy than the public believes them to be (Willis, 2010). Eight of nine student participants in this study stated confidently that they believe the readers trust the publications they wrote about for their research papers for the Community Journalism class. The students' beliefs here align with Willis' (2010) research showing that journalists tend to think of themselves and their publications as trustworthy (Willis, 2010). Only one student, who wrote about a small-town Oklahoma weekly newspaper at which she interned, discussed doubt of the audience trusting the publication, stating, "I'm not exactly sure . . . part of me says there is some trust with the paper because they have helped break some big news around the county in the past few years, but I'm not exactly sure it's completely trusted." Asked to explain the reasons behind the possible lack of trust, she continued, ". . . in the past . . . there has been political corruption and corruption in the sheriff's office. And some people don't feel like that got enough coverage." While this student's response shows that she took time to think about reasons why a publication would not be trusted, the other students' quick answers that "yes," people trusted the publication indicates a lack of critical thinking about why audience members would or would not trust an outlet.

Many participants' responses within the theme, *journalism is hard*, could be categorized within certain elements of the theme, as those that have already been presented in this section. However, a few responses indicate that many of these challenges, taken together, make working for an outlet that practices community journalism difficult, or even broader, that profession of journalism a whole is difficult and challenging. One student noted about her internship experience:

It helped show me that community journalism, which is my instance was in a smaller community with a small, local paper, is at par with and possible even more difficult to produce than high-stakes-national reporting. This is different than I would have assumed. Having a newsroom of less than 10 trying to produce a high-quality product, interact directly with the community, and balance a regular life looks and feels much different, and is possible harder that working in a large newsroom with many resources. So, I think the short version is that my internship helped give me respect for community journalism.

This student's statement encompasses a variety of elements from all four themes in the findings, indicating how the themes all connect to the final theme that journalism done well is a difficult process. Her statement also specifically indicates that community journalism, specifically, is hard to do well.

For the last theme, *why journalism is hard*, concerning the professionals' and instructor's responses, some consistencies as well as discrepancies arose between their discussions and the students' discussions. For example, concerning politics, the professionals/instructor talked much more individually about politics than the nine student participants combined. Each of the three professionals shared specific thoughts about Donald Trump. One professional, referring to audience trust, said, "I think that we are finding it troublesome with our president right now. He is making all journalists look bad." The third professional described the current political scene as a "toxic environment," one where "a president has put the country on opposite sides. There used to be this middle ground where a lot of journalists could operate and be fair to both sides, but I think that middle ground has almost disappeared." While this professional talked

about the “middle ground” or where the point of neutrality used to be, this concept is likely not as clear to students who have grown up in an era where stronger political divisiveness has become the standard (Pew Center Research, 2017). All student participants in this study were born well after the advent of the 24-hour cable news cycle, a point historically that journalism researchers refer to as a move toward more partisan news. According to the Beloit Mindset List for the graduating college seniors in 2018, in this generation’s lifetime “FOX News and MSNBC have always been duking it out for the hearts and mindsets of viewers.”

The instructor and professionals’ focus on politics aligns with research about which age groups follow political news the most (Pew Research Center, 2016). The students do not follow or engage in politics as much as older generations, even though journalism students do engage more than non-journalism students of the same age group (Bobkowski, Goodman & Bowen, 2012). Concerning the digital focus element of the final theme, all three professionals and the instructor noted certain skills of this generation of students, specifically the students or recent graduates they have had contact with in recent years. The first professional said he relies on the younger hires to deal with the website and social media which he understands are important to certain segments of his readership: “All those things that I wouldn’t have been able to do. Or can’t do.” However, the professionals and instructor also mention skills the students are lacking. One professional said the interns or new hires sometimes struggle with initiative or resourcefulness and that “some may want to start more at the top and not pay their dues.” Another professional noted the students or recent graduates do not always do well at discerning the good from the bad of the overwhelming amount of information available

online, and that they were often satisfied with shallow or not-so-credible sources. “Looking information up online doesn’t make you an expert. It’s almost an arrogance,” the professional said. This is an interesting point, that students who are perceived as digitally savvy may not always be savvy in using those skills for work rather than entertainment.

On the topic of attitudes of both journalists and audiences, the instructor and the professionals were less likely to criticize the audience in their roles as the new consumer. Journalists have a responsibility to acknowledge these beliefs of elitism and knowledge gaps, and journalists do nothing to improve the problem when they blame audience members for the downfalls in the relationship. However, it may also be fair for journalists to argue that audiences have become harder to engage, easier to trick into believing fake news, less likely to decipher opinion from fact, and unlikely to fact check items they share on social media, as there is research to support all of these claims (Wiesinger & Beliveau, 2016). Additionally, in contrast to the student participants, the three professional journalists were not quick to answer the question of if their audiences trusted them. They all spoke at length about differing levels of trust between varying segments of their audiences, as well as how trust levels can shift over time and during certain news events. While each professional eventually said “yes,” that they believe their audiences trust them, they discussed more caveats concerning the waxing and waning of trust in different scenarios. None of the professionals’ answers of “yes,” were simple answers. However, the clear majority of students who eagerly agreed that yes, the audience members trust these particular publications, aligns with established research that journalists think of themselves as more trustworthy than the general public thinks of them

(Willis, 2010). This particular disconnect between audience and journalist is a long-standing issue, and the student participants within this study seem to be perpetuating the problem.

The first three dominant themes in this research, being part of the community, meeting community needs, and doing journalism right are all part of the more encompassing and final theme that journalism work is hard. The participants expressed a variety of examples for living and working in a community as a journalist, working to learn and meet the community needs, and the various elements required to do journalism “right.” However, the overarching theme for all of this description can be encapsulated in the statement that journalism work is hard.

### **Summary of Findings**

The sum of the participants’ responses indicates a seemingly simple statement: Journalism is hard. However, in discussion of all the reasons *why* journalism is hard, the participants’ responses produced the ideas that being *part of the community*, trying to meet the *community’s needs*, and *doing journalism right*, are all themes related to the overall problem that practicing journalism is hard. The participants tell their stories of hardships in the profession with examples of being out in the community and talking to people, getting to know people, letting people know them, and attempting to really listen to people. They continue their stories with trying to meet community needs by not only being part of the community, but providing useful information in their journalism and representing those in their community who bring *their stories* to the journalists. Participants discussed a multitude of skills and actions required to get their journalism work right, which would help them better meet the community’s needs. Finally, in

speaking about the business end of journalism, the political climate, the concerns about journalism's digital focus, and the complicated attitudes of both journalists and their audiences, all the elements of the participants' stories then arrive back to the simple statement: Journalism is hard.

The following and final chapter provides a discussion of these findings, conclusions drawn from the findings, and implications for research, practice and policy.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Journalism is required for a functioning democracy; however, audiences lack trust in journalists and journalism despite a variety of efforts since the 1960s to improve this relationship. Breakdowns in the relationship between audiences and journalists threaten democracy; therefore, research focused on problems within the journalist/audience relationship and potential solutions for those problems are needed. This issue has only become more apparent following the 2016 presidential election. The purpose of this study was to explore options for improving trust between journalists and their communities within the boundaries of collegiate journalism education. This research used a case study design; two sets of data were collected from college students who completed a community journalism class: 1) 25 written reflections from students in the spring 2014 and 2015 classes and 2) individual interviews with nine students from the 2016 and 2017 classes. In order to capture data from the whole of the students' community journalism education, additional data was collected through an interview with the instructor of that class and through individual interviews from three journalists currently working at publications that 1) encourage their journalists to engage in community journalism and, 2) frequently work with and hire college interns or recent graduates. I prepared verbatim transcripts from interviews from the students, instructor, and journalism professionals to make a comprehensive case record. I then analyzed the dataset using qualitative text

analysis (Kuckartz, 2014) in order to collect findings that could help me answer questions about improving the relationship between journalists and audiences within the boundaries of collegiate journalism education.

The dominant themes that emerged from the data including: being part of the community, community needs, getting journalism right, and why journalism is hard. Within these dominant themes participants spoke of going out into the community and talking to people, getting to know people, letting people know them, and attempting to really listen to people. They also spoke of providing useful information to readers, representing the community when community members bring ideas to a journalist or outlet, and the multitude of skills, actions and decisions required to do journalism well. They talked about journalism's financial problems, the political climate, the digital focus in the profession, and attitudes of both journalists and their audiences, culminating in the general idea that journalism is a multifaceted and difficult job.

### **Interpreting the Findings**

Student participants' responses produced the most data in the areas of getting out into the community and talking with people and the elements required to do journalism the right way. Students discussed at length various scenarios of being out in the public eye frequently, interacting with people, asking them questions, and listening to them. However, even when they were speaking of other people in the community, their discussions would often take an inwardly-focused tone. This inward focus could be partially attributed to the students living in "the daily me" environment (Wiesinger & Beliveau, 2016), characterized by investing a significant amount of one's time and efforts in a digital space, engaging most frequently only with the content one wants, at the time



one choses, and engaging frequently in asynchronous communication. However, the student responses relating to engaging with the audience mostly referred to a physical, face-to-face presence. The students are engaging in or noting the importance of engaging in face-to-face, but they are also likely comfortable with digital engagement. Technology allows a variety of ways to simulate interpersonal interaction, and it is possible to feel highly engaged through digitally-mediated tactics. The student participants also talked at length about engaging with their readers via social media or through comments on websites; this generation of student journalists could broaden how researchers and professionals think of community journalism by means of their digital savviness.

Findings also clearly suggest that the students see beyond community journalism's roots in small-towns print newspapers. All participants agreed community journalism could be practiced outside of the print medium of newspapers, and most student participants could describe detailed, meaningful examples from either the publications they wrote their research papers about, publications where they had interned, or publications they consume. Many of their examples indicated community journalism practices within digital platforms. The instructor's efforts to teach the lesson that community journalism transcends small town newspapers was effective.

The student participants provided a great deal of explanation about producing information that is useful or helpful to a community or representative of its community members. However, although they talked about this in a *general* way, few students gave *specific* details about what type of information was useful, helpful, or representative for *specific* communities. This indicates the students understand the lesson in general, but have perhaps not thought critically about employing this lesson. Critical thinking about

specific needs of specific communities is likely necessary to meeting a community's needs.

Students also talked frequently about needing to be both accurate and transparent in their journalism work in order to be practicing "good journalism." Many students also indicated in some way that it is better to be right than be first, to report a story accurately than to publish the story before other media outlets. However, words from the instructor and one professional indicate that once in the profession, the students will need to work on speed while also being accurate; both mentioned that students do not yet realize how quickly they will need to work once they are in a professional journalism job. The professionals also emphasized a continued importance on accuracy, indicating journalists are now expected to work increasingly faster, while maintaining accuracy in their work.

As indicated in Chapter 4, all of the dominant themes relate to the fourth and final theme of journalism being a difficult profession. Dynamics of the final, culminating theme included matters of business and politics along with concerns related to the digital focus in media as well as the attitudes of both audience members and journalists. Concerning business matters, students may not have fully understood the business of journalism yet, but they do understand that many smaller or family-owned publications struggle to make enough money to continue producing a publication. However, students seemed to receive mixed messages from speakers in the class as well as some professionals they have interned with concerning what type of publications are doing things right or wrong, or concerning which platforms will survive into the future. This relates also to the conversations about the focus on digital platforms, mainly from student responses in the data. Students were quick to judge a publication negatively that did not

make use of a website or social media, a 2016 Neilson Scarborough report shows that not all publications need a digital presence to be successful. This December 2016 report indicated 169 million adults in the U.S. read a news outlet in any given month, via print, web or app, and of these monthly newspaper readers, 81% engage with a print publication monthly, and 51% of the 169 million, or just over 85 million people, reported they engage exclusively with print news (Neilson, 2016). Admittedly, those who engage exclusively in print are the older members in the audience (Pew Research Center, 2016) which could suggest that “print is dying” as journalists have heard since the advent of radio. However, if a particular audience does not want a digital presence, or a digital-only presence an outlet can often be successful without it; the number of successful print community newspapers still running is the proof. However, the majority of journalism jobs these students will take in the near future will likely require digital media skills, so this focus on print newspapers is not to suggest a return to print-only journalism. Rather, the suggestion is, for the time being, many journalism graduates will need to know how to both engage with readers who want a print publication and face-to-face interaction as well as some level of digital interaction. A 2016 report from the Tow-Knight Center for Entrepreneurial Journalism showed, following a survey of 39 newsroom leaders across the country, that the ideal candidate for a reporting position should have new media skills, “along with strong editorial sensibility or a solid foundation in journalism fundamentals,” (Mullins, 2016).

Along with business and digital concerns, politics arose as a topic of conversation although I did not ask any questions concerning politics. All three professionals and the instructor along with four of nine student participants specifically mentioned Donald

Trump's relevance to the tension between journalists and the public. Not all of the political discussion related to Trump, but it was the majority. And, all participants, no matter their role, who spoke about Donald Trump did so in a way that indicated the president's words and actions are affecting the relationship between journalists/journalism and the general public. The student participants from spring semester 2016 were taking the Community Journalism class during the unconventional presidential race that would lead to the vote between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Due to the newsworthiness of these campaigns, the instructor mentioned that this particular class talked about politics more than previous classes that took place in non-presidential election years. The instructor also said he felt the need to delve more into the issue of trust in both spring 2016 and spring 2017 than in previous semesters specifically "because of Trump." Most of the candidates in the running for their party's nomination for president openly labeled their opponents untrustworthy—nothing new in politics. However, candidate Trump, and now President Trump has spoken more derisively of the press than any president in history (Lee, 2017). Until now, many historians credited Richard Nixon as being the U.S. president most critical of the press; however, the open nature and inciting word choices in Trump's critiques go beyond Nixon's clandestine rants (Lee, 2017). Trump has publically and repeatedly deemed some of the historically most-trusted news outlets as promulgating "fake news," and in doing so he has openly and intentionally served as a divider between the general public and the press. Other political responses from participants focused mainly on readers in a conservative state not being likely to trust larger, or nationally-focused, publications, due to a perception that those publications report favorably toward liberal ideals.

Additionally, students' responses indicate this group of participants unanimously believe that much of the dynamics of the relationship between journalist and audience, including winning audience trust, is the journalist's responsibility. However, four of nine students also placed significant blame in some way on audience members for the often-faulty relationships between journalists and their readers. This action, of blaming the audience, contributes to a long-standing issue of audiences viewing journalists as elite or as contributing to the knowledge gap between journalists, who are "in the know," and non-journalists, who are not (Willis, 2010).

Finally, an overall gloomy perspective emerged at times from all participant groups when they talked about successful solutions for improving trust with the public. Some mentioned that the task was too immense, or that journalism had strayed too far from its roots to redeem itself. One student noted after I asked how journalism could improve its image, that "everyone asks that question. Teachers ask it, parents, readers. Everyone. It's a lot of stress." And, in response to the same question, one of the professionals stated simply that the only "hope for a true revival of journalism is on the hyper-local level." His words indicate that even as journalism has become increasingly connected across the globe through technology, what might save journalism in the end is a return to serving, *and engaging with*, small, intimate communities. These themes and dynamics within them encompass the dominant issues that emerged from the participants' responses. Next, I apply what the participants said in relation to established constructs of community and trust.

### **Trustworthy Journalism as a Service to the Community**

The way people define community has changed with technological advances; this is true for how people, both journalists and audiences, define community as related to news publications. The Beloit Mindset List for graduating college seniors of 2018 suggests this generation views Skype as a place to “gather with friends,” rather than the local park. Research has shown the people think of Twitter and other social media platforms as a community or a place to find various communities (Gruzd, et. al, 2011), and that social media can be used to foster democracy (Dahlgren et. al, 2012). But whether that community is within the geographical boundaries of a city or within the shared interests of an online group, journalism is inherently grounded in the community it serves.

As detailed in the literature review, journalism researchers regard the social responsibility theory (SRT) of the press, one of four guiding theories of the press, as part of the normative theories of the press and media. Normative theories focus on the right and wrong, the ethical and unethical, the desirable or undesirable standards in society; in journalism studies, this translates into questions about what the role of journalism is and should be (Christians, et. al, 2009). Critics of this theory view elements of SRT as the government intruding on press freedom by *requiring* the press to be socially responsible. This point is valid; if the government had been or started to *require* socially responsibility of news outlets, that would violate the press’s First Amendment rights. However, journalistic ethical codes are commonly self-imposed by members of the press, for example, in leaving a minor’s name, who has been implicated in a crime, out of a story. It is legal to include the minor’s name; however, most journalists believe it is not ethical and that children deserve an extra layer of protection from public scrutiny.

Therefore, when *journalists* lead the responsible practices in their work, as they often do when practicing community journalism, they are operating within SRT of the press while making full use of their First Amendment protections. Social responsibility, operating within the framework of the First Amendment, can play a role democracy that provides citizens with information they need to make informed decisions about their lives and communities (Tedesco, Kaid & Melton-McKinnon, 2000). Community journalism tactics often involve journalist-led responsibility. Additionally, the social responsibility rationale of normative journalism theory describes journalism as a service to the community (Siebert, et al., 1963), similar to the concept of community journalism. As Christians, et. al (2009) suggest, normative theories, such as SRT, within journalism research translate into questions about what the role of journalism is and should be. Findings from this research indicate that that the role of community journalism fits within established norms of SRT, but may also expand the theory. All nine student participants spoke of their own responsibility as journalists in a variety of ways in the duration of the interviews. They spoke of their responsibility in terms of accuracy, admitting mistakes, seeking credible sources, upholding their personal ethics, being “true” to the journalism profession, getting to know people in the community, figuring out what the audience needs and wants, being approachable, being transparent, and in improving the relationship between audiences and journalists.

In the past, journalism as a profession has relied on journalists *doing good work* to advocate for journalism as worthy and necessary to a functioning democracy. In the age of digital platforms and varying degrees and definitions of fake news, *doing good work* is not enough. Being a socially responsible journalist may now mean being able to advocate

successfully for the profession. Being able to advocate successfully for the profession is not likely inherent to the journalist; likely, this skill needs to be taught.

### **The Three Elements of Trust**

The construct of trust was central to developing the research questions for this study. Researchers often break down the study of trust in the media and of journalists in terms of three elements: reliability, credibility and responsiveness. This research used the following definitions of these elements of trust: 1) reliability—likely to be correct and behave ethically based on history; 2) credibility—ability to be believed; and 3) responsiveness—reacting quickly and appropriately to the public and events (Brants, 2013 p. 17). The interview protocol asked three separate questions, breaking down trust into these three components: What does it mean to be a reliable journalist? What does it mean to be a credible journalist? What does it mean for a journalist or outlet to be responsive to the community? Concerning two of these elements, reliability and credibility, much discussion took place from all groups of participants: students, professionals, and the instructor. However, student participants barely spoke of responsiveness, although the instructor and the professionals discussed this element at length and indicated how important this element is in gaining and keeping audience trust. Within the dominant themes, the three elements of trust as defined in Brants (2013) appear regularly, especially reliability and credibility, sometimes as a result of a direct question, but often these elements arose in other lines of questioning. Participants would return to these elements when discussing other topics.

*Reliability—likely to be correct and behave ethically based on history.* The majority of student participants seem to view themselves as reliable and to understand



that building reliability is based on tedious efforts over periods of time. They spoke frequently of admitting to and correcting mistakes, just as their instructor and the journalism professionals. However, most did not speak of how easily that reliability is undone with one mistake. And mistakes are more common and easier to make in the 24-hour news cycle when there is no actual deadline and the pressure is to continuously be first *and* be right—a difficult combination to consistently achieve. At odds with the students' belief that they are or will be reliable journalists, are the persisting statistics that show the majority of the public does not believe that journalists are likely to be correct (Swift 2016, 2017). However, concerning the role of journalism instructors, the concept of reliability seems to have more tangible outcomes, or tangible lesson that instructors can point to in order to help students learn how to be reliable.

*Credibility—ability to be believed.* Students spoke of reliability more than they did of credibility, while the instructor and professionals spoke of both fairly equally. It may be easier to talk of reliability, because credibility is based more on a person's individual qualities. Our ability to be believed stems in part from our outwardly displayed attributes. And those attributes can be difficult to discuss as they require critically thinking about one's self. The instructor spoke at length of the need for journalists to be humble, and from speaking with editors of major publications, he knows that is important to them as well. The question he asked was, "how do you teach humility?" The question may be further complicated by the generation he is teaching. According to research on digital literacy, or the ability to navigate through a digital world, the current group of traditionally-aged college students operate within a system referred to as "the daily me" (Wiesinger & Beliveau, 2016). "The daily me," includes living part or most of one's life

in a digital space, a large portion of communication being asynchronous, and the news and information delivered to you is mostly the content you already want on your own schedule (Wiesinger & Beliveau, 2016). All of these aspects turn focus inward, potentially making people more self-involved or appearing that way. As one of the professional participants said, “Credibility is everything,” to a journalist or a news outlet. However, if credibility is harder to come by in the digital age, and a harder concept to teach than reliability, journalism educators may need to find ways to work around these complications.

*Responsiveness—reacting quickly and appropriately to the public and events.* The public is most worried about journalists’ lack of responsiveness when it comes to the three elements of trust (cite?). This concern appears to be justified in the student participants’ lack of discussion and understanding of being responsive to a community. The other area that both instructor and professionals stressed as important, but the students did not seem to fully grasp, was thinking critically about who the audience is for each publication. These two gaps in the students’ knowledge are likely related. It is difficult to be responsive to a community if one has not thought deeply about who makes up the community and what the community members might need and want from a publication. The interaction necessary with the community makes this third element of trust slightly different than the elements of reliability and credibility which focus more on the journalists’ individual practices and ethics rather than the relationship between them and their readers. It is understandable that it would be difficult for students to develop a sense of being responsive before they have worked in and for a community. This is an indication for an even stronger push for journalism majors to start internships early in

their education as well as find more ways to encourage them to work for campus newspapers. Prompted by the question on responsiveness, students either offered vague answers or said explicitly that they were not sure what the concept meant. For example, the set of two students who interviewed together looked to each other for a response, but neither produced one of substance:

**Researcher:** Did you guys discuss what it means for a publication to be responsive to its community? Was that a conversation at all?

**Student 1:** There was some of that in the readings. We covered it and stuff . . .  
[looks at Student 2 while trailing off. Both stay silent for a moment.]

**Researcher:** What about the guest speakers, did they talk about being responsive to their communities?

**Student 2:** That . . . [pausing, looking up to ceiling while thinking] they didn't pontificate on it.

**Researcher:** Anything else on that? [both students shake their heads no]

The idea of “the daily me” (Wiesinger & Beliveau, 2016) could be useful in the discussion of students’ seeming lack of understanding concerning being responsive as well. The factors of “the daily me” can lead to an inward focus. An inward focus could lead to a lack of responsiveness; however, individuals who are highly engaged and savvy in the digital world, like the majority of the student participants, could turn their time spent in the digital world into acts of responsiveness. Digital tools and social media allow journalists to be responsive immediately if the audience is also part of the digital world. As people are increasingly getting their news and information from digital sources and social media sites, young journalists who are highly functional in the digital world could

be as asset in journalism outlets, assuming these new professionals understand what responsiveness means and how to enact this element of trust in their practice. The findings in the study led to a discussion of both the concepts of community and of trust. From this discussion, I can offer the following conclusions.

### **Conclusions**

The findings of the research suggest that there is no single route to repair the struggling relationship between journalists and their audiences, because both that relationship and the practice of journalism are too complicated for simple solutions. However, the findings also indicate that there are practices, seemingly smaller and more individual in nature, that journalism educators and professionals, as well as journalism students can engage in to work toward an improved journalist/audience relationship. Five general conclusions can be drawn from the findings concerning the relationship between journalists and audiences and what measures can be taken at the college level to improve trust between them.

*First, student participants do seem to understand that trust is not something easily gained by the journalist from the audience—that they will have to repeatedly produce quality work that is thorough, accurate, fair, and transparent and consistently practice solid journalism ethics to earn and keep trust.* The student participants talked about reliability and credibility, two elements of trust, in meaningful ways and with passion that indicated they believe in the strategies behind becoming reliable and credible, and are already engaged in those strategies or plan to in their future professional positions. Although encompassing all the elements participants discussed concerning doing

journalism right is a grand task, any time a journalist or student journalist is engaging in one of those elements, they are working to build trust with their audience

*Second, student participants show evidence of understanding how and a willingness to implement community journalism practices in meaningful ways across multiple media platforms, including digital media.* The instructor of this conveys this idea clearly to his students, and they all agreed with the sentiment, but beyond agreement, were able to explain how community journalism tactics could be applied at broadcast, magazine, digital, or otherwise non-traditional new outlets. The instructor has put forth impressive efforts in his nine years teaching community journalism at the research site. He encourages his students to explore nontraditional media outlets for their work in the course. Community journalism may have arrived in the 1960s, but its tactics transcend medium and are valuable in modern journalism. Furthermore, journalism students who possess the new media skills needed in the changing technological landscape of the media profession, and who *also* understand community journalism tactics, could both reach younger audience members in the manner they want to be reached *and* work toward successfully fostering trust across age demographics. Americans are increasingly using social media to find news, and they are also increasing the number of social media sites used with one in four U.S. adults using two or more social media sites for news (Grieco, 2017). In order for community journalism tactics to be successful in a digital-first news era, journalists must understand how to use those tactics via social media.

*Third, recent developments of political divisiveness have shaped how most participants in this study think of trust in the journalism profession.* All journalism students, professionals, and educators have been living and working within a unique

political environment that began with Donald Trump winning the Republican party nomination for the 2016 presidential election and continues with his presidency. Before Trump was a serious contender for president, increasing political divisiveness and news outlets that cater to that divisiveness had already led to many individuals only trusting news sources that aligned with their own beliefs (Schmidt et. al, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2014). But after Trump's election, with a sitting president who openly labels facts as lies and credible journalistic pursuits as "fake news," all journalists and journalism students face new challenges in working within the current media landscape, while news consumers face increasingly confusing and misleading options for navigating this landscape and making decisions on which outlets they can trust. Because journalism is essential to a functioning democracy (Siebert, et al., 1963), any factors that confuse, mislead, or stand in the way of the pursuit of truth threaten democracy. The current president is now one of those factors. A PEW survey following quickly after the 2016 election found that "64% of adults believe fake news stories cause a great deal of confusion and 23% said they had shared fabricated political stories themselves – sometimes by mistake and sometimes intentionally" (Anderson & Rainie, 2017). This article suggested that misinformation is and will continue to be one of the most challenging factors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Fourth, the audience is the other half of the journalist/audience relationship, but the responsibility does and should weigh heavier on the journalist to work toward improving this relationship.* The instructor and professionals' data indicate this is important and is being taught; however, the students' responses indicate they acknowledge the lesson, but still complain a lot about the audience members'

shortcomings in the relationship. The modern journalism landscape is difficult to navigate even for those who work in it; imagine then how difficult it may be for a person who has not studied journalism or media issues extensively. Ridiculing audience members for believing fake news reports or refusing to follow more than one news outlet does nothing to improve the relationship. Some news outlets have recently started to use campaign, public service announcements and other public-relations style tactics to improve their images or explain what the pursuit of truth means. Two examples include *The Washington Post* promoting a new slogan in February 2017, “democracy dies in darkness” (Frej, 2017), and CNN’s advertising campaign #FactsFirst that began in October 2017 and included a series of minimalist-style television commercials indicating that facts cannot be changed; despite distractions, political divisiveness, and misleading rhetoric, facts remain as they are (Tani, 2017).

*And finally, fifth, although journalism instructors and bosses likely understand and acknowledge that young journalists operate in a media landscape very different than a generation ago, what may not be as well-understood are the ways in which the current media landscape has shaped the younger journalists’ thoughts about trust and approaches to the journalist/audience relationship.* Journalism educators and professionals who work with new journalists must face who OUR audience is. The students and recent graduates, if they are of traditional college age, are the generation of young people who have grown up in a digital world. “The daily me” (Weisinger & Beliveau, 2016) is their reality, and while certain aspects of living with so much tied to the digital world may cause certain difficulties in teaching these students, they also

possess different potentials and new skills that can bring community journalism tactics into the current and future journalism platforms.

Students often hear from educators and older professionals about how journalism used to be, or how it was easier to remain neutral before the 24-hour-news cycle. However, this current journalism reality is exactly that: reality. Journalism educators and professionals in leadership roles need to face that reality and teach toward it, not behind it. Additionally, as increasingly divergent political views continue to divide the country (Pew Research Center, 2017), journalism educators and professionals must realize that the younger generation has not lived in a world without this divide openly represented in many dominant news sources. This is their normal, given how both the current generation of young people and their parents are unraveling traditional community institutions (Putnam, 2000) through declining face-to-face interaction and reconstituting them in a digital environment.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

In light of the current state of journalism education, the profession of journalism, and the U.S. political climate, the conclusions from this research have clear implications. Recommendations for additional research, practices within collegiate journalism programs, and policy as it related to journalism education accreditation standards follow each implication.

#### **Implication 1: Gaps in Students' Education**

Analysis and interpretation of the data reveals two gaps in student participants' community journalism education within this case study: responsiveness to community and thinking critically about an audience. The lack of substantive student responses to the



concepts of being responsive to one's community and thinking critically about who the audience is for each publication is troubling, particularly because research the element of responsiveness is what the general public talks about most when criticizing journalists and journalism (Brants, 2013). Accordingly, educators need to consider new lessons or new ways to teach existing lessons concerning these gaps. These two areas are related, as thinking critically about an audience would likely increase understanding of how to be responsive to them.

**Recommendations for research.** When the instructor and professionals in the study talked about trying to help students understand the audience, they would often phrase the question to the students as “Who is your audience?” However, it is possible that students think about audience differently than their instructors and internship supervisors, in part because the line between news provider (journalist) and news consumer (audience) is not as clearly divided as it used to be before digital media (Wiesinger & Beliveau, 2016). The students may not separate themselves clearly from the audience. Research focusing on how student or recently graduated journalists think of themselves within the community of a news outlet they work for could offer answers to fill in the identified knowledge gaps in students' community journalism education of being responsive to community and thinking critically about individual audiences.

**Recommendations for practice.** When considering how to adapt new material, it is beneficial to think of the generation we are teaching and their relationship to the digital world. For example, the Beloit list for the college graduating class of 2018 suggests that because they binge-watch television shows, they may also want to binge-watch video lectures. Additionally, because these students are so involved in the digital world,

continued and deeper focus should be added to community journalism curriculum in relation to how it can apply to new and emerging media platforms. Several student participants in the study complained of a lack of solid examples of community journalism practice within digital platforms or guest speakers from such platforms, even though the instructor made it clear that community journalism could be practiced in such outlets. Additionally, this idea of broadening the scope of community journalism should be pursued further in community journalism courses at all universities with a journalism degree; and if community journalism classes do not exist in the curriculum, they should be created.

### **Implication 2: Self-Advocacy of Journalism**

Next, and important to both professionals and student journalists, the idea of journalism advocating for itself and reaching out to help audiences understand how to navigate within the current media system, including how this relates to political climate, should become part of the profession. When charged with the idea of what real improvements to the profession, starting with student's education in journalism school, would look like, one researcher said the answer "might include training journalism students in a new paradigm, a community-first paradigm that privileges citizens rather than officials and advocates engagement as a fundamental part of the job," (Robinson, 2017, p. 306). Robinson's (2017) article does not specifically refer to journalism advocating for itself as a benefit to the community, but I am suggesting this action would benefit the community and would be part of a community-first paradigm in journalism.

**Recommendations for research.** Research in this area could look at combining effective PR tactics to journalism.

**Recommendations for practice.** It may be necessary to begin to structure a course or various lessons within journalism curriculum for how to advocate for journalism and how do help audiences understand the media landscape.

**Recommendations for policy.** Along with its current standards for accreditation, AEJMC could look at including advocacy for journalism in the curriculum for accredited schools.

### **Implication 3: Developing New Curriculum**

Teaching the basics of quality storytelling, both written and visual, along with information gathering, interviewing, researching, and working within the context of journalism law and ethics, will always be necessary to quality journalism education. However, working within the existing realities of how journalism, audiences, and journalism students function, and developing curriculum to support how it is now, and not how it used to be is equally important. This realistic approach will produce future journalists who are more likely to have the ability to connect with their audiences, therefore attempt to foster trust, within the existing media landscape. Furthermore, professional participants and the instructor participant indicated that certain aspects of journalism are harder to teach than others in the current media landscape, one of those being what it takes to be credible. As one of the professional participants said, “Credibility is everything,” to a journalist or a news outlet. However, if credibility is harder to come by in the digital age, and a harder concept to teach than reliability, journalism educators may need to find ways to work around these complications.

**Recommendations for research.** The Beloit Mindset list suggests that Millennial students, who are currently upper division college students or recent graduates, and

Generation X, who are currently age 20 or younger, possess some wildly different attributes. Journalism educators could benefit from studies on the differences in these generations to help us understand the students we are currently and soon-to-be teaching.

**Recommendations for practice.** I suggest journalism educators look for way to adapt our teaching to the current and incoming generation of students, while still keeping a focus on the value of ethical journalism practices. Good reporting is good reporting no matter the platform.

#### **Implication 4: Examples of Digitally-Focused Community Journalism in Curriculum**

All students in this study showed a clear understanding of how community journalism could be practiced outside of small-town print publications, including in digital-only publications; however, most did not receive actual experience in doing community journalism this way, nor did they hear it from professionals in the industry. Educators and professionals need to make an effort to find and showcase existing examples of digitally-focused media outlets engaged in community journalism practices.

**Recommendations for research.** A case study of a digital-only community journalism outlet could provide useful insight on how community journalism practices unfold at digital-only publications and serve as a roadmap for how other digital publications could pursue community journalism.

**Recommendations for practice.** I suggest a more concerted push for digital focus in community journalism education, perhaps assignments that require students to develop a digital needs assessment for various outlets, real or fictitious. This assignment

would engage the element of responsiveness as well, as discussions of what an audience needs and wants and reacting to that would be necessary in this assignment.

### **Implication 5: Focus Needed on *Evidence of Trust***

Concerning journalism curriculum in general, evidence of trust is an understudied area in media studies about trust between audience and journalist. Understanding more tangible ways a journalist can recognize that audiences trust them can give journalists something solid to work toward in that relationship.

**Recommendations for research.** Due to the lack of research on the topic, numerous ideas come to mind. A comparison study of traditional evidence of trust v. non-traditional (new media or digital) evidence for trust. A case study of a particular new outlet's evidence for trust (it's clear this information can be gathered, but there just is not much of it in current research.)

**Recommendations for practice.** A community journalism class, but also other classes like news reporting, news editing, media ethics, multimedia reporting, could serve as courses through which student journalists seek out and discuss more these various types of evidence for trust. Journalism educators should look within certain classes to find those that fit with the idea of recognizing elements of trust from the audience.

### **Summary of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore options for improving trust between journalists and their communities within the boundaries of collegiate community journalism education. The study was needed because the public in general does not hold high levels of trust for journalism; however, strong journalism is required for a functioning democracy. The research was a case study design, and the researcher

collected and analyzed data from students, an instructor and professionals involved in community journalism in order to provide insight for potential ways to improve the relationship between journalists and their audiences within the context of the education young journalists receive. From the analysis, the researcher produced a set of findings, and from the findings, conclusions to inform the research questions concerning trust between journalists and their communities. Findings produced four dominant themes that participants spoke of most frequently including: journalists being part of the communities they work in, journalists working to meet community needs, the multiple elements and requirements that lead to doing journalism right, and finally, with all three preceding themes relating to a final overarching theme that practicing journalism is quite hard.

Conclusions from the findings included: student journalists do understand that trust is not easily gained from an audience, and while they seem to understand reliability and credibility as related to trust, they have less of a grasp on the element of responsiveness; students understand and have a desire to implement community journalism practices across multiple platforms, including digital; political divisiveness continues to increasingly shape how journalists think of trust in the journalism profession; students somewhat understand that improving the relationship between journalist and audience is more of a responsibility on the journalist, but they tend to blame audience members for shortcomings in the relationship; and, although seasoned professionals and educators understand that younger journalists operate in a different media landscape than a decade ago, they may not fully understand how those differences have shaped the younger journalists' thoughts about trust and the relationship with their audience.

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## APPENDICES

## Norman Campus Application (Version 1.2)

### 1.0 General Information

\* Enter the full title of your study:

Exploring Options to Build Trust Between Journalists and Audiences in Collegiate Community Journalism Education

\* Enter the short title you would like to use to reference the study:

Exploring Options to Build Trust

\* This field allows you to enter an abbreviated version of the Study Title to quickly identify this study.

### 2.0 Add Department(s)

2.1 List departments associated with this study

Primary Dept?	Department Name
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	NC - NC - College of Journalism

### 3.0 Assign key study personnel(KSP) access to the study

3.1 \* Please add a Principal Investigator for the study:

Melanie G Wilderman, MA

3.2 If applicable, please select the Research Staff personnel:

A) Additional Investigators

B) Research Support Staff

3.3 Please add a Study Contact:

Melanie G Wilderman, MA

The Study Contact(s) will receive all important system notifications along with the Principal Investigator. (e.g. The project contact(s) are typically either the Study Coordinator or the Principal Investigator themselves).

3.4 If applicable, please add a Faculty Advisor:

### 4.0 25 - Type of Submission

4.1 Select the type of submission you wish to complete:

- Study Application/Research Application
- Protocol Development Application
- Determination of Human Subjects; Research Worksheet

### 5.0 50 - Primary Focus / Nature of Research

5.1 The primary focus/nature of the research is:

- Bio-Medical/Clinical
- Social/Behavioral

5.2 Does your study involve any of the following? Check all that apply.

- Interactions with participants who have a medically diagnosed condition
- Procedures involving ionizing radiation
- Procedures involving blood-flow restriction
- FDA controlled substances, supplements, and/or devices
- The use of human cell line(s) and/or human cloned DNA/RNA
- The administration or transfer of recombinant DNA, microorganisms, viruses, or biological toxins to humans
- The review/analysis of pre-existing data/records

5.3 Does your research ONLY involve the review and analysis or pre-existing research records/data? If so, you may respond N/A to any questions regarding interactions with participants.

Yes  No

## 6.0 100 - Participant Information

6.1 In this section, you will need to add rows for each participant group you will include in your research design. For example, you will need to add two rows if your study involves interviewing both children and adults. If you are having only one, broad group participants complete an online survey, you would only add one row. Click the "Add a Row" button below to begin.

Type of Participant Group	Age Range & Gender	Vulnerable Population	Racial/Ethnic Origin						
Provide a brief description of this participant group:  OU students who have completed the Community Journalism class within the last two years	What is the maximum number of participants from this group to be recruited into the study?  7	From 19	To 25	Gender: <input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Transgender or Gender Fluid <input checked="" type="radio"/> All		If OTHER, describe:		If OTHER, describe:	Do these participants speak/read/write in English? If not, you must submit all translated documents that have been reviewed by a native speaker to their language. You must also submit a signed Translator Statement (found on our website, here: <a href="http://compliance.ouhsc.edu/hrpp/Norman/Resources/ApplicationForms.aspx">http://compliance.ouhsc.edu/hrpp/Norman/Resources/ApplicationForms.aspx</a> )  <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No

				<p>Is this participant group being specifically targeted because they fall into one of the following vulnerable populations? If you are not specifically targeting members of these vulnerable populations, do not check any of the boxes.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Children (under 18)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant Women</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Elderly (65 &amp; older)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Decisionally Impaired (unable to consent)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Psychologically Impaired (able to consent)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Fetuses</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Specific Native American Tribes and/or Tribal Organizations</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other Vulnerable Populations</p>		<p>Is this participant group being specifically targeted because they fall into one of the following racial/ethnic groups? Check all that apply. If you are not specifically targeting members of these racial/ethnic groups, but your study may include members of the groups - do not check any of the boxes.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Native American or Alaskan Native</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Asian</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other</p>		
		From	To		If OTHER, describe:		If OTHER, describe:	
		55	70					

Provide a brief description of this participant group:	What is the maximum number of participants from this group to be recruited into the study?			Gender: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Transgender or Gender Fluid <input type="radio"/> All	Is this participant group being specifically targeted because they fall into one of the following vulnerable populations? If you are not specifically targeting members of these vulnerable populations, do not check any of the boxes.		Is this participant group being specifically targeted because they fall into one of the following racial/ethnic groups? Check all that apply. If you are not specifically targeting members of these racial/ethnic groups, but your study may include members of the groups - do not check any of the boxes.		Do these participants speak/read/write in English? If not, you must submit all translated documents that have been reviewed by a native speaker to their language. You must also submit a signed Translator Statement (found on our website, here: <a href="http://compliance.ouhsc.edu/hrpp/Norman/Resources/ApplicationForms.aspx">http://compliance.ouhsc.edu/hrpp/Norman/Resources/ApplicationForms.aspx</a> )
Professor of Community Journalism course at OU	1	From	To	<input type="checkbox"/> Children (under 18) <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant Women <input type="checkbox"/> Elderly (65 & older) <input type="checkbox"/> Decisionally Impaired (unable to consent) <input type="checkbox"/> Psychologically Impaired (able to consent) <input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners <input type="checkbox"/> Fetuses <input type="checkbox"/> Specific Native American Tribes and/or Tribal Organizations <input type="checkbox"/> Other Vulnerable Populations	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Native American or Alaskan Native <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Other	If OTHER, describe:	If OTHER, describe:	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	
		23	65						

Provide a brief description of this participant group:	What is the maximum number of participants from this group to be recruited into the study?			Gender: <input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Transgender or Gender Fluid <input checked="" type="radio"/> All	Is this participant group being specifically targeted because they fall into one of the following vulnerable populations? If you are not specifically targeting members of these vulnerable populations, do not check any of the boxes.		Is this participant group being specifically targeted because they fall into one of the following racial/ethnic groups? Check all that apply. If you are not specifically targeting members of these racial/ethnic groups, but your study may include members of the groups - do not check any of the boxes.		Do these participants speak/read/write in English? If not, you must submit all translated documents that have been reviewed by a native speaker to their language. You must also submit a signed Translator Statement (found on our website, here: <a href="http://compliance.ouhsc.edu/hrpp/Norman/Resources/ApplicationForms.aspx">http://compliance.ouhsc.edu/hrpp/Norman/Resources/ApplicationForms.aspx</a> )
Oklahoma journalists who currently engage in community journalism practices	7				<input type="checkbox"/> Children (under 18) <input type="checkbox"/> Pregnant Women <input type="checkbox"/> Elderly (65 & older) <input type="checkbox"/> Decisionally Impaired (unable to consent) <input type="checkbox"/> Psychologically Impaired (able to consent) <input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners <input type="checkbox"/> Fetuses <input type="checkbox"/> Specific Native American Tribes and/or Tribal Organizations <input type="checkbox"/> Other Vulnerable Populations		<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Native American or Alaskan Native <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian <input type="checkbox"/> Asian <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Other		<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No

6.2 If you noted above that any of the participant groups will be specifically targeted due to their inclusion in a certain vulnerable population or racial/ethnic group, please use the text box below to describe the additional safeguards included in the research design to protect their rights and welfare.

## 7.0 150 - Research Design

### 7.1 Provide a description of the purpose of your study and your research design.

This description should be short and written for a lay reader, not for someone in your field. Also, your response should be understandable without the reader having to refer to another study document. Do not cut and paste your thesis/dissertation research abstract.

Since the establishment of the Society of Professional Journalists in 1909, journalists have employed a variety of tactics to improve their relationship with the public, and efforts increased during various movements within the profession in the 1960s and again in the late 1980s-mid 1990s. Despite these efforts, many in society continued to view the profession and its members with distrust (Broersma and Peters, 2013). This is certainly a concern for professional journalists, but also for the journalism professors who prepare future journalists and the future journalists themselves. Community-oriented journalism tactics (including civic, public and community journalism) encourage audience/journalist interaction and trust building (Rosen, 2005; Reader, 2012). Courses in community journalism, along with community-oriented content in other journalism courses, began appearing in individual journalism schools in the 1970s, surged in popularity after 1996 (Lauterer, 2006) and remain well represented in the curriculum today. Six of ten of top ten-rated U.S. journalism schools (Gilbert, 2014) include a community-oriented journalism class in the curriculum or a professor specializing in community journalism on staff. Media scholars and journalism educators regularly publish empirical studies considering what students should, and do, learn in these courses. Studies have found that students who complete a community-oriented journalism course have a sense of connecting with the community, they understand social problems more, they are more sympathetic to community needs and they are able to practice objective journalism strategies despite the subjectivity that can arise in community-related journalism strategies (Corbett & Kendall, 1999; Haas, 2000, Anyaegbunam & Ryan, 2003; Franz, 2004; Simon & Sapp, 2007; Flournoy, 2007). Many students believe community journalism is making them better journalists and helping them serve the community better (Simon & Sapp, 2006; Flournoy, 2007). Since this strategy has been widespread in journalism schools for more than 20 years, it is logical to think the strategy might have fostered more public trust of journalism/journalists, as those who learned this style of journalism are now established in the profession, but academic research and public opinion polling both show it has not. Additionally, much of the research on community-oriented journalism in college curriculum focuses on student learning outcomes, but not on the question of trust between journalists and their audiences. Directors of journalism programs across the country disagree on how to best train future successful journalists as well as which courses should take precedent in journalism curriculum (Blom & Davenport, 2012). This disagreement, along with the failure of tactics of community-oriented journalism to improve the public's view of journalism and journalists, makes exploratory studies of journalism education, such as this one, appropriate. Furthermore, journalism is required for a functioning democracy, and therefore, breakdowns in the relationship between audiences and journalists threaten democracy. This issue has become more apparent following the 2016 U.S. presidential election. What is uncertain is if the journalism profession can do anything to change this relationship, and if so, what this might be. One main research question and two sub questions guide this study: RQ1: What measures can be taken at the college level to improve trust between journalists and their audiences? A: specifically through a college course in community journalism? B: in general through the curriculum for a journalism degree?

To answer these questions, the following data will be collected:

1. Approximately 40 reflection statements from students over four semesters of the Community Journalism class, from spring 2013-fall 2014 (reflection statements were not collected after fall 2014 in this course).
2. Focus group of 4-6 students who took the course within the last two years.
3. Interview with professor of the course
4. Focus group of 4-6 journalists currently working at publications which engage in community journalism strategies.
  - a. If these professionals cannot all meet for a focus group, my secondary tactic will be individual interviews with any who cannot attend the focus group, but are still willing to participate.

### 7.2 Add a row for each task participants may complete.



Which participants will complete this task?	What is the task?	How long will the task take to complete?	Where/How will the task be completed?	Will this task be recorded?	Will medical clearance or screening be required for participants to complete this task?				
<input type="checkbox"/> All Participants <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Some Participants	<p>If only some of the participants will complete the task, note which groups of participants will complete the task below. Refer to Section 100 for your noted participant groups.</p> <p>Student participants</p>	<input type="radio"/> Survey Instrument <input checked="" type="radio"/> Focus Group Discussion <input type="radio"/> Individual Interview <input type="radio"/> Observation <input type="radio"/> Personal Records/Data Review or Analysis <input type="radio"/> Intervention/Physical Task <input type="radio"/> Other	<p>If OTHER, please describe:</p>	1-2 hours	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In-Person <input type="checkbox"/> Online <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone/Skype	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<p>If YES, note how the data will be recorded:</p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio-Recording <input type="checkbox"/> Video-Recording <input type="checkbox"/> Photographs	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No	<p>If YES, explain how medical clearance will be obtained. If a screening instrument will be used, you will need to upload it in the upload section after the application.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> All Participants <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Some Participants	<p>If only some of the participants will complete the task, note which groups of participants will complete the task below. Refer to Section 100 for your noted participant groups.</p> <p>Professional journalist participants</p>	<input type="radio"/> Survey Instrument <input checked="" type="radio"/> Focus Group Discussion <input type="radio"/> Individual Interview <input type="radio"/> Observation <input type="radio"/> Personal Records/Data Review or Analysis <input type="radio"/> Intervention/Physical Task <input type="radio"/> Other	<p>If OTHER, please describe:</p>	1-2 hours	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In-Person <input type="checkbox"/> Online <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone/Skype	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<p>If YES, note how the data will be recorded:</p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio-Recording <input type="checkbox"/> Video-Recording <input type="checkbox"/> Photographs	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No	<p>If YES, explain how medical clearance will be obtained. If a screening instrument will be used, you will need to upload it in the upload section after the application.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> All Participants <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Some Participants			<p>If OTHER, please describe:</p>	1-2 hours		<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No		<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No	

	<p>If only some of the participants will complete the task, note which groups of participants will complete the task below. Refer to Section 100 for your noted participant groups.</p> <p>Professor of community journalism class</p>	<input type="radio"/> Survey Instrument <input type="radio"/> Focus Group Discussion <input checked="" type="radio"/> Individual Interview <input type="radio"/> Observation <input type="radio"/> Personal Records/Data Review or Analysis <input type="radio"/> Intervention/Physical Task <input type="radio"/> Other			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In-Person <input type="checkbox"/> Online <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone/Skype		<p>If YES, note how the data will be recorded:</p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio-Recording <input type="checkbox"/> Video-Recording <input type="checkbox"/> Photographs		<p>If YES, explain how medical clearance will be obtained. If a screening instrument will be used, you will need to upload it in the upload section after the application.</p>
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

7.3 Does your research design include any of the following elements?

- Research for a thesis/dissertation
- International research
- Deception
- Research involving the military

7.4 If you are using an online survey, enter the URL's (links) for the survey(s) in the box below and upload a hard-copy version in the upload screens that are displayed after you complete the application.

8.0 160 - Student Research

8.1 Note: Students who are serving as Principal Investigator on the study must submit a signed Student as Principal Investigator form. Please go to the IRB website ([irb.ou.edu](http://irb.ou.edu)) and click on Application Forms under "Resources" to access this form. You will be asked to upload it at the end of the application.

Provide the name of the student who is writing the thesis/dissertation:

8.2 Provide five (5) references from the literature to support your hypothesis:

1. Brants, K. (2013) Chapter 1: Trust, cynicism and responsiveness: the uneasy situation of journalism and democracy. *Rethinking Journalism: Trust and Participation in a Transformed Landscape*. Routledge Press. New York.
2. Broersma, M. & Peters, C. (2013). Introduction: Rethinking journalism: the structural transformation of a public good. *Rethinking Journalism: Trust and Participation in a Transformed Landscape*. Routledge Press. New York.
3. Flournoy, C. (2007). Doing learning: Investigative reporting and service learning. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*. Spring 2007, 47-61.

4. Lauterer, J. (2006). *Community Journalism: Relentlessly Local*. University of North Carolina Press.

5. Rauch, J. & Trager, K.D. & Kim, E. (2003). *Clinging to Tradition, Welcoming Civic*

*Solutions: A Survey of College Students' Attitudes toward Civic Journalism. Journalism & Mass Communication Educator. 58 (2), 175-186.*

8.3 What is the proposed end date for this research project?

12/01/2017

## 9.0 200 - Study Sites

9.1 Describe your study site(s):

1. The existing data set of students' written reflection work is saved on the Community Journalism professor's computer. He has agreed to print these for me or send them electronically after he removes identifying information. 2. In-person focus groups with student participants will take place at the University of Oklahoma Gaylord College in a classroom or meeting room. Students are familiar with this setting. I work at this institution and have access to the rooms. 3. In-person focus groups of journalists will take place at a public, but relatively quiet meeting spot to be determined in the Oklahoma City-metro area based on the location and schedules of participants. 4. The individual interview with the professor can take place at the location of his choosing, most likely his office in Gaylord College or another room or meeting area on the OU campus.

If online focus groups are necessary for either students or journalists, this can be accomplished in a social media closed group setting, such as a Facebook private group or GoogleGroups, in which an invitation is required to join or a password is required to join. However, one in-person focus group with students and one in-person focus group with professionals is my ideal and first choice.

9.2 Are there multiple data collection sites, with different investigators conducting research at those sites?

Yes  No

**If YES, enter the names of each site and the lead investigator at each site, and respond to the questions below.**

Describe the management plan for monitoring the conduct of research activities at each site.

Describe how research data will be transferred to the Principal Investigator's site.

Describe how the Principal Investigator will be notified of the need for modifications, and of any unanticipated problems and/or protocol deviations.

Describe how the Principal Investigator will confirm information for Continuing Reviews and notify all study sites of study closure.

## 10.0 250 - Key Study Personnel Roles

10.1 Click the "Add a row" button to add a row, then select a member of your KSP and list the research responsibilities and availability. Click the button again to add another row until you have a row for each KSP. This table must reflect each person listed in Section 3.0, including your faculty sponsor (if applicable).

Name and Information		What will this person do?							
Wilderman, Melanie G, MA	Position at institution: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Adjunct Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Research Center Employee	Will this person directly interact with participants? <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	This person is adequately trained and has sufficient time for these activities. <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	Human Subjects' Research (HSR) Activities <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Recruit <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collect Data <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manage/Monitor Identifiable Data <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Analyze Identifiable Data	Not-HSR Activities <input type="checkbox"/> Analyze De-Identified Data <input type="checkbox"/> Advise/Consult <input type="checkbox"/> Manuscript Preparation <input type="checkbox"/> Other	If "Other", please describe:	This researcher will be involved in the following activities (check all that apply): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conducting study activities at OU <input type="checkbox"/> Conducting study activities at another institution <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conducting study activities in the field	Is this person associated with another institution? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No	If YES, please provide the name of the institution and contact information for the HRPP/IRB office at that institution.

10.2 Describe the key study personnel management process and continuing interaction between the Principal Investigator and research team/faculty sponsor to assure that the protocol is being carried out as approved by the IRB. For example: How often will you meet with your research team? Who is responsible for notifying the IRB of any deviations or unanticipated problems?

While I am the sole investigator and I will conduct and manage all research in this study, I will meet as necessary with my chair at OSU to discuss issues or ideas as they arise. We meet either in person, on the phone or in a Skype chat.

10.3 Are there any non-OU collaborating researchers involved with this study?

Yes  No

## 11.0 300 - Risks and Benefits

### 11.1 Investigator's Risk / Benefit Assessment

Select the appropriate option for your study:

- Research not involving greater than minimal risk.
- Research involving greater than minimal risk, but presents the prospect of direct benefit to individual participants.
- Research involving greater than minimal risk and there is no prospect of direct benefit for the individual participant; however, it is likely to yield generalizable knowledge about the participants' disorders or conditions.

11.2 If the research exposes participants to risks that are greater than those they would experience in their daily lives, check all of the boxes for risks that apply:

- Economic/Financial Risks
- Employment/Occupational/Professional Risks
- Legal Risks
- Physical Risks
- Psychological Risks
- Social Risks

Other

If OTHER, please describe:

11.3 If you selected risks above, what is the possibility that these risks will occur and what is the likely severity if they do?

11.4 Explain what steps will be taken to minimize risks and to protect participant welfare.

Before a focus group (or the one individual interview with the professor) session begins, I will read a statement describing what my research is about along with information letting the participants know they are not obligated to participate and can opt out at any time during the focus group. I will hand out a form to sign to obtain their consent and collect that form at the time of the focus group. I will make a copy and give it to each participant as well. I will be solely responsible for seeking consent. Please see Appendix F for the consent form. For student participants, I will not seek out any student who I have taught or who has worked for me or who is enrolled in a class with me next semester to eliminate any perception that they need to participate due to a student/teacher relationship.

11.5 Describe the anticipated benefits research participants will experience directly. Do not include compensation here. If none, state "None."

none

## 12.0 350 - Recruitment

12.1 Describe your proposed recruitment procedures:

For example, consider the following questions:

- Who will approach potential participants?
- What information are potential participants given about the study?
- What safeguards are in place to minimize coercion?
- If the researcher(s) is also the participants' supervisor/instructor, how will you assure that the identities of the research participants remain unknown to the researchers until after (1) the data have been gathered and de-identified or (2) the class grades have been assigned?

### Guidance

- If the participants are under the direct supervision of the researcher(s) [such as employees or students of the researcher(s)], someone other than the researcher must conduct all recruitment and identifiable data collection activities.

Student participants: I will obtain the enrollment list from the professor of students who took the Community Journalism class in the past two years. With their names, I can look up their OU email addresses. Even if they have graduated, they will still have an OU email account. I will then send individual emails to the students asking them to participate. Please see Appendix F for script for email in attachment. If I do not receive a response via email, I will look up their names on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Linked in and send the message via social media private messaging. Professional participants: I will use the Internet to find work phone numbers and email addresses of the journalists and editors who are known to practice community journalism at Oklahoma publications. I will then call or individual emails to the professionals asking them to participate. Please see Appendix F for script for phone call/email in attachment. If I do not receive a response via phone or email, I will look up their names on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Linked in and send the message via social media private messaging. Professor participant: As this professor is my colleague, I will ask him in person to schedule an interview. He is already aware of my proposed study and has agreed to be interviewed after IRB approval.

12.2 Indicate how potential participants will be approached:

Direct Contact / Verbal Script

Telephone Script

Email

- Recruitment Flyer
- Web Posting
- Other

If OTHER, please describe:

### 13.0 400 - Compensation to Participants

#### 13.1 Select the form of compensation:

- None, No Compensation
- Cash
- Gift/Gas Card
- Food
- Class Credit Hours/Extra Credit
- Other

If OTHER, please describe:

#### 13.2 Provide the total amount of compensation a participant is eligible to receive for the research:

#### 13.3 When and how often will the participant receive compensation?

### 14.0 450 - Informed Consent

#### 14.1 Check each method that applies:

- Signed consent
- Online consent via the internet or email
- Verbal consent
- Informed consent will not be obtained because this research studies pre-existing data
- Deception consent with debriefing document

#### 14.2 Who will be consenting to participate in the research? (Check all that apply)

- Participant
- Child
- Parent of Child
- Guardian
- Legally Authorized Representative
- Child, Parent, Guardian, or Legally Authorized Representative outside of the state of Oklahoma

#### 14.3 Describe the measures instituted to minimize undue influence and/or coercion during the recruitment and consent process. Be sure to note when consent will be obtained and any waiting period between informing the participant about the study and obtaining consent.

Before a focus group (or the one individual interview with the professor) session begins, I will read a statement describing what my research is about along with information letting the participants know they are not obligated to participate and can opt out at any time during the focus group. I will hand out a form to sign to obtain their consent and collect that form at the time of the focus group. I will make a copy and give it to each participant as well. I will be solely responsible for seeking consent. Please see Appendix F for the consent form.

#### 14.4 If the researcher is also the participants' supervisor or instructor, how will you assure that the identity of the participant remains unknown until after 1) the data have been gathered and have been de-identified or 2) the class grades have been assigned?

I will not ask any students who have taken a class with me, worked for me, or are enrolled in a class with me next

semester to participate.

#### 15.0 500 - Review or Analysis of Pre-Existing Records / Data / Biological Specimens

##### 15.1 Describe any pre-existing research data:

Approximately 40 reflection statements from students over four semesters of the Community Journalism class, from spring 2013-fall 2014 (reflection statements were not collected after fall 2014 in this course). These statements come from an assignment the professor of the class assigned during this time span. They can be given to me as printed paper documents or electronic documents. Either way, the names will be removed before they come to me.

##### 15.2 Number of research records to be analyzed:

40

Specify the variables/information included in the research records:

Written work from the students

#### 16.0 550 - Funding

##### 16.1 Check all of the appropriate boxes for funding / support sources for this research. Include pending funding source(s).

- Not externally funded
- External funding [Industry, Government (Non-Federal), Non-Profit]
- Funding from one of these federal agencies: Departments of Defense, Energy, Justice, Education, or Environmental Protection Agency
- Funding from any other federal program not listed above

If you are receiving funding from a federal program not listed below, please describe here:

##### 16.2 Has this research proposal been routed through the Office of Research Services (ORS)?

- Yes / In progress
- No

If "Yes / In progress", enter the ORS proposal/award number:

#### 17.0 600 - Privacy and Confidentiality

##### 17.1 What identifying information will you collect from research participants?

- Name
- Contact Information
- Employer and Job Title
- Demographic Identifiers
- Health Status Identifiers
- Direct Quotations
- Other Identifiable Information
- No Identifying Information

If you selected "Other Identifiable Information" above, please describe:

17.2 Will you provide a copy of identified research data to anyone outside of the research team?

Yes  No

If YES, explain why and to whom:

17.3 How will you transfer the data to other investigators, outside entities, or devices?

- Data transfer via a secured network connection
- Data transfer via encrypted files or devices
- Data transfer via secure cloud network hosted by OU
- Data transfer via secure cloud network not hosted by OU
- Other

If OTHER, please describe:

17.4 How will you protect the identity of your participants?

- Interactions are held in a private area.
- Only designated personnel are present during discussions.
- Research records are reviewed in a private area.
- Data are coded; data key is destroyed at end of study.
- Data are coded; data key is kept separately and securely.
- Other

If OTHER, describe:

Describe other persons who are not participants who will be present for the research, and note what they will be doing during the research activities.

17.5 How will participants be recorded?

- Audio-Recording
- Video-Recording
- Photographs
- Electronic Monitoring
- Other
- No Recordings

If OTHER, please describe:

Who will transcribe those files and how will participants' identities be protected in the transcripts and in transferring the data to the transcriptionist?

I will transcribe. I will not need to use participants' names in transcriptions.

17.6 How will you store data during the research project?

- Data are kept in a locked filing cabinet.
- Data are kept in a locked office or suite.
- Electronic data are protected with a password.
- Data are stored on a secure network.
- Other

If OTHER, please describe:



17.7 How long will you retain data and how will you dispose of it? Provide justification if you plan to retain data indefinitely.

I will dispose of data 6 months after the end of the study.

17.8 Will you obtain a Federal Certificate of Confidentiality for this research?

Yes  No

If YES, attach documentation of application (and a copy of the Certificate of Confidentiality award if granted) at the end of the application process. If the data collected contains information about illegal behavior, visit the NIH Certificate of Confidentiality.

18.0 650 - Application Type

18.1 What level of review is appropriate for your research?

- Full Board/Committee  
 Expedited  
 Exempt

19.0 665 - Expedited Review Categories

19.1 Select the appropriate categories:

- 1 - A very limited number of approved drugs and devices  
 2 - Blood sampling  
 3 - Noninvasive specimen collection  
 4 - Noninvasive clinical procedures  
 5 - Research involving materials that were previously collected for either non-research or research purposes  
 6 - Use of recordings  
 7 - Low risk behavioral research

20.0 700 - Conflict of Interest

20.1 Do you or any key study personnel, including non-OU collaborators, have a Conflict of Interest (as defined in the OU COI Policy – see help bubble) that could possibly affect or be perceived to affect the results of the research, educational, or service activities proposed?

Yes  No

If you answered 'Yes' to the COI question, click the bar to complete the COI Disclosure Form. If your campus's Office of Research has provided you with a COI management plan, upload it along with your other study documents -OR- upload documentation from that office that a management plan is not required.

No form has been attached.

21.0 750 - HIPAA

21.1 Does your research involve the collection, use, or sharing of Protected Health Information from medical diagnoses or medical records?

Yes  No

If Yes, you are required to store PHI on a secure data server or on an encrypted device, and to transmit the PHI using only secure transmissions (e.g., University approved portal, encrypted email, secure file transfer).

Please contact IT for assistance.

Please note: Storing Protected Health Information (PHI) in the cloud (Office 365, Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey, etc.,) is not permitted.

HIPAA templates are located on the OU IRB website ([irb.ou.edu](http://irb.ou.edu)), under Resources - Application Forms. You will have the opportunity to upload HIPAA documents at the end of the application.

## 22.0 800 - Final Assurances

22.1 Use the text box below to add any other information you would like to include in this application.

I received an email this week from the OSU IRB noting that this proposal should go through the OU IRB. I am happy to provide a copy of this email, any OSU contacts you may need and the full submission as it was sent to OSU IRB. Please let me know if and how I can provide information to help this process along.

## 22.2 Principal Investigator Certifications

- I certify that all information provided in this submission, including support materials, is complete and accurate.
- I certify that all investigators have completed the education requirements of the Norman Campus IRB (&#34;NC IRB&#34;) as applicable and required for conducting human subjects research.
- I assure that I have obtained all necessary approvals from external entities, as applicable and required for conducting human subjects research.
- I assure compliance of all investigators to this submission as approved; relevant OU IRB policies and procedures; applicable federal, state and local laws; and, ethical conduct of the research and protection of the rights and welfare of human participants, as applicable and required for conducting human subjects research.
- I agree that all participants entered onto the master list of participants for the study must sign a consent document prior to undergoing any study related interactions or interventions, unless the IRB has granted a waiver of informed consent or a waiver of signed consent.
- I agree to promptly report protocol deviations and/or unanticipated problems as defined by OU IRB policy to the OU IRB, as applicable.
- I assure that I have documentation of encryption for all electronic devices used in conducting human subjects research.

## Signed Consent to Participate in Research

I am Melanie Wilderman from the Gaylord College, and I invite you to participate in my research project entitled “**Exploring Options to Build Trust Between Journalists and Audiences in Collegiate Community Journalism Education.**” This research is being conducted at the University of Oklahoma. You were selected as a possible participant because you have either taken a course in community journalism, teach community journalism or practice community journalism as a professional. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

**Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.**

**What is the purpose of this research?** The purpose of this study is to explore options for improving trust between journalists and their communities by means of the preparation that occurs in higher education.

**How many participants will be in this research?** About nine journalism students, five journalism professionals and one journalism professor will take part in this research.

**What will I be asked to do?** If you agree to be in this research, you will answer questions about your experiences in community journalism in a focus group or individual interview.

**How long will this take?** Your participation will take one to two hours during either a focus group or individual interview. There is potential for a short follow up via email or phone.

**Are there any risks or benefits to participating in this research?** There are no risks and no benefits from being in this research

**Will I be compensated for participating?** You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this research.

**Who will see my information?** In research reports, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you without your permission. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records. You have the right to access the research data that has been collected about you as a part of this research. However, you may not have access to this information until the entire research has completely finished and you consent to this temporary restriction.

**Do I have to participate?** No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

**Will my identity be anonymous or confidential?** Your name will not be retained or linked with your responses unless you specifically agree to be identified. The data you provide will be destroyed unless you specifically agree for data retention or retention of contact information at the end of the research. Please check all of the options that you agree to:

I agree to being quoted directly.  Yes  No

I agree to have my name reported with quoted material.  Yes  No

I agree for the researcher to use my data in future studies.  Yes  No



**Audio Recording of Research Activities** To assist with accurate recording of your responses interviews or focus groups may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty. However, for focus groups, recording is necessary, so if you do not wish to be recording, you cannot participate in this research.

I consent to audio recording.  Yes  No

**Will I be contacted again?** The researcher may like to contact you again to gather or clarify additional information.

I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future.

I do not wish to be contacted by the researcher again.

**Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints?** If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact me at 405-615-3876 or [mgwilderma@ou.edu](mailto:mgwilderma@ou.edu). You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or [irb@ou.edu](mailto:irb@ou.edu) if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

*You will be given a copy of this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.*

Participant Signature	Print Name	Date
Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent	Print Name	Date

## Appendix F

### Recruitment messages

#### **Name of study: Exploring Options to Build Trust Between Journalists and Audiences in Collegiate Community Journalism Education**

#### **Principal Investigator: Melanie Wilderman**

Script for email, phone or social media messages to potential participants:

Greetings, NAME,

#### **(For students)**

I am writing/calling to request your voluntary participation to assist in research for my dissertation on the topic of college students, community journalism and building trust with audiences. You have completed the Community Journalism course at Gaylord College in the past three years, which makes you a valuable participant on this topic.

If you choose to participate, I will ask that you take part in a focus group, ideally in person at the Gaylord College (for those still in the area) or in a private online group (if some do not live close by). I will arrange a time in June that works for your schedule. These focus group sessions will last no longer than one hour, and the questions will focus on your experiences in the Community Journalism class. Any follow up questions can be handled via phone or email.

Participation is voluntary. There are no repercussions to not participating. Additionally, if you do participate, there is no compensation and no personal benefits. All personal information about yourself will be kept confidential and not reported in the research. Nothing you say will be tied to your name.

I would greatly appreciate your willingness to participate. Please respond and let me know if you are able to do so.

Thank you for your time.

Melanie Wilderman

Assistant Professor of Journalism, Gaylord College

Doctoral Candidate in Higher Education Administration, Oklahoma State University

*The OU IRB has approved the content of this advertisement but the investigator is responsible for securing authorization to distribute this message by mass email.*

#### **For professionals:**

I am writing/calling to request your voluntary participation to assist in research for my dissertation on the topic of college students, community journalism and building trust with audiences. You work at a publication that is known to participate in community journalism tactics, and you likely are now or will be in the future



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## Appendix F

working with young journalists just out of college, which makes you a valuable participant on this topic.

If you choose to participate, I will ask that you take part in a focus group, ideally in person at an agreed upon location in the Oklahoma metro area (for those in the area) or in a private online group (if some do not live close by). These focus group sessions will last no longer than one hour, and the questions will focus on your experiences with working in community journalism and opinions about the future of community journalism. Any follow up questions can be handled via phone or email. I will make contact with you to arrange a time for the focus group that works for your schedule in June 2017.

Participation is voluntary. There are no repercussions to not participating. Additionally, if you do participate, there is no compensation and no personal benefits. All personal information about yourself will be kept confidential and not reported in the research. Nothing you say will be tied to your name.

I would greatly appreciate your willingness to participate. Please respond and let me know if you are able to do so.

Thank you for your time.

Melanie Wilderman

Assistant Professor of Journalism, Gaylord College

Doctoral Candidate in Higher Education Administration, Oklahoma State University

*The University of Oklahoma is an Equal Opportunity Institution*

### **For the professor (face-to-face verbal request):**

I would like to ask for your voluntary participation to assist in research for my dissertation on the topic of college students, community journalism and building trust with audiences. You have been teaching community journalism for many years now, which makes you a valuable participant for this research.

If you choose to participate, I will ask that you take part in one-on-one interview, for approximately 30 minutes, with me at Gaylord College at some point in June 2017 that works with your schedule. The questions will focus on your experiences with working in community journalism, teaching community journalism, and your opinions about the future of community journalism.

Participation is voluntary. There are no repercussions to not participating. Additionally, if you do participate, there is no compensation and no personal benefits. All personal information about yourself will be kept confidential and not reported in the research. Nothing you say will be tied to your name. I would greatly appreciate your willingness to participate. Are you able to do this, and when is a good time for us to schedule the interview?



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## Appendix A

**Name of study:** Exploring Options to Build Trust Between Journalists and Audiences in Collegiate Community Journalism Education

**Principal Investigator:** Melanie Wilderman

Questions for focus groups **with students:**

1. Think back to your time in the community journalism class. What stands out to you as the main lesson learned in this class?
2. What other lessons came out of the class?
3. Tell me about meeting with community partners or community newspaper leaders.
  - a. How did that go?
4. What did you learn from these community partners or newspaper leaders?
5. Of course, community journalism deals with communities, but what did you learn that stands out about the community you were studying?
6. Did you get the sense that the community members liked their news publications? Explain why or why not.
  - a. Do you think they trusted their publication? Explain.
7. What did you learn in that semester about journalists and reliability?
8. What major issues did your community partner or newspaper leader express to you about the profession?
9. What did you learn in that semester about journalists and credibility?
10. What did you learn in the class about journalists and being responsive to their communities?
11. If you are still in school, how might you apply what you learned in the class to your first journalism job? Likewise, if you have graduated and are working in journalism, how are you applying the lessons from community journalism?
12. Is community journalism an important class for the journalism curriculum? Please explain your answer.
13. What, if anything, did you find most difficult about the class?
14. What, if anything, did you find most rewarding about this class?
15. What do you think, as a journalist, is the best way to get your audience to trust you?
16. How do you know as a journalist when your audience has trust in you—what evidence is there of trust?
17. How can journalism in general improve its standing with the public?
18. What else would you like to add?



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## Appendix C

**Name of study:** Exploring Options to Build Trust Between Journalists and Audiences in Collegiate Community Journalism Education

**Principal Investigator:** Melanie Wilderman

Questions for focus groups with **professionals:**

1. Your publications are known for practicing community journalism. What does that phrase mean when it comes to everyday work in the newsroom?
2. Tell me about your audience.
  - a. Can you also tell me a little about your relationship with your audience?
  - b. Is that the same as your publication's relationship to the audience? If not, explain the difference.
3. What have you learned about your community in your time with your publication?
4. Did you get the sense that the community members like their news publications? Explain why or why not.
  - a. Do you think they trust you? Explain.
  - b. Do you think they trust the publication? Explain.
5. How do you know as a journalist when your audience has trust in you—what evidence is there of trust?
  - a. Has this changed over the years? Explain.
6. What do you think it means to be a reliable publication/journalist?
7. What community issues has your audience brought to your attention in recent years?
8. What do you think it means to be a credible publication/journalist?
9. Do you think you are responsive to your community? Explain.
10. I've read some research that says all good journalism is community journalism. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
11. Do you have journalists working for you who are just out of college or just to 2-3 years out of college? If so, how are they fitting in to the community journalism model?
12. Have you worked with any college interns or students in college classes recently? How did those experiences turn out?
13. What do you think, as a journalist, is the best way to get your audience to trust you?
14. How can journalism in general improve its standing with the public?



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## Appendix C

15. Think about your experiences working with college students and new journalists less than 3 years after their graduation, and also the ideas that you just shared about earning public trust and improving the media's standing with the public. Based on those experiences, what would you change about the curriculum of the journalism program where you earned your degree? Would you add a community journalism course if there isn't one? Why/not?
16. What else would you like to add?

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## Appendix B

**Name of study:** Exploring Options to Build Trust Between Journalists and Audiences in Collegiate Community Journalism Education

**Principal Investigator:** Melanie Wilderman

Questions for individual interview **w/community journalism professor**

1. I've read the syllabus and description for the course, but will you tell me in your own words what the community journalism class is all about?
2. Let me read you the academic definition of community journalism I'm using for this research. (Read it to them) Does that sound like what you are teaching, or is there another way you would describe community journalism?
3. When you were working in the field, did you practice community journalism?
  - a. If so, tell me about that.
  - b. And how has it changed since you left the field?
4. I've read some research that says all good journalism is community journalism. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
5. Research still shows that audiences don't trust journalists. What do you think are the reasons for this?
  - a. Do you address these issues in your class? If so, how?
6. How do you know as a journalist when your audience has trust in you—what evidence is there of trust?
  - a. Has that changed over the years? If so, why do you think that is?
7. What is the main lesson you try to impart on students before they leave this class?
  - a. Do you think they are understanding that lesson?
8. Do you specifically address the issue of trust between journalists and audience in this course—is there a section dedicated to it?
  - a. If so, how do you address that?
  - b. If not, why do you not address that?
9. What do you think it means to be a reliable publication/journalist?
10. What do you think the students get out of teaming up with community partners and/or community journalism publications for this class?
11. What do you think it means to be a credible publication/journalist?
12. What lessons in this class do you think are most important for the students to take with them as professionals?
13. Have you heard from any recent graduates who are working in community journalism?

## **Appendix B**

- a. If so, what are they telling you?
14. Is community journalism an important class for journalism curriculum in college?  
Please explain your answer.
15. What are student journalists not learning in college that they should be learning?
16. What do you think, as a journalist and a journalism educator, is the best way to get your audience to trust you?
17. How can journalism in general improve its standing with the public?
18. What else would you like to add?

## JMC 3043: Community Journalism Spring 2015



### Instructor's Name and Info

Prerequisites: JMC 2033

### Overview

The meaning of community is evolving as new media becomes more important in the cultural mix. Social media is changing the way people describe the communities to which they belong. Geographical communities continue to define media consumers. But so do online communities, ethnic and racial communities, gender communities and other groups seeking to find and exchange relevant information.

The changes are forcing communication professionals to rethink the ways in which they connect with their audiences. Newspapers and broadcasters are developing new ways to attract readers and viewers. Bloggers and online media are moving to seize audience share from legacy media in much the same way that radio and television seized audiences when they came into existence. Public relations and advertising professionals are creating novel ways to reach their audience, whether it is the reporter in a newsroom or the couch potato at home.

We will explore a variety of forms of community journalism from its roots in the small town newspapers that have provided a verbal/visual town square for centuries to current redefinitions of the concept of community and the media manifestations of those redefinitions.

We will hear from newspaper publishers, editors, broadcasters, minority media members and bloggers talk about steps they are taking to maintain connections or reconnect to their audience whether it is instituting hyper local coverage or focusing more heavily on so-called breaking news.

We will also explore ways to increase connections through various type of

stories including business, sports and

### **Learning Outcomes**

This course seeks to provide students with:

- A clearer understanding of how they can use other forms of media to distribute content, not just keep in touch with family and friends.
- An understanding of the community's role in society.
- An integrated view in how traditional media and other forms of community media can work together.

### **Oklahoma Community Papers**

Each week during the semester we will analyze the content of one of the state's top community papers. The discussion will be lead by a pair of students who will work together to determine what they see as the strengths/weaknesses of the paper. The discussions will be held on Tuesdays.

**RESEARCH PAPER:** Each student must write a 12-15-page research paper, with a minimum of 20 citations, about a community medium's efforts to remain relevant and why the community is such an important component in communications—whether it is journalism, advertising or public relations. Students must interview a practitioner of community journalism about how they are dealing with the rapidly evolving technological landscape. This interview will help inform the research that must be undertaken. Your work will be graded on professional standards, which includes issues of craft, depth of sourcing and research. – **400 possible points**

*Research proposals* – Two pages –Due Feb. 5. Each student will present a three minute synopsis of their proposal, why it is important and who they plan to interview – 40 points

*Bibliography* – Two pages – Due Feb. 26 – 60 points

*Literature Review* – Due March 12 -- Four pages properly footnoted or with endnotes – 80 points

*First draft* – 12-15 pages – Due April 2 – properly footnoted or with endnotes – 100 points

*Final paper* – 12-15 pages – Due April 30 – properly footnoted or with endnotes – 120 points

### **Midterm Exam -- Feb. 28 – 100 points**

**Readings:** The core of the course is contained in the readings you will be assigned. This course operates in a seminar format. Failure to read the readings each week hurts you and your classmates. Extra credit will be given to those who participate in the class discussion.

### **Quizzes – 200 points**

### **Books/Course Pack:**

### Required:

- Course Pack – Available from: King Copy, 119 West Boyd St., Norman, Okla. Phone: (405) 321-0202

### Recommended Books:

- EMUS LOOSE IN EGNAR: BIG STORIES FROM SMALL TOWNS, Judy Muller, University of Nebraska Press, 2011, \$24.95
- FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNITY JOURNALISM. Reader & Hatcher, 2012. Amazon: \$39.24.
- BAD NEWS AND GOOD JUDGMENT: A Guide to Reporting on Sensitive Issues in a Small-Town Newspaper. Pumarlo, 2005. Amazon: \$18.95
- SuperMedia: Saving Journalism So It Can Save the World, Charlie Beckett, Wiley-Blackwell, 2008. \$17.34 paperback via Amazon; \$15.61 Kindle Edition

### Readings:

Each week you will be assigned readings from the course pack. Also, you should remain current on the material being produced on two blogs.

MediaShift: Your Guide to the Digital Media Revolution by Mark Glaser. This is the PBS webzine tracking the digital divide. Located at:  
<http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/>

### What's News Discussions

Each week class members will lead a discussion about one of Oklahoma's community newspapers. Each team member will be required to select at least 3 stories to review and then lead a discussion about. *See the What's News Discussion outline posted on D2L.* The outline is also attached to this syllabus

**The discussions are a key component of the class participation grade you will receive for the course.**

### Academic Integrity

The policy regarding academic honesty for this course consists of the definitions and policies as stated in the OU Faculty Handbook (October, 1998): "Honesty is a fundamental precept in all academic activities, and those privileged to be members of the university community have a special obligation to observe the highest standards of honesty and have the right to expect the same standards of all others." Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication and fraud. Cheating is "the use of unauthorized materials, methods, or information in any academic exercise, including improper collaboration." Plagiarism includes "the representation of the words and ideas of another as one's own." Fabrication includes "the falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise." This includes deliberate changing of research data (e.g., misreporting scores to better fit a desired hypothesis) and the faking of research data (e.g., making up answers to a survey instead of actually interviewing respondents). Fraud includes "the falsification, forgery, or misrepresentation of academic work, including the resubmission of work performed in one class for

credit in another class.”

For OU’s complete academic misconduct policy, go to:  
<http://www.ou.edu/provost/integrity-rights/>

Any student guilty of cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, fraud or other forms of dishonesty may be subjected to a failing grade in the course and disciplinary action in accordance with University regulations.

### **Respect for People and Their Individual Dignity**

We live in a society in which questions of difference and diversity play an increasingly central role in debates over cultural values, public policy and the shape of our daily lives. This is a course focuses on the role the mass media play in shaping how people feel about themselves and others. We will explore issues you may have never confronted before in your communities. A university campus has the unique ability to present new and different things. Some students may have ideas and beliefs that differ from those held in your communities and families. Everyone will be encouraged to participate and everyone will be respected. Please listen attentively when anyone is speaking in class.

It is the policy of the University to excuse absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required class work that may fall on religious holidays.

### **Classroom expectations**

This course operates as a seminar, albeit a very large seminar. You are expected to come to class, engage in discussions, meet your deadlines, work professionally, and support your team. Your work is graded on professional standards, which includes issues of craft, depth of sourcing and research.

### **Guest Speakers**

I hope to bring in a number of guests during the semester to discuss how they are using the new methods to distribute news.

### **Attendance**

More than three unexcused absences will result in lowering your final grade by one full letter grade. Absences are excused only for: 1) university-sanctioned events and religious holidays as outlined on the Provost’s web site when the instructor has been notified in advance; and 2) illness when medical treatment is required. If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes from other students. If you still have questions after consulting with classmates, see me during office hours.

### **Gaylord College requirement:**

- Each student must submit their final paper to the college’s online portfolio. Instructions will be provided. Failure to complete this requirement will result in a grade of incomplete for passing students.

**Late Work** – The deadlines outlined in this syllabus mean just that. They are a deadline. Failure to comply with the deadline will result in the loss of 10 percent credit for each day late the first week. After the second week, no credit will be given.

## **Policies**

*Cell phones.* Do not have a cell phone out during class. Do not text message, tweet or visit any other social media site during class. Be sure your cell phones are in a pocket, backpack or bag. You will be asked to leave the class and will be assigned an absence if you do not.

*Laptops, tablets:* Laptop and tablet use is not permitted.

## **Grading**

Your work is graded on professional standards, which includes issues of craft, depth of sourcing and research.

- Research paper – 400 points
  - Research proposals – 10 percent
  - Bibliography -- 15 percent
  - Literature Review – 20 percent
  - First draft – 12 pages including footnotes/endnotes – 25 percent
  - Final paper – 15 pages including footnotes/endnotes – 30 percent
- What's News discussion– 100 points
- Quizzes – 200 points

## **Final grade**

Final course grades will be assigned according to the following scale:

- A 90% - 100%
- B 80% – 89.99%
- C 70% – 79.99%
- D 60% – 69.99%
- F 59.99% and below

Grading on these criteria will be as follows:

- 90% - 100% = Shows mastery of material and concepts.
- 80% - 89.99% = Good effort at applying material and concepts.
- 70% - 79.99% = Meets minimum requirements or expectations.
- 60% - 69.99% = Shows little effort at understanding and applying concepts.
- 59.99% and below = Fails to meet requirements.

## **Access**

If you have special needs as addressed by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), please notify us immediately so accommodation can be made.



## VITA

Melanie Wilderman

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: EXPLORING OPTIONS TO BUILD TRUST BETWEEN JOURNALISTS AND AUDIENCES  
IN COLLEGIATE COMMUNITY JOURNALISM EDUCATION

Major Field: Higher Education

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in Higher Education at  
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December 2017

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Journalism at University of  
Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma in December 2003

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Journalism at University of  
Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma in May 2001

Experience: Instructor of Mass Communication, Northwestern Oklahoma State  
University, Alva, Oklahoma. August 2008 – May 2013  
Assistant Professor of Journalism, University of Oklahoma, Norman,  
Oklahoma. August 2013 – present.

Professional Memberships: Society of Professional Journalists, Journalism Education  
Association