

Community Engagement Report – 2015-2016

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The plan: I initially proposed creating a website to showcase student work from our Reporting classes and other courses that do not involve publication of student writing, editing and photography. This would also contribute to the media options in Bellingham.

*Revision: However, that proved to be both an ambitious project for the timeframe and inappropriate for spring quarter, when I was not teaching Reporting. I plan to launch **BellinghamMatters** in fall 2016 instead, and post work by the JOUR 397G class reporting on the campaign and elections. Other journalism professors, including at least one who is a Community Engagement Fellow in 2016-17, will also participate and post student work. In spring quarter 2016, I taught (for the first time) JOUR 450 Advanced Reporting, a capstone course for students in the news/editorial sequence of the Journalism major. The capstone courses for the other two tracks (public relations and visual journalism) have always had a service learning component.*

Preparation: First, I reached out to several potential news media partners in the Whatcom/Skagit area and discussed possible investigative reporting projects for the students. Generally, these were projects the editors or reporters had on the “back burner” but had lacked resources to pursue; they welcomed the opportunity to work with advanced student journalists. Each partner committed to meeting regularly with the students on their teams.

Goal: This was an opportunity to develop or strengthen ties with news organizations in Whatcom and Skagit Counties. Many journalism courses involve contact with professionals -- for example, as guest speakers – and all journalism students must complete a 240-hour internship as part of the major, so ongoing contact with news and PR organizations facilitate more internship opportunities. Working with a professional on an assignment for publication gives the advanced reporting students valuable hands-on experience with editors and additional insight into the profession – they’ve already received editing input from professors, student editors and possibly an internship supervisor, so this experience provided additional exposure before they begin their careers. And, importantly and ideally, this project gave all the students a portfolio piece to use as they seek an internship or job, as well as a professional reference in their community partner.

Process: Each partner met with the entire class and described the project. (They also gave some biographical information and shared their insight into journalism, job-hunting and related topics appropriate for a class of students who were within a few quarters of graduation.) Students self-selected into teams of three or four. Various milestone deadlines were set throughout the quarter, and students had time in and outside of class to discuss their progress and plans. The service learning assignment comprised the bulk of the work of JOUR 450 for the 17-member class.

At the end of the quarter, student teams gave presentations about their work. All community partners were invited, and this was also an opportunity for the students to see each other’s work as well.

Because of the nature of publications, the student work has appeared over the summer months in the several publications represented by our community partners. In several cases, this required some additional meetings with partners to answer questions and conduct additional reporting. However, nearly all of the teams produced stories were published; one more may be published in October 2016.

Evaluation: The 17 advanced reporting students produced eight stories that ran in print and online editions of three Whatcom/Skagit newspapers (listed below). The timeline was uneven, tied both to events and to the needs of the publications – three of the teams did some additional work after spring quarter ended, but they did complete the assignment and are rewarded with a strong “clip” for their portfolio. Next time, I’d strive to set a stricter timeline with earlier milestones so that the work was more nearly completed by the end of spring quarter.

The project met the goal of strengthening and establishing ties with area news organizations. The Skagit Valley Herald is a longtime partner of Western’s journalism department, typically hiring two or three interns every summer. That was again the case, with one of the students who worked with that news partner hired as an intern for summer 2016. Two other students (one from the JOUR 450 class) were hired as summer interns at

weeklies that are sibling publications of the Herald. Western's relationship was strengthened with The Bellingham Business Journal, which has not had interns for several years; the BBJ hired a journalism student as a summer intern and is seeking interns for other quarters during the academic year. Whatcom Watch, under a new managing editor (who was a news partner in this project), has not had Western interns for many years, and has hired several for summer and during the academic year. So Western journalism students have new opportunities for community engagement as a result of this quarter's partnership.

Following is a list of the projects, the resulting stories (including URLs) and participating journalism students.

JOUR 450 Projects & Partners

Changing Landscape of Carbon Rules

Partner: *Skagit Valley Herald* - Kimberly Cauvel, reporter

A discussion of the pending federal clean power plan and state Department of Ecology's Clean Air Rule. This is particularly relevant since Whatcom and Skagit Counties contain four of the five oil refineries in the state. It was also particularly challenging because the revised draft of the Clean Air Rule was released in late May; students had researched and written background material, and participated in a Webcast press conference.

Resulting stories:

"Efforts to curb carbon emissions grow in Washington, beyond"

http://www.goskagit.com/news/efforts-to-curb-carbon-emissions-grow-in-washington-beyond/article_3a900312-26b2-5124-b0e2-cf9937f44484.html

July 3, 2016

— This story is a collaboration between staff writer Kimberly Cauvel and Western Washington University student Brenna Visser.

"Pacific Coast leaders unite to combat climate change"

http://www.goskagit.com/news/pacific-coast-leaders-unite-to-combat-climate-change/article_a28fd8ce-fa9a-5dc3-88b9-91139500fca5.html

July 3, 2016

— This story is a collaboration between staff writer Kimberly Cauvel and Western Washington University student Maria Matson.

Food Deserts – Neighborhoods without groceries

Partner: *Whatcom Watch*, Bob Schober, managing editor

Haggen's is undergoing transitions; Whole Foods is moving in; Albertson's is closing. The restructuring results in a "food desert" for one of Bellingham's poorer neighborhoods. What are the social effects? What can be done?

Resulting story:

"Birchwood, Alderwood Neighborhoods Labeled as a Food Desert"

<http://whatcomwatch.org/index.php/article/birchwood-alderwood-neighborhoods-labeled-as-a-food-desert/>

July 2016 issue

by Christian Conahan, Janae Easlon and Elizabeth Kayser

Rental Inspections in Bellingham

Partner: *Bellingham Business Journal* – Emily Hamman, editor

The rental inspection program begins soon. What's the timeline? What's happened already, and what will happen next?

Resulting Stories:

“Rental inspections start next month”

<http://bbjtoday.com/blog/rental-inspections-start-next-month/33737>

May 11, 2016

By Kate Galambos and Daniel Roth

“Checking on rentals: Inspections to start this month for residential properties”

<http://bbjtoday.com/blog/checking-on-rentals-inspections-to-start-this-month-for-residential-properties/33906>

June 6, 2016

By Kate Galambos and Daniel Roth

Homelessness issues and rural poverty in particular

Partner: *Whatcom Watch*, Bob Schober, managing editor

Resulting story:

“Whatcom’s Homeless Women and Children”

<http://whatcomwatch.org/index.php/article/whatcoms-homeless-women-and-children/>

August 2016

by Kara Spencer and Vanessa Thomas

Steelhead runs – still threatened or overcautious?

Partner: *Skagit Valley Herald* - Kimberly Cauvel, reporter

Puget Sound winter steelhead were listed as threatened in 2007, and in 2010 spring steelhead fishing on the Skagit River was closed to help stem the decline of wild fish. Today reports show that returning fish are above the levels set by state fishery managers, and local anglers have protested the closure for four years.

Resulting story:

“Fisheries frustrations”

http://www.goskagit.com/news/fisheries-frustrations/article_d456e556-e1d1-52ba-89cc-4ad8732ea9a5.html

July 31, 2016

Western Washington University students Nick Belcaster, Ashe Lambe and Jennifer Seifried contributed to this report through their advanced reporting class.

Sex trafficking in Whatcom and the I-5 corridor

Partner: *Whatcom Watch*, Bob Schober, managing editor

What is the extent of the problem? What are the county and city government’s involvement, and what are community organizations doing in this regard?

(This is the remaining piece to be published; it may run in the October 2016 issue of Whatcom Watch)