A Real-World Journalism Education at the Daily Collegian

Walking around campus, I see a rack of newspapers near the front entrance to almost every building. Every day on Facebook, I see a link shared by a friend about a local event or a campus controversy.

That’s the reach of the Massachusetts Daily Collegian, the independent, student-run newspaper at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

As the Opinion & Editorial Editor, I am responsible for coordinating the production of the opinion section in print four days a week and helping out online 24/7. In addition to creating and maintaining a schedule of columnists, I send out reminders, manage meetings every week, propose changes to the bylaws, create rules about layout and design, collaborate with the graphics staff, represent the section at board of editors meetings, and much more.

The Collegian is a “teaching” newspaper, which means that its purpose is to teach students how to be journalists. Whether it’s writing breaking news, covering a big sports win, reviewing the latest show in Northampton, or giving your perspective on a local or national issue, the Collegian can give you the opportunities and help you improve your abilities.
Division I Athletics means sports writers got to cover UMass in the NCAA Tournament last year.

More than two years ago, I joined the staff as an opinion columnist. While I had been actively opinionated on Facebook and with my friends and family, I had never written my views down for public consumption. Yet, this newspaper not only offered me an opportunity to share my views, but said that I could do it every two weeks, even though I had no experience.

Over the past two years, I have written over 40 columns sharing opinions on the SGA, national politics, media personalities, feminism, local controversies, campus issues, state politics, and more. After having the opportunity to write for the student body once, I couldn’t give it up.

The next semester I applied to be an assistant opinion editor, an unpaid position that I loved. The next year, I applied to be the opinion senior producer, who coordinates opinion content for the web. Finally, I was hired as the opinion & editorial editor, and I have the opportunity to coordinate content, request color pages, and, most importantly, teach columnists how to write, editors how to edit, and graphic designers how to lay out a page.
With a Monday through Thursday print circulation of over 7,000, the Collegian is one of the largest college papers in New England, which means that my view can be read across campus in print, and by people across the world. My columns have been cited in German blogs, and once even appeared as a high school homework assignment.

Next year, 2015, also brings the 125th year of publication for the Collegian, which began publishing as Aggie Life in 1890. And with the advent of web-based news media, the Collegian now publishes seven days a week online, breaking stories over the weekend, publishing videos of local shows and events, and creating sports, news, arts, and opinion podcasts.
But most of the time, it just feels like walking into a home away from home.

If you’re interested in writing, visit the “Contact Us” page of DailyCollegian.com. If you just want to stay informed, pick up a print copy in your dorm and visit the website. You can also like “The Massachusetts Daily Collegian” on Facebook or follow on Twitter @MDCollegian.

(Photos courtesy of Cade Belisle/Daily Collegian and Justin Surgent/Daily Collegian)

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