

The Value of Scholastic Media

Students who work on high school media learn to think critically, research topics, conduct interviews, write clearly for an audience and work together as a team. In schools with strong journalism programs, they also learn how a free and responsible press can improve their school communities by informing, entertaining and influencing their audience.

Research out in the spring of 2008, “High School Journalism Matters,” by Jack Dvorak of Indiana University, shows those with student media experience get better high school grades overall, outscore others on ACT tests, and earn higher grades in college.

Not only do students who participate in school media improve their basic academic skills, they also understand more than other students about their rights and responsibilities in a democracy. The 2005 national survey by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, “The Future of the First Amendment,” showed an alarming lack of knowledge and concern about basic freedoms in the 100,000 teens surveyed. But those who took journalism courses or participated in their school’s newspaper or other media understood those freedoms better and were more willing to let others express opposing views.

The National Council of Teachers of English also reaffirmed the value of journalism courses in 2004 when it passed a resolution to support “maintaining, reinstating, or creating journalism programs and courses; and [promoting] the value of journalism programs that, under the guidance of a qualified journalism educator, give students a voice and allow them to exercise their constitutional right of free speech.”

Providing a strong high school media program isn’t always easy. Lack of funding, increased testing of “core subjects,” concern for the school’s image in the community and inadequately trained teachers create challenges, but these aren’t insurmountable. Today’s newsroom professionals, their organizations, and foundations are supporting student media both with funding and mentoring. Even teacher training is becoming more accessible through online courses and fully funded summer institutes. College and university schools and program are also actively involved.

Because of those reasons, ASJMC supports strong journalism programs as not only the training ground for future journalists but also as the place all students can learn about, appreciate and practice democracy in action. No other activity offers such authentic assessment as students publishing or broadcasting their work to the whole community. Thus even though scholastic media may not seem like necessary parts of the curriculum or of co-curricular activities, they are invaluable to students as they become better writers and thinkers and to the community as these students learn to value democracy and civic engagement. ASJMC urges you to encourage and support scholastic journalism programs and to encourage those involved to participate in workshops, training and online classes. Thus you can help build the foundation for tomorrow’s journalists, media consumers, and concerned citizens.

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