

THE EFFECTS OF INDIVIDUAL AND ROUTINE FORCES IN GATEKEEPING ON
STUDENT JOURNALISTS AND EDITORS OF UNIVERSITY
NEWSPAPER PUBLICATIONS

A Thesis

by

MEREDITH ANN CORTE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

August 2009

Major Subject: Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications

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Co-Chairs of Committee, Tracy A. Rutherford
Gary J. Wingenbach
Committee Members, Charles R. Conrad
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ABSTRACT

The Effects of Individual and Routine Forces in Gatekeeping on Student Journalists and Editors of University Newspaper Publications. (August 2009)

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Co-Chairs of Advisory Committee: Dr. Gary J. Wingenbach
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Most gatekeeping studies involve evaluating journalists and editors with years of media writing experience to determine how they are influenced by gatekeeping forces. While many universities publish a campus newspaper that is written and edited by the students, no research was found analyzing the impact that gatekeeping has on student newspaper publications. Therefore, this study attempted to measure the influence of gatekeeping forces on student reporters and student editors who work on university newspaper publications.

Data was collected through a web-based questionnaire that measured the influence of individual and routine gatekeeping forces. A convenient sample size of $N = 42$ was used to gather information about how students perceived a news story's level of newsworthiness. Results of this study indicated that particular routine forces of news media actions and influences of newsworthiness were more significant than other forces and significant relationships exist among certain individual and routine forces. This study also looked at how news media job titles can determine the level of importance

and influence of gatekeeping forces on news stories before reaching the final destination of publishing. Results indicated that significant differences exist in routine gatekeeping forces when compared to university student job title.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this degree and thesis to my family who have always been my major support system. Particularly to my parents, who have always encouraged me to pursue my dreams and never give up, even when times were difficult. Thank you for your encouragement and love. I couldn't have accomplished this without you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has been a long, educational journey through my many years of studying, quizzing, and testing to finally graduate from college and complete my master's degree. I could have never achieved such a goal if it wasn't for several people in my life who made these accomplishments possible.

First, I would like to thank my family. Nothing in my life could have ever been accomplished without your love and support. Mom and Dad, you have always encouraged me to work hard and reminded me that I can achieve any goal as long as I stay focused and dedicated. Thank you for your patience and guidance. Spencer and Mackenzie, you are the best brother and sister anyone could ask for. Thank you for the wonderful memories and for being my best friends. You have all been there for me whenever I needed you the most. I love you and cannot thank you enough for everything you have done for me.

I would like to thank my committee co-chairs, Dr. Tracy Rutherford and Dr. Gary Wingenbach, and committee member, Dr. Charles Conrad, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research. Thank you for all your advice, edits, knowledge, and wisdom. Without you, my thesis completion would have not been possible.

I also want to extend my gratitude to Dr. Bill Cassidy, who provided the survey instrument, and to all the students who were willing to participate in the study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

News stories travel a long path before they are newsworthy enough for distribution to readers as news stories. This path includes a number of gates that news stories must pass through before reaching a final destination of publishing. At these gates are individuals, known as *gatekeepers*, who hold the power of rejecting, or accepting, news stories as a result of different forces that affect the newsworthiness of the news story. This process is known as gatekeeping and has become one of the most notable areas of research for mass communications within the past 60 years.

Gatekeeping is an essential part of the news gathering and distribution process that initiates the many decision choices involved in writing. What do we want to write? What will we accept or reject? How do we want our audience to perceive our message? Though there is no universal definition of the term, McQuail's (2005) *Mass Communication Theory* best described gatekeeping as:

a widely used metaphor to describe the process by which selections are made in the media work, particularly in decisions regarding whether or not to allow a particular news report to pass through the 'gates' of a news medium into the news channels (p. 308).

Gatekeeping traces the pathway of news production, beginning when potential news items are conceived, discovered, and analyzed for newsworthiness; and ends with the final selection and shaping of news items and their dissemination (Shoemaker, 1996).

This thesis follows the style of *Journal of Applied Communications*.

Gatekeeping is one of the oldest theories researched in the field of mass communications, but many new developments have changed its impact. From the beginning, gatekeeping was viewed as a process of channels and gates that determine what is considered news, and what is not. “This process is as old as the process of communication, the town crier had to decide what to announce and what to withhold, and even gatekeeping in academic journals dates back to the mid-1600s” (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 3). Now, research has discovered forces that influence the flow of news items, negatively or positively, through the different channels and gates.

Gatekeeping has been studied with newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and even online publications to determine how each media type processes news stories to meet the needs and wants of their audience. Most of the studies involve evaluating journalists and editors with years of experience to determine how they are influenced by the gatekeeping process. However, no research was found analyzing the impact that gatekeeping has on student newspaper publications at public universities. Many universities publish a campus newspaper that is written and edited by the college students; therefore, this study aims to analyze the forces of gatekeeping that influence student journalists and student editors who work on university newspaper publications. Observing the history of gatekeeping research reveals the many potential influences and forces in gatekeeping and how it can affect student newspaper publications.

Theoretical Framework

Lewin first coined the term *gatekeeping* in his unfinished manuscript “theory of channels and gatekeepers,” which was later elaborated in 1951 in *Field Theory in Social Science*, an edited collection of Lewin’s work (Shoemaker, 1991). The study aimed to answer the question, “why people eat what they eat,” and was developed as a means of understanding how one could produce widespread social changes in a community by changing a population’s food habits. Lewin concluded that not all members of the population are equally important in determining food selections; therefore, social change could be accomplished by concentrating on the individual with the most control over food selection for the home. Food comes to the table through various channels. One channel begins at the grocery store, where food is purchased; but there are additional channels such as deliveries, buying food in the country, baking at home, canning, and growing in a family garden. Each channel is subdivided into various sections where a food unit may be rejected or accepted. The entrance to the channel and to each section is controlled by a “gatekeeper” (Lewin, 1943). Throughout this process, Lewin gave these gatekeepers complete control over whether or not an item would travel completely through a channel.

However, to understand and influence food habits, in addition to identifying the objective food channels and availability, it is important to know the psychological factors influencing the person who controls the channels. Lewin reported, “Understanding the functioning of the gate becomes equivalent then to understanding the factors which determine the decisions of the gatekeepers, and changing the social

process means influencing the gatekeeper” (1943, p. 186). Lewin’s study on gatekeeping evaluates three levels of influence: (a) An individual’s decision to purchase from the market or another channel, (b) routines or habits of family members, and (c) societal and cultural forces. Lewin classified these factors under two headings: Cognitive structure and motivation.

Cognitive structure applies to the terms that people use to think and speak about food and is composed of four sections: (a) Food outside and within consideration, (b) food for husbands and children, (c) meal patterns, and (d) the meaning of the eating situation. First, Lewin considered what food is and how it differs among cultures. “There are many edible materials which people never even consider for use because they do not think of them as food for themselves” (Lewin, 1943, p. 178). The first objective of studying food habits is to consider what is “food for us,” because if the culture does not acknowledge an item as food, neither will the gatekeeper. The second section identified the typical food preference of other family members and their influence on the gatekeeper. For example, Lewin demonstrated that the most typical husband’s food was found to be meat, while the most typical food for children was vegetables. The third section acknowledges what food is acceptable for each meal. Breakfast foods were found to be mostly comprised of eggs and toast, lunch foods consisted of salads, sandwiches, and fruits; and foods for dinner contained meat, vegetables, potatoes, and dessert. These set ideas for food can influence the decision process of the gatekeeper. The fourth section acknowledges the feeling of group belongingness created by eating in the company of others. Whether it is friends, family, or coworkers, “the ‘eating group’

greatly influences the eating conduct and the eating ideology of the individual” (Lewin, 1943, p. 180).

Motivation pertains to the system of values behind the gatekeeper’s choice of food, which Lewin divides into three categories: (a) Values behind food selection, (b) food needs, and (c) obstacles to be overcome. Lewin determined the values people use when selecting food include expense, health, taste, and status; and each value does not contain the same strength for every individual or group. Lewin recognized that the relative weight of the various needs for food may change over time due to satisfaction, situation, or cultural forces toward diet variations. For example, if a family’s diet must be altered due to health reasons, the corresponding value will increase in strength. Lewin also acknowledged that obstacles, such as lack of domestic help and time necessary for preparing and cooking, would influence the food selection choice of the gatekeeper (Lewin, 1943).

Lewin’s analysis of the flow of food “ holds not only for food channels but also for the traveling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group, for movement of goods, and the social locomotion of individuals in many organizations” (Lewin, 1943). Since Lewin, many researchers have connected this theory to mass communications and have further examined the forces that influence the gatekeeping process.

White, Lewin’s research assistant at the University of Iowa, was the first communication scholar to apply Lewin’s theory of channels and gatekeeping to a communication project (1950). White’s 1950 study closely examined how one of the

gatekeepers in the complex channels of communication operates the “gate.” His study was constructed to evaluate why the wire editor selected or rejected news stories filed by press associations and gain an understanding about the general role of the gatekeeper in the areas of mass communications. White’s subject was a 40-year-old man with approximately 25 years of journalism experience, who was a wire editor for a morning newspaper in a highly industrialized Midwest city. Known as “Mr. Gates,” the subject was asked to keep all copies of stories that came into his office from three wire services: (a) The Associated Press, (b) United Press, and (c) International News Service. For the period of February 6 through 19, 1949, Mr. Gates saved every piece of wire copy that he rejected and recorded the reason why it was discarded.

Through observation of Mr. Gates’ selection decisions, White began to “understand how highly subjective, reliant upon value-judgments based on the gatekeeper’s own experiences, attitudes and expectations the communication of ‘news’ really is” (White, 1950, p. 65). Two main categories were derived from this observation. First, rejecting the incident as worthy of being reported indicated that the gatekeeper feels certain news items appearing in the paper are insignificant. For example, Mr. Gates rejected a story concerning the Townsend Plan, indicating that the merits of the story were highly dubious and cited the story as “Never use this” (White, p. 65). As a result, Mr. Gates’ reason for rejecting the story was placed into the category of highly subjective value-judgments. The second category, selecting from many reports of the same event focused on the difficulty of making choices of one piece of copy over another. At least 168 stories were rejected by Mr. Gates due to “No space” (White, p.

66). White said, “In short, the story (in his eyes) has merit and interest, he has not ‘personal’ objections to it, but space is at a premium” (p. 66).

Mr. Gates was also asked to consider four questions that were submitted for the study. First, he was asked if the category of news affected his choice of news stories. Mr. Gates reported he does consider the category of news when he accepts or rejects a story and does not attempt to hold a rigid balance in the selections, but strives for variety. Second, Mr. Gates was asked if he felt he had any prejudices that might affect his choice of news stories. He reported a “few prejudice, built-in or otherwise” (White, 1950, p. 70), but there was little he could do about that. He preferred to go with human interest and other stories that tailored to suit his audiences’ needs. Third, Mr. Gates’ was asked about his concept of the audience for whom he selects stories and what he viewed as the average person. Mr. Gates reported he viewed all his readers as people with average intelligence and with a variety of interest and abilities, and believed they were all entitled to the news that pleased and informed them. The final question asked if he had specific tests of subject matter on ways of writing that helped him determine the selection of any particular news story. Mr. Gates concluded he only focused on clarity, conciseness, and angle. “The clarity trio is almost a constant yardstick in judging a story” (White, p. 71). Mr. Gates also admitted to using story length as a factor in his selection process.

“It begins to appear, that in his position as gatekeeper the newspaper editor sees to it that the community shall hear as a fact only those events which the newsman, as the representation of his culture, believes to be true” (White, 1950, p. 71). The study showed

Mr. Gate's selection process was based on his own likes and dislikes. One-third of the stories were rejected based on personal evaluation of the level of newsworthiness and others were discarded due to lack of space or because similar stories were already published. Similar to White's findings, this study aims to identify what influences student journalists and student editors when they decide what is considered newsworthy and what is not.

Another expert in the research of gatekeeping, Shoemaker (1991), reported that the gatekeeping process relies on individuals with personal ideas and beliefs functioning within organizations that have a set of norms, which are tied to larger societal ideologies. Similar to Lewin's three levels of influence in gatekeeping, Shoemaker and Reese (1991) introduced a hierarchical model that provides five levels of influence: (a) Individual, (b) routines of communication work, (c) organizational, (d) social and institutional, and (e) societal.

The individual level is based on personal selection decisions. Gatekeepers ask themselves, "What do I like or dislike" (Shoemaker, 1996, p. 83). Factors such as gender, ethnicity, personal backgrounds and experiences shape the communicator's personal attitudes, values, and beliefs. These factors also contribute to the communicator's professional experiences such as whether they decided to study journalism or communications in school. Professional experiences shape the communicator's professional roles and ethics which have a direct effect on mass media content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991).

The routines of communication work level focused on decisions that are made according to a patterned and repeated practice and form that media workers use to do their job. Routines form a set of rules that ensures the media system will respond in predictable ways and cannot be easily violated (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). Routines construct a framework and boundaries that develops a journalist's behavior towards the level of newsworthiness. Questions such as, is this newsworthy enough to be included in the day's television program or this week's newspaper, are generally considered (Shoemaker, 1996).

The organizational level focuses on the position and power the gatekeeper holds within the organization that can influence their final decision. "Centrally located gatekeepers, such as newspaper publishers and television station managers, tend to have considerable power to develop organizational policies that greatly influence selection decisions" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991, p. 83). The social and institutional level highlights on potential extramedia influences, such as sources, audiences and advertisers, markets and economic forces, government, interest groups, public relations efforts, and other media. On the societal level, events vary to the degree that they are culturally available as news stories. "Culture as well as other indicators of social significance, including political, military, and economic ties also influence selection decisions, affecting the extent to which different parts of the world are covered" (Shoemaker, 1996, p. 84).

Shoemaker, Eichloz, Kim, and Wrigley (2001) explored the concept that items have "forces" that either facilitate or constrain their passage through the gatekeeping

process. Shoemaker et al. focused the study on the individual forces (such as professional background, attitudes, and beliefs) and routine forces (on newsworthiness) in gatekeeping to determine how prominently major Congressional bills were covered by U.S. newspapers between 1996 and 1998. They compared the staff writers' individual characteristics with editors' assessments of the newsworthiness, based on judgments made at the routine level of the newsgathering process of the Congressional bills studied. The study addressed the question of whether individual or routine factors present more importance when predicting media coverage. For example, an individual reporter's previous success or prestige could facilitate the passage of a news item through the editorial gates, just as the inexperience of a report could hinder their chance of getting that same news item accepted. On the other hand, the routine factors of assessing newsworthiness and meeting deadlines suggest that a story of moderate newsworthiness may be more likely to be accepted far in advance of the publication deadline, whereas a highly newsworthy story would replace a lesser newsworthy story even if very near the deadline (Shoemaker et al.).

Shoemaker et al. (2001) developed two hypotheses to compare the influence of individual and routine forces: (1) "The routine gatekeeping force of assessing a bill's newsworthiness will be related to how prominently a bill is covered," and (2) "the individual forces will be related to how prominently a bill is covered" (2001, p. 236). Shoemaker et al. predicted that the routine forces hold more of an impact, than individual forces, on the media coverage of Congressional bills. Shoemaker tested the first hypothesis by asking journalists to provide information using a one-page

questionnaire that focused on individual forces and another questionnaire that focused on routine forces. The results of the two questionnaires showed that the routine force of newsworthiness was positively related to the quality of news coverage of Congressional bills, whereas no characteristics of individual journalists had any measure of how prominently the bills were covered in U.S. newspapers.

Cassidy (2006) examined the influence of gatekeeping forces at the individual and routine levels on the professional role conceptions of print and online daily newspaper journalists. “The professional role conceptions of journalism can be seen as [the journalist’s] ideas about which potential news items are worthy of transmission to the audience” (Cassidy, p. 5). One research question asked, “Do routine gatekeeping forces exert more influence than individual gatekeeping forces on the professional role conceptions of print and online newspaper journalists” (Cassidy, p. 4). Cassidy’s sample was drawn from a population of 1,191 English-language mainstream general daily newspapers and data was collected from journalists via a Web-based survey. Comparable to Shoemaker et al. (2001), the results determined that routine level gatekeeping forces exerted more influence than individual gatekeeping forces on the professional role conceptions of print and online newspaper journalists.

Cartmell, Dyer, Birkenholz, and Sitton (2003) surveyed the primary editors for Arkansas' 30 daily newspapers and investigated the strategies they use to make gatekeeping decisions regarding agricultural news. The perceived level of importance of a topic by the gatekeeper is a factor that may influence whether a story is published or not. The study found that "editors believe that their readers' interests coincide with their

own. Health, food safety, and environmental issues were the areas of greatest interest" (Cartmell et al., .19). Cartmell et al. (2003) placed the editor at the center of the communication flow and determined that the editors have the primary responsibility for deciding what gets published about agricultural issues. "Editors indicated that the most important criterion used to decided whether or not to print agricultural news is the interest of the story to the local community" (Cartmell et al., p.19).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if significant differences in routine gatekeeping forces exist when compared by job title (university student reporter to university student editor) and to describe individual and routine gatekeeping forces among regional university student reporters and editors.

Objectives

The objectives of this research were to:

1. Assess the levels of importance for routine gatekeeping actions on newsworthiness.
2. Assess the levels of influence of newsworthiness.
3. Determine if significant relationships exist between individual and routine gatekeeping forces.
4. Determine if significant difference exist in routine gatekeeping forces when compared by university student job title.

Study Design

This quantitative study used a correlation research design with a nonrandom sampling option. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) described this research as the investigation of a possible relationship between two variables without any attempt to manipulate a variable. Two groups participated in this study, Big 12 Conference and 1862, 1890 and 1994 land-grant College or University newspaper student reporters and newspaper student editors.

Population

The target population of interest included student reporters and student editors who work for university newspaper publications. A regional study of student reporters and editors for university newspaper publications in the Big 12 Conference and 1862, 1890, and 1994 land-grant colleges or universities within those states were used to evaluate the individual and routine forces of gatekeeping on their news selection process. The nineteen universities and colleges that provided a student developed university newspaper represented the population: Baylor University, Colorado State University, Haskell Indian Nations University, Iowa State University, Kansas State University, Langston University, Lincoln University, Little Priest Tribal College, Nebraska Indian Community College, Oklahoma State University, Prairie View A&M University, Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, University of Colorado, University of Kansas, University of Missouri, University of Nebraska, University of Oklahoma, and the University of Texas.

Sample

Student reporters and editors from each university and college were asked to participate in this study. Email addresses of advisers were collected via phone calls and from newspaper's Web sites. Of the original 19 universities and colleges that made up the regional population, only 12 universities had contact information for the newspaper's advisers. The recruitment process produced an accessible population of 12 universities, from which a sample size of seven universities (Kansas State University, Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, University of Kansas, University of Missouri, University of Nebraska, and University of Oklahoma) was derived. The small size of this sample is recognized as a limitation of the study. Caution is advised in generalizing these results to other populations beyond the sample.

Instrumentation

Shoemaker (1996) reported surveys can identify psychological determinants of gatekeeping and measure respondents' perceptions of forces working on the selection process. For this study, a web-based survey of multiple questions was sent to each participant. The same scales were used by Cassidy (2006) in his examination of gatekeeping forces, but questions were slightly altered to match the purpose of this study. The questionnaire was divided into four sections. First, participants were asked to answer questions pertaining to their job title. The second section focused on how important participants believe a number of actions are in their newspaper. For example, to get information to the public quickly, provide information, inform the student body of university issues, and influence public opinion. The level of importance participants

assigned to each statement was measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = not really important, 4 = somewhat important, and 7 = extremely important).

The third section asked participants to assess how influential a number of routine forces (peers on staff, supervisors, journalistic training, news sources, priorities of prestige publications, local competing news media, deadlines, etc.) are on the way they determine what is newsworthy. The level of influence subjects assign to each routine force was again measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all influential, 4 = somewhat influential, and 7 = very influential). The fourth section was designed to determine the influence of individual forces. Participants were asked questions regarding their gender, university classification, racial/ethnic makeup, political ideology, and number of years working on the university's newspaper.

The dependent variables of this study were the questions pertaining to media responsibilities and newsworthiness. Variables such as importance level of media actions, attitudes, deadlines, and influences of newsworthiness were considered dependent. The independent variables were individual gatekeeping forces that cannot be changed or altered. Basic demographics such as gender, background experience, university classification, ideology, and political ideology were classified as independent variables.

Data Collection

Data were collected through an online survey. Prior to data collection, an introduction email about the research was sent to advisers to inform them of the research process and encouraged them to motivate their students to participate. Later, the

survey was emailed to advisers who were asked to forward the survey to their student reporters and editors. After four weeks of data collection, of the 12 universities, only three had student reporters and editors ($n = 31$) that participated. Therefore, email addresses of student reporters and editors from the universities that had not participated were gathered from each newspaper's Web site. Then, emails containing the survey were directly sent to those students. After two weeks of data collection, four more universities had student reporters and editors ($n = 11$) that completed the survey, providing a final convenient sample size of $N = 42$, which yielded a response rate of 58% universities that participated in the study. Access to the sample was limited, with contact provided only through the newspaper's advisers, or limited websites that provided student reporters and editors names and contact information, and is considered a limitation of this study. As a result of the small convenient sample size, results from this study are not generalizable.

Data Analysis

Using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS©), data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to test the importance of routine gatekeeping actions on media roles and access the level of influence on newsworthiness. A descriptive bivariate analysis was run on both student reporters and student editors to test the relationships between the levels of individual and routine gatekeeping forces. Oneway ANOVA was run to determine the significant difference between routine gatekeeping forces when compared by university student job title.

CHAPTER II

THE INFLUENCE OF GATEKEEPING FORCES ON UNIVERSITY NEWSPAPER

STUDENT REPORTERS AND STUDENT EDITORS

Overview

Most gatekeeping studies involved evaluating journalists and editors with years of media writing experience to determine how they are influenced by gatekeeping forces. While, many universities publish a campus newspaper that is written and edited by the students, no research was found analyzing the impact that gatekeeping has on student newspaper publications. Therefore, this study attempted to measure the influence of gatekeeping forces on student reporters and student editors who work on university newspaper publications. Results of this study indicated that particular forces of news media actions and influences of newsworthiness were more significant than other forces and significant relationships exist among certain individual and routine forces.

Introduction

The level of importance of news media actions and the influence of newsworthiness can fluctuate for news stories throughout the story developing process. A number of forces influence the path of news stories, negatively or positively, before reaching a final destination of publishing. These influences are known as *gates* and are operated by individuals known as *gatekeepers*, who hold the power of rejecting, or accepting, news stories as a result of different forces that affect the level of newsworthiness of the story. This process is known as gatekeeping and has been studied among newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and even online publications to

determine how each media type process news stories to meet the needs and wants of their audience.

Gatekeeping is an essential part of the news gathering and distribution process that initiates the many decision choices involved in writing. What do we want to write? What will we accept or reject? How do we want our audience to perceive our message? It is one of the oldest theories researched in the field of mass communications, but many new developments have changed its impact. From the beginning, gatekeeping was viewed as a process of channels and gates that determine what is considered news, and what is not. “This process is as old as the process of communication, the town crier had to decide what to announce and what to withhold, and even gatekeeping in academic journals dates back to the mid-1600s” (Shoemaker, 1991, p. 3). Now, research has discovered forces that influence the flow of news items, negatively or positively, through the different channels and gates.

Theoretical Framework

Gatekeeping first originated through a study aimed to answer the question, “why people eat what they eat,” and was developed as a means of understanding how one could produce widespread social changes in a community by changing a population’s food habits. Lewin first coined the term gatekeeping in his unfinished manuscript “theory of channels and gatekeepers,” which was later elaborated in 1951 in *Field Theory in Social Science*, an edited collection of Lewin’s work (Shoemaker, 1991). In the study, Lewin concluded that not all members of the population are equally important in determining food selections; therefore, social change could be accomplished by

concentrating on the individual with the most control over food selection for the home. Food comes to the table through various channels and each channel is subdivided in to various sections where a food unit maybe rejected or accepted. The entrance to the channel and to each section is controlled by a “gatekeeper” (Lewin, 1943).

To understand and influence food habits, in addition to identifying the objective food channels and availability, it is important to know the psychological factors influencing the person who controls the channels. Lewin reported, “Understanding the functioning of the gate becomes equivalent then to understanding the factors which determine the decisions of the gatekeepers, and changing the social process means influencing the gatekeeper” (1943, p. 186). Lewin’s study on gatekeeping evaluates three levels of influence: (a) An individual’s decision to purchase from the market or another channel, (b) routines or habits of family members, and (c) societal and cultural forces. Lewin classified these factors under two headings: Cognitive structure, which applies to how the gatekeeper thinks and speaks about food, and motivation, which pertains to the system of values behind the gatekeeper’s choice of food.

Other studies in the research of gatekeeping, applied Lewins analysis of the flow of food to the process of mass communications. Shoemaker, Eichloz, Kim, and Wrigley (2001) explored the concept that items have “forces” that either facilitate or constrain their passage through the gatekeeping process. This study addressed the question of whether individual or routine factors present more importance when predicting media coverage.

Individual factors are based on personal selection decisions. Gatekeepers ask themselves, “What do I like or dislike” (Shoemaker, 1996, p. 83). Factors such as gender, ethnicity, personal backgrounds and experiences shape the communicator’s personal attitudes, values, and beliefs. These factors also contribute to the communicator’s professional experiences such as whether they decided to study journalism or communications in school. Professional experiences shape the communicator’s professional roles and ethics which have a direct effect on mass media content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991).

Routine factors focus on decisions that are made according to a patterned and repeated practice and form that media workers use to do their job. Routines form a set of rules that ensures the media system will respond in predictable ways and cannot be easily violated (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). Routines construct a framework and boundaries that develops a journalist’s behavior towards the level of newsworthiness. Questions such as, is this newsworthy enough to be included in the day’s television program or this week’s newspaper, are generally considered (Shoemaker, 1996).

Shoemaker et al. focused the study on the individual and routine forces in gatekeeping to determine how prominently major Congressional bills were covered by U.S. newspapers between 1996 and 1998. They compared the staff writer’s individual characteristics with the editors’ assessments of the newsworthiness, based on judgments made at the routine level of the newsgathering process of the Congressional bills studied. The study found that the routine force of newsworthiness was positively related to the quality of news coverage of Congressional bills, whereas no characteristics of individual

journalists had any measure of how prominently the bills were in U.S. Newspapers (Shoemaker et al., 2001).

Cassidy (2006) examined the influence of individual and routine gatekeeping forces on the professional role conceptions of print and online daily newspaper journalists. “The professional role conceptions of journalism can be seen as [the journalist’s] ideas about which potential news items are worthy of transmission to the audience” (Cassidy, 2006, p. 5). One research question asked, “Do routine gatekeeping forces exert more influence than individual gatekeeping forces on the professional role conceptions of print and online newspaper journalists” (Cassidy, p. 4). Cassidy’s sample was drawn from a population of 1,191 English-language mainstream general daily newspapers and data was collected from journalists via a Web-based survey. Comparable to Shoemaker et al. (2001), the results determined that routine level gatekeeping forces exerted more influence than individual gatekeeping forces on the professional role conceptions of print and online newspaper journalists.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if significant relationships exist when comparing individual and routine gatekeeping forces and describe individual and routine gatekeeping forces among regional university student reporters and editors.

Objectives

The objectives of the research were

1. Assess the levels of importance for routine gatekeeping actions on newsworthiness.
2. Assess the levels of influence on newsworthiness.
3. Determine if significant relationships exist between individual and routine gatekeeping forces.

Methodology

A regional study of student journalists and editors for university newspaper publications in the Big 12 Conference and 1862, 1890, and 1994 land-grant college or universities within those states, were used to evaluate the individual and routine forces of gatekeeping on their news selection process. The nineteen universities and colleges that provided a student developed university newspaper represented the population of interest: Baylor University, Colorado State University, Haskell Indian Nations University, Iowa State University, Kansas State University, Langston University, Lincoln University, Little Priest Tribal College, Nebraska Indian Community College, Oklahoma State University, Prairie View A&M University, Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, University of Colorado, University of Kansas, University of Missouri, University of Nebraska, University of Oklahoma, and the University of Texas.

Contact information for newspaper advisers were gathered through Web sites and phone calls. Universities that did not provide contact information for their newspaper's adviser or did not publish a student develop newspaper, were removed from the study.

Seven institutions were removed: Haskell Indian Nations University, Iowa State University, Langston University, Little Priest Tribal College, Nebraska Indian Community College, and the University of Colorado.

A letter of introduction was emailed to the 12 remaining universities, informing advisers about the study, the methodology, and when data collection would begin. A week later, the web-based survey was emailed to advisers who were asked to forward the survey to their student reporters and editors. Data was collected for one month with reminder emails sent to advisers every two weeks. At the end of the four weeks, only three universities (University of Kansas, University of Oklahoma, and University of Nebraska) participated in the survey giving a sample size of 31 student reporters and editors.

Email addresses of student journalists and editors for universities who had not participated in the survey were gathered to develop a late respondent group. The web-based survey was directly emailed to these students. Data was collected for two weeks with a reminder email sent each week. Four universities (Kansas State University, Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, and University of Missouri) participated in the survey, giving a late respondent sample size of 11 student reporters and editors, and a final convenient sample size of $N = 42$, which yield a response rate of 58% universities that participated in the study. Access to the sample was provided only through the newspaper's advisers, or limited names and contact information of student reporters and editors provided on university newspaper's Web site, is considered a limitation of this

study. As a result of the small convenient sample size, results from this study are not generalizable.

To accomplish the four objectives, data were collected with a web-based questionnaire, adapted from Cassidy's (2006) instrument measuring the influence of individual and routine gatekeeping forces. The same scales were used by Cassidy (2006) in his examination, but questions were slightly altered to match the purpose of this study. The questionnaire was divided into four sections. First, participants were asked questions pertaining to their job title. The second section focused on how important participants believe a number of news media responsibilities are in their newspaper. For example, to get information to the public quickly, provide information, inform the student body of university issues, and influence public opinion. The level of importance participants assigned to each statement was measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = not really important, 4 = somewhat important, and 7 = extremely important).

The third section asked participants to assess how influential a number of routine forces (peers on staff, supervisors, journalistic training, news sources, priorities of prestige publications, local competing news media, deadlines, etc.) are on the way they determine what is newsworthy. The level of influence subjects assign to each routine force was again be measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all influential, 4 = somewhat influential, and 7 = very influential).

After removal of the scaled content, *stay away from stories where factual content cannot be verified*, from the level of importance of news media responsibilities section,

all scales (*Level of Importance of News Media Responsibilities* and *Level of Influence of Newsworthiness*) were found to be reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.80.

The fourth section was designed to determine the influence of individual forces. Participants were asked questions regarding their gender, university classification, racial/ethnic makeup, political ideology, and number of years working on the university's newspaper.

The dependent variables of this study were the questions pertaining to media responsibilities and newsworthiness. Variables such as importance level of media actions, attitudes, deadlines, and influences of newsworthiness were considered dependent. The independent variables were individual gatekeeping forces that cannot be changed or altered. Basic demographics such as gender, background experience, university classification, and political ideology were classified as independent variables.

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) to describe the sample's demographics, assess the level of importance of news media responsibilities, and assess the level of influence of newsworthiness. A descriptive bivariate analysis was run to determine significant relationships between variables of interest between individual forces and routine forces of gatekeeping.

Results

The background information determined that most participants worked for The University Daily Kansan (33.3%) and the Daily Nebraskan (31%). The Maneater and The Oklahoma Daily each accumulated 9.5 % of the study, The Daily Toreador accumulated 7.1 %, and the Kansas State College and The Battalion each accumulated

4.8% of the study. Exact job titles ranged from the majority of news (15%) and staff (15%) reporter, and editor-in-chief (12.5%) to the minority of broadcaster reporter (2.5%), design editor (2.5 %), and opinions editor (2.5%). The overall basic demographics of the participants for this study showed 26 were female and 12 were male. The majority of participants were seniors (35.7%), journalism majors (69%), classified their race as Caucasian (61.9%), identified their political philosophy as liberal (38.1%), and had one to two years of work experience on their university newspaper (40.5%). The small size of this convenient sample is recognized as a limitation of the study. Caution is advised in generalizing these results to other populations beyond the sample.

Objective 1

Objective 1 attempted to measure the level of importance for routine gatekeeping actions on newsworthiness. Table 1 displays means and standard deviations for 15 statements related to how important participants perceived certain actions of news media responsibilities. The study found that the majority of participants perceived the action to inform the student body of university issues to be extremely important ($M = 6.77$). Nine routine actions were perceived to be very important among participants: to get information to the public quickly ($M = 6.44$), provide interpretation of complex problems ($M = 6.13$), challenge university officials by being skeptical of their actions ($M = 6.05$), investigate claims and/or statements made by the government ($M = 5.97$), discuss university policy while it is still being developed ($M = 5.97$), Challenge public officials ($M = 5.95$) and university organizations ($M = 5.92$) by being skeptical of their

actions, give students the chance to express their views on public affairs ($M = 5.82$), and develop intelligence of the public ($M = 5.64$). Routine actions to influence public opinion ($M = 3.42$) and provide relaxation ($M = 3.28$) were found to have of little importance on newsworthiness.

Table 1

Level of Importance of Routine Gatekeeping Actions on Newsworthiness (N = 37)

| | <i>M^a</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|----------------------|-----------|
| Inform the student body of university issues | 6.77 | 0.49 |
| Get information to the public quickly | 6.44 | 0.82 |
| Provide interpretation of complex problem | 6.13 | 1.08 |
| Challenge university officials by being skeptical of their actions | 6.05 | 1.21 |
| Investigate claims and/or statements made by the government | 5.97 | 1.18 |
| Discuss university policy while it is still being developed | 5.97 | 0.93 |
| Challenge public officials by being skeptical of their actions | 5.95 | 1.17 |
| Challenge university organizations by being skeptical of their actions | 5.92 | 1.20 |
| Give students the chance to express their views on public affairs | 5.82 | 1.17 |
| Develop intelligence of the public | 5.64 | 1.37 |
| Concentrate on news that is of interest to the widest possible audience | 5.16 | 1.50 |
| Develop cultural interests of the public | 5.15 | 1.35 |
| Provide entertainment | 4.97 | 1.42 |
| Influence public opinion | 3.42 | 1.97 |
| Provide relaxation | 3.28 | 1.59 |

Note. Maximum rating is 7.00.

^a 1.00 – 1.50 = Not Really Important, 1.51 – 2.50 = Not Important, 2.51 – 3.50 = Of Little importance, 3.51 – 4.50 = Somewhat Important, 4.51 – 5.50 = Important, 5.51 – 6.50 = Very Important, and 6.51 – 7.00 = Extremely Important.

Objective 2

Objective 2 attempted to measure the level of influence of newsworthiness on student journalists and editors of university newspaper publications. Table 2 displays

means and standard deviations for 12 statements related to how influential certain factors are on participants perception of newsworthiness. The study found that the majority of participants perceived readers of the newspaper publication to be influential ($M = 6.13$). Comparable to Cassidy's (2006) report that routine level forces of peers on staff and journalistic training exerted the most influence, this study found participants perceived journalistic training ($M = 6.00$) to have the second highest level of influence and peers on staff ($M = 5.18$) to be moderately influential. Factors related to interests groups ($M = 2.68$) and advertisers ($M = 2.05$) were found to have the lowest influential rate.

Table 2

Levels of Influence of Newsworthiness (N = 36)

| | M^a | SD |
|--|-------|------|
| Readers | 6.13 | 0.91 |
| Journalistic training | 6.00 | 1.32 |
| Peers on staff | 5.18 | 1.37 |
| Deadlines | 5.13 | 1.42 |
| News sources | 5.08 | 1.36 |
| Local competing news media | 5.05 | 1.22 |
| Supervisors | 4.86 | 1.81 |
| Priorities of network news and other prestige newspapers | 4.50 | 1.54 |
| Audience research | 4.00 | 1.68 |
| Public opinion polls | 3.68 | 1.54 |
| Interest groups | 2.68 | 1.44 |
| Advertisers | 2.05 | 1.29 |

Note. Maximum rating is 7.00.

^a1.00 – 1.50 = Not at all Influential, 1.51 – 2.50 = Not Influential, 2.51 – 3.50 = Of Little Influence, 3.51 – 4.50 = Somewhat Influential, 4.51 – 5.50 = Moderately Influential, 5.51 – 6.50 = Influential, and 6.51 – 7.00 = Very Influential.

Objective 3

Objective 3 attempted to measure the significant relationships between individual and routine gatekeeping forces. Table 3 displays the 12 significant relationships found when comparing individual gatekeeping forces to routine gatekeeping forces, using Pearson's Correlation analysis. The study found that the longer participants worked for their university's newspaper publication, the level of importance to provided entertainment ($r = -0.43$) and the influence of audience research ($r = -0.49$) decreased, while the level of importance to challenge public officials ($r = 0.39$), university officials ($r = 0.42$), and university organizations ($r = 0.47$) by being skeptical of their actions, increased. The longer participants worked as a reporter, the level of importance to get information to the public quickly ($r = -0.40$) decreased. The longer participants worked as an editor, the level of importance to discuss university policy as it is being developed ($r = 0.39$) and to influence public opinion ($r = 0.39$) increased. When comparing participants' university classification, as the classification progressed from freshman to graduate students, the influence of other news sources ($r = 0.39$) increased. The less participants studied a form of journalism, the level of importance to concentrate on news that is of interest to the widest possible audience ($r = -0.52$) and the level of influence from journalistic training ($r = -0.51$) increased. When observing race, the study indicated that the more participants identified their race as Caucasian, the less influential they perceived interest groups ($r = 0.50$). The study found no significant relationship when comparing the individual forces of gender and political ideology to routine gatekeeping forces.

Table 3

Significant Relationships Between Individual and Routine Gatekeeping Forces (N=29)

| | Years | Reporting | Editing | Univ. Class. | Major | Race |
|---|--------|-----------|---------|-----------------|---------|-------|
| Get information to the public quickly | 0.17 | -0.40* | 0.05 | 0.04 | 0.04 | -0.16 |
| Provide interpretation of complex problems | 0.27 | -0.06 | 0.08 | -0.11 | -0.16 | 0.12 |
| Provide entertainment | -0.43* | 0.16 | -0.14 | -0.19 | 0.00 | -0.23 |
| Provide relaxation | -0.15 | 0.11 | -0.31 | -0.31 | 0.06 | 0.06 |
| Investigate claims and/or statements made by the government | 0.15 | -0.24 | -0.08 | -0.25 | 0.09 | 0.25 |
| Concentrate on news that is of interest to the widest possible audience | -0.08 | 0.09 | 0.02 | 0.12 | -0.52** | -0.01 |
| Discuss university policy while it is still being developed | 0.36 | -0.14 | 0.40* | 0.27 | -0.16 | 0.07 |
| Develop intelligence of the public | 0.17 | -0.22 | 0.07 | -0.17 | -0.10 | 0.28 |
| Develop cultural interests of the public | -0.02 | 0.00 | 0.16 | -0.11 | -0.26 | 0.22 |
| Challenge public officials by being skeptical of their actions | 0.39* | -0.07 | 0.00 | -0.14 | -0.10 | 0.20 |
| Challenge university officials by being skeptical of their actions | 0.41* | -0.07 | 0.04 | -0.13 | -0.14 | 0.14 |
| Challenge university organizations by being skeptical of their actions | 0.47* | -0.07 | 0.09 | -0.10 | -0.33 | 0.08 |
| Inform the student body of university issues | -0.03 | -0.32 | -0.07 | -0.18 | 0.19 | -0.15 |
| Influence public opinion | 0.28 | 0.15 | 0.39* | 0.28 | -0.24 | -0.06 |
| Give students a chance to express their views on public affairs | -0.25 | -0.03 | -0.03 | 0.02 | 0.10 | -0.23 |
| Your peers on staff | -0.17 | -0.11 | -0.11 | -0.05 | 0.20 | 0.04 |
| Your supervisors | -0.10 | 0.16 | -0.13 | 0.33 | -0.02 | 0.03 |
| Your journalistic training | -0.07 | -0.08 | 0.07 | -0.07 | -0.50** | -0.16 |

Table 3 Continued

| | Years | Reporting | Editing | Univ. Class. | Major | Race |
|---|--------|-----------|---------|-----------------|-------|--------|
| News Sources | 0.04 | 0.21 | 0.03 | 0.39* | -0.14 | 0.03 |
| Priorities of network news and prestige newspapers | -0.14 | 0.05 | -0.04 | 0.09 | -0.25 | -0.18 |
| Local competing news media | -0.02 | 0.14 | 0.13 | 0.27 | -0.20 | -0.34 |
| Deadlines | -0.01 | 0.10 | 0.04 | 0.21 | -0.35 | -0.17 |
| Advertisers | -0.20 | 0.28 | 0.10 | 0.18 | -0.03 | 0.13 |
| Readers | -0.17 | 0.15 | 0.13 | 0.06 | -0.29 | -0.20 |
| Interest Groups | -0.09 | 0.35 | -0.16 | 0.13 | 0.01 | 0.50** |
| Audience Research | -0.40* | 0.24 | -0.13 | -0.27 | -0.18 | 0.09 |
| Public Opinion Polls | -0.15 | 0.14 | 0.00 | -0.15 | -0.29 | 0.08 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study showed student reporters and editors of university newspaper publications perceive certain news media responsibilities to be more important than others, particular factors of newsworthiness more influential than others, and that significant relationships exist when comparing individual and routine gatekeeping forces.

Routines construct a framework and boundaries that develops a journalist's behavior towards the level of newsworthiness (Shoemaker, 1996). Participants found routine gatekeeping actions highly important and influential when considering news media responsibilities and newsworthiness. This supports Shoemaker et al. (2001), who found that editor's assessment of routine forces of newsworthiness positively related to

the quality of news coverage of Congressional bills. However, this study does not clarify if routine gatekeeping forces positively related to student reporters and editors news selection process. This study describes only how the levels of importance and influence of routine gatekeeping actions are perceived by student reporters and editors; therefore, further research should be conducted to determine how routine gatekeeping forces affect student's news selection process.

Moderate positive, moderate negative, strong positive and strong negative relationships exist between individual and routine gatekeeping forces. The existence of these relationships supports Cassidy (2006), who determined the relationship that routine level gatekeeping forces exerted more influence than individual gatekeeping forces, but does not specify if one force is more dominate than the other. The findings show that individual and routine levels have a direct relationship, however, future research should be conducted to determine if routine levels of gatekeeping forces put forth more of an influence than individual levels on student reporters and editors of university newspaper publications.

Results indicated that the more participants did not study a form of journalism, the more important they perceived the routine force of journalistic training. Therefore, recommendations for advisers to concentrate on student reporters and editors journalistic training is strongly encourage. Through studying a form of journalism, students learn basic skills on how to properly develop a news story from the selection process to publication. This routine factor of newsworthiness determines how journalists perceive their target audience to determine what will be of most interest to them.

Though surveys can identify psychological determinants of gatekeeping and measure respondents' perceptions of forces that influence the news selection process, the low response rate is considered a limitation for this study. However, this study adds to the knowledge of gatekeeping by expanding its research borders, and supports that gatekeeping is a process based on forces operating on more than just the individual level and suggested that routine level forces also play a prominent role in journalistic decision making (Shoemaker, 1996). Research should be continued to gain more knowledge on how individual and routine gatekeeping forces affect student reporters and editors.

CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF GATEKEEPING FORCES ON UNIVERSITY NEWSPAPER

PUBLICATIONS WHEN COMPARED BY UNIVERSITY JOB TITLE

Overview

News media job titles can determine the level of importance and influence of gatekeeping forces on news stories before reaching the final destination of publishing. This study attempted to measure the levels of news media actions and influences of newsworthiness of routine gatekeeping forces on student reporters and student editors of university newspaper publications. Results indicated that particular forces of news media actions and influences of newsworthiness were more significant than others, and significant differences exist in routine gatekeeping forces when compared by university student job title.

Introduction

“News is a window on the world. Through its frame, Americans learn of themselves and others, of their own institutions, leaders, and life styles, and those of other nations and their peoples” (Tuchman, 1978, p.1). However, how this window is operated is another story. A number of forces, known as *gates*, influence the developing process of news stories. These gates are operated by individuals known as *gatekeepers*, who hold the power of rejecting, or accepting, news stories as a result of different forces that affect the perceived level of newsworthiness of the story.

Gatekeeping is one of the oldest theories studied in mass communications and is an essential part of the news gathering and distribution process that initiates the many

decision choices involved in writing. Though there is no universal definition of the term, McQuail's (2005) *Mass Communication Theory* best described gatekeeping as:

a widely used metaphor to describe the process by which selections are made in the media work, particularly in decisions regarding whether or not to allow a particular news report to pass through the 'gates' of a news medium into the news channels (p. 308).

Gatekeeping traces the pathway of news production, beginning when potential news items are conceived, discovered, and analyzed for newsworthiness; and ends with the final selection and shaping of news items and their dissemination (Shoemaker, 1996).

Theoretical Framework

Lewin first coined the term *gatekeeping* in his unfinished manuscript "theory of channels and gatekeepers," which was later elaborated in 1951 in *Field Theory in Social Science*, an edited collection of Lewin's work (Shoemaker, 1991). The study aimed to answer the question, "why people eat what they eat," and was developed as a means of understanding how one could produce widespread social changes in a community by changing a population's food habits. Foods come to the table through various channels, which are subdivided into various sections where food can be accepted or rejected by the controller known as the "gatekeeper" (Lewin, 1943). The study reported that psychological factors influence the gatekeeper's selection process and understanding these factors is important when understanding the functioning of the gate.

White, Lewin's research assistant at the University of Iowa, was the first communication scholar to apply Lewin's theory to channels and gatekeeping to a

communication project (1950). White's 1950 study closely examined how one of the gatekeepers in the complex channels of communication operates the "gate." His study was constructed to evaluate why the wire editor selected or rejected news stories filed by press associations and gain an understanding about the general role of the gatekeeper in the area of mass communications. For the period of February 6 through 19, 1949, the subject, known as "Mr. Gates," was asked to keep all copies of stories that came into his office from three wire services and record the reasons for why he rejected certain stories.

White's study highlighted the individual influences that affect the gatekeeper's decision process and demonstrated "how highly subjective, how based on the 'gate keeper's' own set of experiences, attitudes, and expectations, the communication of 'news' really is" (White, 1950, p. 71). The study showed Mr. Gate's selection process was based on his own likes and dislikes. One-third of the stories were rejected based on personal evaluation of the stories level of newsworthiness and others were discarded due to lack of space or because similar stories were already published.

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) reported that the gatekeeping process relies on individuals with personal ideas and beliefs functioning within organizations that have a set of norms, which are tied to larger societal ideologies. They introduced a hierarchical model that provides five levels of influence: (a) Individual, (b) routines of communication work, (c) organizational, (d) social and institutional, and (e) societal. For the purpose of this study, individual and routines of communication work levels will be discussed only.

Individual factors are based on personal selection decisions. Gatekeepers ask themselves, “What do I like or dislike” (Shoemaker, 1996, p. 83). Factors such as gender, ethnicity, personal backgrounds and experiences shape the communicator’s personal attitudes, values, and beliefs. These factors also contribute to the communicator’s professional experiences such as whether they decided to study journalism or communications in school. Professional experiences shape the communicator’s professional roles and ethics which have a direct effect on mass media content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991).

Routine factors focus on decisions that are made according to a patterned and repeated practice and form that media workers use to do their job. Routines form a set of rules that ensures the media system will respond in predictable ways and cannot be easily violated (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). Routines construct a framework and boundaries that develops a journalist’s behavior towards the level of newsworthiness. Questions such as, is this newsworthy enough to be included in the day’s television program or this week’s newspaper, are generally considered (Shoemaker, 1996).

Many studies have been conducted to determine which force is more significant, individual or routine? White’s (1950) study focused on the influence of individual forces of gatekeeping and determined that the editor’s selection process was highly subjective and based on personal experiences, attitudes, and expectations of what is considered news. Shoemaker et al. (2001) study on the individual and routine forces in gatekeeping to determine how prominently major Congressional bills were covered by U.S. newspapers between 1996 and 1998. They compared the staff writer’s individual

characteristics with editors' assessments of the newsworthiness, based on judgments made at the routine level of the newsgathering process of the Congressional bills studied. The study found that the routine force of newsworthiness was positively related to the quality of news coverage of Congressional bills, whereas no characteristics of individual journalists had any measure of how prominently the bills were in U.S. Newspapers (Shoemaker et al., 2001).

Comparable to Shoemaker et al. (2001), Cassidy's (2006) study of individual and routine gatekeeping forces on the professional role conceptions of print and online daily newspaper journalists, determined that routine level gatekeeping forces exerted more influence than individual gatekeeping forces. This supports Tuchman's theory that news itself is the outcome of routines because journalists conform to institutional practices. "News is located, gathered, and disseminated by professionals working in organizations. Thus it is inevitable a product of newswriters drawing upon institutional processes and conforming to institutional practices" (Tuchman, 1978, pg. 4).

The simple flow pattern of news stories through a newsroom is common for most newspaper publications. The original story is developed by the reporter, who then transfers it to the city editor for reviewing and editing. From there the story is then sent to the copy editor for further editing and assignment of position in the newspaper. Despite the simplicity of this process, decisions must be made along this path that can make the process much more complicated (Brooks, Kennedy, Moen, & Ranly, 2005). An individual's role within the news developing process can determine the level of newsworthiness of a news story. Tuchman (1978) reported, "Interactions within the

bureaucratic hierarchy, reporters and editors jockeying with one another, may determine what is identified as news" (pg. 25)

Cartmell, Dyer, Birkenholz, and Sitton (2003) surveyed the primary editors for Arkansas' 30 daily newspapers and investigated the strategies they use to make gatekeeping decisions regarding agricultural news. The study found that "editors believe that their readers' interests coincide with their own. Health, food safety, and environmental issues were the areas of greatest interest" (Cartmell et al., p.19). Cartmell et al. (2003) placed the editor at the center of the communication flow and determined that the editors have the primary responsibility for deciding what gets published about agricultural issues. "Editors indicated that the most important criterion used to decide whether or not to print agricultural news is the interest of the story to the local community" (Cartmell et al., p.19).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine significant differences in routine gatekeeping forces when compared by student job title (university student reporter to university student editor) and to describe the levels of routine gatekeeping forces among regional university student reporters and editors.

Objectives

The objectives of the research were

1. Assess the levels of importance for routine gatekeeping actions on newsworthiness.
2. Assess the levels of influence on newsworthiness.

3. Determine if significant difference exist in routine gatekeeping forces when compared by university student job title.

Methodology

A regional study of student journalists and editors for university newspaper publications in the Big 12 Conference and 1862, 1890, and 1994 land-grant college or universities within those states, were used to evaluate the individual and routine forces of gatekeeping on their news selection process. Nineteen universities and colleges that provided a student developed university newspaper represented the population of interest: Baylor University, Colorado State University, Haskell Indian Nations University, Iowa State University, Kansas State University, Langston University, Lincoln University, Little Priest Tribal College, Nebraska Indian Community College, Oklahoma State University, Prairie View A&M University, Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, University of Colorado, University of Kansas, University of Missouri, University of Nebraska, University of Oklahoma, and the University of Texas.

Contact information for newspaper advisers were gathered through Web sites and phone calls. Universities that did not provide contact information for their newspaper's adviser or did not publish a student develop newspaper, were removed from the study. Seven institutions were removed: Haskell Indian Nations University, Iowa State University, Langston University, Little Priest Tribal College, Nebraska Indian Community College, and the University of Colorado.

A letter of introduction was emailed to the 12 remaining universities, informing advisers about the study, the methodology, and when data collection would begin. A

week later, the web-based survey was emailed to advisers who were asked to forward the survey to their student reporters and editors. Data was collected for one month with reminder emails sent to advisers every two weeks. At the end of the four weeks, only three universities (University of Kansas, University of Oklahoma, and University of Nebraska) participated in the survey giving a sample size of 31 student reporters and editors.

Email addresses of student journalists and editors for universities who had not participated in the survey were gathered to develop a late respondent group. The web-based survey was directly emailed to these students. Data was collected for two weeks with a reminder email sent each week. Four universities (Kansas State University, Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, and University of Missouri) participated in the survey, giving a late respondent sample size of 11 student reporters and editors, and a final convenient sample size of $N = 42$, which yielded a response rate of 58% universities who participated in the study. Access to the sample was only provide through the newspaper's advisers, or limited names and contact information of student reporters and editors provided on each university newspaper's Web site, and is considered a limitation of this study. As a result of the small convenient sample size, results from this study are not generalizable.

To accomplish the four objectives, data were collected with a web-based questionnaire, adapted from Cassidy's (2006) instrument measuring the influence of individual and routine gatekeeping forces. The same scales were used by Cassidy in his examination, but questions were slightly altered to match the purpose of this study. The

questionnaire was divided into four sections. First, participants were asked questions pertaining to their job title. The second section focused on how important participants believe a number of news media responsibilities are in their newspaper. For example, to get information to the public quickly, provide information, inform the student body of university issues, and influence public opinion. The level of importance participants assigned to each statement was measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = not really important, 4 = somewhat important, and 7 = extremely important).

The third section asked participants to assess how influential a number of routine forces (peers on staff, supervisors, journalistic training, news sources, priorities of prestige publications, local competing news media, deadlines, etc.) are on the way they determine what is newsworthy. The level of influence subjects assign to each routine force was again be measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all influential, 4 = somewhat influential, and 7 = very influential).

After removal of the scaled content, *stay away from stories where factual content cannot be verified*, from the level of importance of news media responsibilities section, all scales (*Level of Importance of News Media Responsibilities* and *Level of Influence of Newsworthiness*) were found to be reliable with a Cronbach's Alpha above of 0.80.

The fourth section was designed to determine the influence of individual forces. Participants were asked questions regarding their gender, university classification, racial/ethnic makeup, political ideology, and number of years working on the university's newspaper.

The dependent variables of this study were the questions pertaining to media responsibilities and newsworthiness. Variables such as importance level of media actions, attitudes, deadlines, and influences of newsworthiness were considered dependent. The independent variables were individual gatekeeping forces that cannot be changed or altered. Basic demographics such as gender, background experience, university classification, ideology, and political ideology were classified as independent variables.

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) to describe the sample's demographics, assess the level of importance of news media responsibilities, and assess the level of influence of newsworthiness. Oneway ANOVA was run to determine the significant difference between routine gatekeeping forces when compared by university student job title.

Results

The background information determined that most participants worked for The University Daily Kansan (33.3%) and the Daily Nebraskan (31%). The Maneater and The Oklahoma Daily each accumulated 9.5 % of the study, The Daily Toreador accumulated 7.1 %, and the Kansas State College and The Battalion each accumulated 4.8% of the study. Exact job titles ranged from the majority of news (15%) and staff (15%) reporter, and editor-in-chief (12.5%) to the minority of broadcaster reporter (2.5%), design editor (2.5 %), and opinions editor (2.5%). The overall basic demographics of the participants for this study showed 26 were female and 12 were male. The majority of participants were seniors (35.7%), journalism majors (69%),

classified their race as Caucasian (61.9%), identified their political philosophy as liberal (38.1%), and had one to two years of work experience on their university newspaper (40.5%). The small size of this convenient sample is recognized as a limitation of the study. Caution is advised in generalizing these results to other populations beyond the sample.

Objective 1

Objective 1 attempted to measure the level of importance for routine gatekeeping actions on newsworthiness. Table 4 displays means and standard deviations for 15 statements related to how important participants perceived certain actions of news media responsibilities. The study found that the majority of participants perceived the action to inform the student body of university issues to be extremely important ($M = 6.77$). Nine routine actions were perceived to be very important among participants: to get information to the public quickly ($M = 6.44$), provide interpretation of complex problems ($M = 6.13$), challenge university officials by being skeptical of their actions ($M = 6.05$), investigate claims and/or statements made by the government ($M = 5.97$), discuss university policy while it is still being developed ($M = 5.97$), Challenge public officials ($M = 5.95$) and university organizations ($M = 5.92$) by being skeptical of their actions, give students the chance to express their views on public affairs ($M = 5.82$), and develop intelligence of the public ($M = 5.64$). Routine actions to influence public opinion ($M = 3.42$) and provide relaxation ($M = 3.28$) were found to have of little importance on newsworthiness.

Table 4

Routine Gatekeeping Actions (N = 37)

| | <i>M^a</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|----------------------|-----------|
| Inform the student body of university issues | 6.77 | 0.49 |
| Get information to the public quickly | 6.44 | 0.82 |
| Provide interpretation of complex problem | 6.13 | 1.08 |
| Challenge university officials by being skeptical of their actions | 6.05 | 1.21 |
| Investigate claims and/or statements made by the government | 5.97 | 1.18 |
| Discuss university policy while it is still being developed | 5.97 | 0.93 |
| Challenge public officials by being skeptical of their actions | 5.95 | 1.17 |
| Challenge university organizations by being skeptical of their actions | 5.92 | 1.20 |
| Give students the chance to express their views on public affairs | 5.82 | 1.17 |
| Develop intelligence of the public | 5.64 | 1.37 |
| Concentrate on news that is of interest to the widest possible audience | 5.16 | 1.50 |
| Develop cultural interests of the public | 5.15 | 1.35 |
| Provide entertainment | 4.97 | 1.42 |
| Influence public opinion | 3.42 | 1.97 |
| Provide relaxation | 3.28 | 1.59 |

Note. Maximum rating is 7.00.

^a1.00 – 1.50 = Not Really Important, 1.51 – 2.50 = Not Important, 2.51 – 3.50 = Of Little importance, 3.51 – 4.50 = Somewhat Important, 4.51 – 5.50 = Important, 5.51 – 6.50 = Very Important, and 6.51 – 7.00 = Extremely Important.

Objective 2

Objective 2 attempted to measure the level of influence of newsworthiness on student journalists and editors of university newspaper publications. Table 5 displays means and standard deviations for 12 statements related to how influential certain factors are on participants perception of newsworthiness. The study found that the majority of participants perceived readers of the newspaper publication to be influential ($M = 6.13$). Comparable to Cassidy's (2006) report that routine level forces of peers on staff and journalistic training exerted the most influence, this study found participants perceived

journalistic training ($M = 6.00$) to have the second highest level of influence and peers on staff ($M = 5.18$) to be moderately influential. Factors related to interests groups ($M = 2.68$) and advertisers ($M = 2.05$) were found to have the lowest influential rate.

Table 5

Factors of Newsworthiness (N = 36)

| | M^a | SD |
|--|-------|------|
| Readers | 6.13 | 0.91 |
| Journalistic training | 6.00 | 1.32 |
| Peers on staff | 5.18 | 1.37 |
| Deadlines | 5.13 | 1.42 |
| News sources | 5.08 | 1.36 |
| Local competing news media | 5.05 | 1.22 |
| Supervisors | 4.86 | 1.81 |
| Priorities of network news and other prestige newspapers | 4.50 | 1.54 |
| Audience research | 4.00 | 1.68 |
| Public opinion polls | 3.68 | 1.54 |
| Interest groups | 2.68 | 1.44 |
| Advertisers | 2.05 | 1.29 |

Note. Maximum rating is 7.00.

^a1.00 – 1.50 = Not at all Influential, 1.51 – 2.50 = Not Influential, 2.51 – 3.50 = Of Little Influence, 3.51 – 4.50 = Somewhat Influential, 4.51 – 5.50 = Moderately Influential, 5.51 – 6.50 = Influential, and 6.51 – 7.00 = Very Influential.

Objective 3

Objective 3 attempted to measure the significant difference in routine gatekeeping forces when compared by university student job title (reporting staff and editing staff). Table 6 displays the means and standard deviations of students who work as reporting staff (RS), editing staff (ES), or reporting and editing staff (R&ES). The

table also displays significant values and F values of the total. The study showed three relationships with the mean difference significant at the 0.05 level. First, students who worked as editing staff determined the news media responsibility to get information to the public quickly significantly more important ($M = 6.80$) than students who worked as reporting staff ($M = 6.00$) or as reporting and editing staff ($M = 6.58$), with a significant difference of .02. Second, students who worked as editing staff determined the news media responsibility to discuss university policy while it is still being developed significantly more important ($M = 6.50$) than students who worked as reporting staff ($M = 5.53$) or reporting and editing staff ($M = 6.00$), with a significant difference of .02. Third, students who worked as reporting staff ($M = 3.36$) determined interest groups were more influential in the level of newsworthiness than those students who worked as editing staff ($M = 2.58$) or reporting and editing staff ($M = 2.00$), with a significant difference of .05.

Table 6

Significant Difference in Routine Gatekeeping Actions When Compared to University Student Job Title (N=29)

| | RS | | ES | | R&ES | | Total | | F | Sig. |
|---|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------|-------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Get information to the public quickly | 6.00 | 0.93 | 6.83 | 0.39 | 6.58 | 0.79 | 6.44 | 0.82 | 4.38 | 0.02* |
| Provide interpretation of complex problems | 6.07 | 0.96 | 6.25 | 1.14 | 6.08 | 1.24 | 6.13 | 1.08 | 0.11 | 0.90 |
| Provide entertainment | 4.80 | 1.61 | 5.17 | 1.19 | 5.00 | 1.48 | 4.97 | 1.42 | 0.21 | 0.81 |
| Provide relaxation | 3.33 | 1.63 | 3.08 | 1.44 | 3.42 | 1.78 | 3.28 | 1.59 | 0.14 | 0.87 |
| Investigate claims and/or statements made by the government | 6.00 | 1.13 | 6.00 | 1.28 | 5.92 | 1.24 | 5.97 | 1.18 | 0.02 | 0.98 |
| Concentrate on news that is of interest to the widest possible audience | 4.67 | 1.45 | 5.42 | 1.44 | 5.55 | 1.57 | 5.16 | 1.50 | 1.38 | 0.27 |
| Discuss university policy while it is still being developed | 5.53 | 0.83 | 6.50 | 1.00 | 6.00 | 0.74 | 5.97 | 0.93 | 4.20 | 0.02* |
| Develop intelligence of the public | 5.33 | 1.50 | 6.08 | 1.31 | 5.58 | 1.24 | 5.64 | 1.37 | 1.02 | 0.37 |
| Develop cultural interests of the public | 5.47 | 1.30 | 5.00 | 1.21 | 4.92 | 1.56 | 5.15 | 1.35 | 0.66 | 0.53 |
| Challenge public officials by being skeptical of their actions | 5.87 | 1.06 | 6.50 | 0.67 | 5.50 | 1.51 | 5.95 | 1.17 | 2.43 | 0.10 |
| Challenge university officials by being skeptical of their actions | 5.87 | 1.13 | 6.67 | 0.49 | 5.67 | 1.61 | 6.05 | 1.21 | 2.51 | 0.10 |

Table 6 Continued

| | RS | | ES | | R&ES | | Total | | F | Sig. |
|--|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|------|-------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | | |
| Challenge university organizations by being skeptical of their actions | 5.67 | 1.11 | 6.42 | 0.67 | 5.75 | 1.60 | 5.92 | 1.20 | 1.52 | 0.23 |
| Inform the student body of university issues | 6.67 | 0.49 | 6.92 | 0.29 | 6.75 | 0.62 | 6.77 | 0.48 | 0.90 | 0.42 |
| Influence public opinion | 3.33 | 2.13 | 4.00 | 1.79 | 3.00 | 1.95 | 3.42 | 1.97 | 0.76 | 0.48 |
| Give students a chance to express their views on public affairs | 5.60 | 1.12 | 6.33 | 1.07 | 5.58 | 1.24 | 5.82 | 1.17 | 1.74 | 0.19 |
| Peers on staff | 4.86 | 1.51 | 5.75 | 1.22 | 5.00 | 1.28 | 5.18 | 1.37 | 1.57 | 0.22 |
| Supervisors | 4.71 | 1.90 | 5.64 | 1.43 | 4.33 | 1.92 | 4.86 | 1.81 | 1.61 | 0.21 |
| Journalistic Training | 5.57 | 1.34 | 6.33 | 1.72 | 6.17 | 0.58 | 6.00 | 1.32 | 1.24 | 0.30 |
| News Sources | 5.29 | 1.27 | 5.25 | 1.42 | 4.67 | 1.44 | 5.08 | 1.36 | 0.80 | 0.46 |
| Priorities of network news and prestige newspapers | 4.07 | 1.54 | 5.17 | 1.27 | 4.33 | 1.67 | 4.50 | 1.54 | 1.82 | 0.18 |
| Local competing news media | 4.57 | 1.09 | 5.73 | 1.10 | 5.00 | 1.28 | 5.05 | 1.22 | 3.09 | 0.06 |
| Deadlines | 5.00 | 1.47 | 5.58 | 1.08 | 4.83 | 1.64 | 5.13 | 1.42 | 0.93 | 0.40 |
| Advertisers | 2.43 | 1.45 | 1.83 | 1.34 | 1.83 | 1.03 | 2.05 | 1.29 | 0.93 | 0.40 |
| Readers | 6.00 | 0.96 | 6.25 | 0.97 | 6.17 | 0.83 | 6.13 | 0.91 | 0.25 | 0.78 |
| Interest Groups | 3.36 | 1.39 | 2.58 | 1.56 | 2.00 | 1.04 | 2.68 | 1.44 | 3.30 | 0.05* |
| Audience Research | 3.93 | 1.54 | 3.50 | 1.93 | 4.58 | 1.51 | 4.00 | 1.68 | 1.29 | 0.29 |
| Public Opinion Polls | 3.64 | 1.15 | 3.58 | 1.62 | 3.83 | 1.95 | 3.68 | 1.54 | 0.08 | 0.92 |

Note. RS = Reporting Staff; ES = Editing Staff; R&ES = Reporting and Editing Staff.

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study showed student reporters and editors of university newspaper publications perceive certain news media responsibilities to be more important than others, that factors of newsworthiness are more influential than others, and that significant differences exist in routine gatekeeping actions when compared by university student job title.

Routines construct a framework and boundaries that develops a journalist's behavior towards the level of newsworthiness (Shoemaker, 1996). Participants found routine gatekeeping actions highly important and influential when considering news media responsibilities and newsworthiness. This supports Shoemaker et al. (2001), who found that editor's assessment of routine forces of newsworthiness positively related to the quality of news coverage of Congressional bills. However, this study does not clarify if routine gatekeeping forces positively related to student journalists and editors' news selection process. This study describes only how the levels of importance and influence of routine gatekeeping actions are perceived by student reporters and editors; therefore, further research should be conducted to determine if routine gatekeeping forces affect student's news selection process.

As news stories travel through the news selection process, its level of newsworthiness is perceived differently from one news media job to the other. Levels of importance and influence of routine gatekeeping actions exist when compared by university student job title. This study found that different roles within the news media newsroom affects the influence of newsworthiness, which supports Tuchman's (1978)

theory that "interactions within the bureaucratic hierarchy, reporters and editors jockeying with one another, may determine what is identified as news" (pg. 25). Further research should be conducted to determine if individual forces have the same effect when compared by university student job titles.

The perceived level of importance of a topic by the gatekeeper is a factor that may influence whether a story is published or not. This study found that job responsibilities can determine an individual's perception of a story's level of newsworthiness. Therefore, advisers of university student newspaper publications are encouraged to share this study's findings with their student reporters and editors to educate them on how one another perceives levels of newsworthiness.

Though surveys can identify psychological determinants of gatekeeping and measure respondents' perceptions of forces that influence the news selection process, the low response rate is considered as a limitation of this study. However, this study adds to the knowledge of gatekeeping by expanding its research borders, and supports that gatekeeping is a process based on forces operating on more than just the individual level and suggested that routine level forces also play a prominent role in journalistic decision making (Shoemaker, 1996). Research should be continued to gain more knowledge on how individual and routine gatekeeping forces affect student reporters and editors.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Results found that student reporters and editors of university newspaper publications perceive certain news media responsibilities to be more important than others and find particular factors of newsworthiness are more influential than others. Results also showed that significant relationships exist when comparing individual and routine gatekeeping forces and significant differences exist in routine gatekeeping actions when compared by university student job title.

Routine gatekeeping actions were found highly important and influential when considering news media responsibilities and newsworthiness. This supports Shoemaker et al. (2001), who found that editor's assessment of routine forces of newsworthiness positively related to the quality of news coverage of Congressional bills. However, this study does not clarify if routine gatekeeping forces positively related to student journalists and editors' news selection process. This study describes only how the levels of importance and influence of routine gatekeeping actions are perceived by student reporters and editors; therefore, further research should be conducted to determine if routine gatekeeping forces affect student's news selection process.

Results indicated that the more participants did not study a form of journalism, the more important they perceived the routine force of journalistic training. Therefore, recommendations for advisers to concentrate on student reporters and editors journalistic training is strongly encourage. Through studying a form of journalism, students learn basic skills on how to properly develop a news story from the selection process to

publication. This factor of newsworthiness determines how journalists perceive their target audience to determine what will be of most interest to them.

Moderate positive, moderate negative, strong positive and strong negative relationships exist between individual and routine gatekeeping forces. The existence of these relationships supports Cassidy (2006), who determined the relationship that routine level gatekeeping forces exerted more influence than individual gatekeeping forces, but does not specify if one force is more dominant than the other. The findings show that individual and routine levels have a direct relationship, however, future research should be conducted to determine if routine levels of gatekeeping forces put forward more of an influence than individual levels on student journalists and editors of university newspaper publications.

As news stories travel through the news selection process, its level of newsworthiness is perceived differently from one news media job to the other. Levels of importance and influence of routine gatekeeping actions exist when compared by university student job title. This study found that different roles within the news media newsroom affects the influence of newsworthiness, which supports Tuchman's (1978) theory that "interactions within the bureaucratic hierarchy, reporters and editors jockeying with one another, may determine what is identified as news" (pg. 25). Further research should be conducted to determine if individual forces have the same effect when compared by university student job titles.

The perceived level of importance of a topic by the gatekeeper is a factor that may influence whether a story is published or not. This study found that job

responsibilities can determine an individual's perception of a story's level of newsworthiness. Therefore, advisers of university student newspaper publications are encourage to share this study's findings with their student reporters and editors to education them on how one another perceives levels of newsworthiness.

Though surveys can identify psychological determinants of gatekeeping and measure respondents' perceptions of forces that influence the news selection process, the low response rate is considered as a limitation of this study. However, this study adds to the knowledge of gatekeeping by expanding its research boarders, and supports that gatekeeping is a process based on forces operating on more than just the individual level and suggested that routine level forces also play a prominent role in journalistic decision making (Shoemaker, 1996). Research should be continued to gain more knowledge on how individual and routine gatekeeping forces affect student reporters and editors.

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APPENDIX A

The purpose of this study is to describe the individual and routine levels of gatekeeping forces among regional university student reports and editors for university publications, and to determine if significant differences in routine gatekeeping forces exist when comparing students by job title (university student reporters and student editors). You were selected to be a possible participant because you are a student journalist or editor for a university newspaper within the Big 12 Conference or a student at an 1862, 1890 and 1994 land-grant college or university within those states.

Your participation is vital to the development of information that will help future researchers identify the influences that affects the news selection process.

The survey has multiple questions and should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. Please read the directions for each section before responding. Your responses are confidential, will be recorded in a secure database, and your name or identifiable information will not be used in any reports resulting from this study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You may refuse to answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable. There are no risks or benefits for your participation in this study.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board–Human Subjects Research, Texas A&M University (2009-0049). For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979)458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu. If you have questions specific to this study, please contact Meredith Corte at 979-458-3391 or Mcorte@aged.tamu.edu.

If you would like to participate in the study, please enter your e-mail address and your newspaper's name in the spaces provided. Participants should print a copy of this consent form. Choosing “I want to complete the survey” will begin your participation.

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 College Station, TX 77843-2116
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 trutherford@tamu.edu

Email Address

Newspaper's
 Name

1. I have read and understand the information above,

- I want to complete the survey
 I DO NOT want to complete the survey

Background Information

2. Which of the following best describes your job?

- Member of the reporting staff
 Member of the editing staff
 Member of both the reporting and editing staff

3. IF YOU ANSWER "C" to the above question, please allocate the PERCENTAGE of time allotted working on each staff. Percentages should total 100%.

Reporting Staff

Editing Staff

4. What is your exact job title? (Select one)

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Editor-in-Chief | <input type="checkbox"/> News Editor | <input type="checkbox"/> News Reporter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Design Editor | <input type="checkbox"/> Feature Editor | <input type="checkbox"/> Broadcast Reporter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sports Editor | <input type="checkbox"/> Broadcast/Online Editor | <input type="checkbox"/> Features Reporter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Copy Editor | <input type="checkbox"/> Opinions Editor | <input type="checkbox"/> Sports Reporter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Editor | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo Editor | <input type="checkbox"/> Staff Writer |

5. What are your main responsibilities in your job?

Media Roles

6. Please indicate HOW IMPORTANT you think each of these actions are for your news media responsibilities. Please use the following scale:

| | Not Really Important | | Somewhat Important | | | Extremely Important | |
|---|----------------------|---|--------------------|---|---|---------------------|---|
| Get information to the public quickly | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Provide interpretation of complex problems | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Provide entertainment | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Provide relaxation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Investigate claims and/or statements made by the government | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Stay away from stories where factual content cannot be verified | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Concentrate on news that is of interest to the widest possible audience | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Discuss university policy while it is still being developed | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Develop intelligence of the public | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Develop cultural interests of the public | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Challenge public officials by being skeptical of their actions | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Challenge university officials by being skeptical of their actions | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Challenge university organizations by being skeptical of their actions | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Inform the student body of university issues | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Influence public opinion | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Give students a chance to express their views on public affairs | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Newsworthiness

7. Please indicate the level of influence the following factors have on your perception of newsworthiness using the following scale:

| | Not at all Influential | | | Somewhat Influential | | | Very Influential |
|---------------------|------------------------|---|---|----------------------|---|---|------------------|
| Your peers on staff | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Your supervisors | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Your journalistic training | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| News Sources | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Priorities of network news and prestige newspapers | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Local competing news media | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Deadlines | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Advertisers | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Readers | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Interest Groups | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Audience Research | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Public Opinion Polls | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Basic Demographics

8. Are you

- Female
 Male

9. For how many years have you worked for your university's newspaper?

- Less than 1 year
 1 to 2 years
 3 to 4 years
 More than 4 years

Never

10. For how many years have you worked in the following types of positions?

| | Less than 1 year | 1 to 2 years | 3 to 4 years | Over 4 years | Never |
|-----------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| Reporting | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Editing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

11. Which is your university classification?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate Student
- PH.D Student

12. What is your major?

- Journalism
- Communication
- Agricultural Journalism & Communications
- English
- Political Science
- Business
- Other

Other (please specify)

13. Which group best describes your race?

- White (Caucasian)
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic or Latino

- Asian or Asian-American
- Native American or Indian
- Other

Other (please specify)

14. Which group best represents your political philosophy?

- Very Conservative
- Conservative
- Moderate
- Liberal
- Very Liberal

Comments

15. If you have any comments about this survey, please include them here.

Thank You

Thank you for your time and participation!

APPENDIX B

[Date]

Dear [Recipient's Name]:

My name is Meredith Corte and I am a graduate student at Texas A&M University studying Agricultural Communications and Journalism. I am contacting you to see if your student reporters and editors would be interested in participating in a study I am conducting for my thesis titled, "The effects of individual and routine forces in gatekeeping on student journalist and editors or university newspaper publications."

The purpose of this study is to describe the individual and routine levels of gatekeeping forces among regional university student reporters and editors of university publications, and to determine if significant differences in routine gatekeeping forces exist when comparing students by job title (university student reporters and student editors).

Throughout this web-based survey, subjects will be asked questions regarding their journalistic or editing background, their opinion on media roles and newsworthiness, and basic demographics.

There are minimal to no risks for participation, however, participants are not obligated to answer questions with which they feel uncomfortable, and are free to leave the study at any time. Participation in this study is confidential—neither student identity nor any identifying information will be disclosed as part of this study.

Surveys will be administered to you via email on Thursday, February 19, 2009. Attached to your e-mail will be another e-mail containing the link to the survey, please forward that message to all student reporters and editors on your staff. Participants will have a little more than a month to complete the survey and results will be collected on Tuesday, March 31, 2009 at 5:00 p.m. A weekly reminder will be sent to you to encourage your students to complete the survey.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board—Human Subjects Research, Texas A&M University (2009 -0049). For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979)458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu. If you have questions specific to this study, please contact Meredith Corte at (979) 458-3391 or mcorte@aged.tamu.edu.

The link to the survey is: Student Newspaper Gatekeeping

Thank you for helping me learn more about gatekeeping influences among student journalists and editors.

Sincerely,

Meredith Corte

Graduate Assistant, PI
Department of Agricultural, Leadership, Education, And Communications
Texas A&M University MS 2116
College Station, TX 77843 – 2116

VITA

Meredith Ann Corte was born in Houston, Texas. Meredith received her Bachelor of Science degree in agricultural leadership, education, and development from Texas A&M University at College Station, in December 2007. While at Texas A&M, she was active in the Public Relations Student Society of America, serving as External PR Coordinator for 2 years, the Beef Cattle Association, serving as treasurer for 1 year, and was a member of Helping One Student to Succeed (HOST).

Meredith entered the Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications graduate program at Texas A&M University in January 2008 and received her Master of Science degree in August 2009. Meredith completed requirements to earn the eLearning Certificate and plans to pursue a career in the field of public relations.

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