

THE RELATIONSHIP OF NEWSPAPER  
CHARACTERISTICS AND TYPES  
OF RELEASES ON  
PUBLICATIONS

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Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION  
December, 1984

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge and formally thank the following people:

Dr. Tom Karman and the other members of my dissertation committee--Dr. Robert Kamm, Dr. Dianna Newman, and Dr. Ann Austin--for their advisement and encouragement.

Dr. Ralph Hamilton and the staffs of OSU's public and agriculture information offices without whose cooperation this study could never been accomplished.

Dr. Joe White who gave me my first public relations position and encouraged me to pursue a doctorate in higher education administration.

My family, Gail and Jene, for their endurance and understanding during the frustrating times of this pursuit.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### A RATIONALE

This research examines how Oklahoma newspaper characteristics relate to publication decisions regarding different types of articles released from Oklahoma State University public information and agriculture information offices. It is based on the assumption that the successfulness of the university's external communications is related to the amount and types of information that reaches the public through Oklahoma media. In light of this assumption, the following rationale is provided.

Higher education administrators can communicate better with external publics. Professional literature on communication effectiveness indicates that three elements--quantity of information, responsiveness to publics, and communicator credibility--combine to form a prescription for successful external communications.

#### Quantity of Information

In 1964, Greenberg published his finding that "attitude change is consistently related to information gain." Greenberg's evidence was acquired from comparisons of pretests and post tests concerning attitudes and knowledge about fallout shelters. The evidence indicated that additional



information served to increase the magnitude of an attitude whether or not that information supported the attitude.<sup>1</sup>

Authors of three studies related specifically to education arrived at similar conclusions. In 1969, Williams suggested from a case study that lack of information about education was related to negative attitudes about education.<sup>2</sup> In 1976, McCain and Wall investigated a school bond issue that had failed three times. They hypothesized that individuals supporting the bond issue were those who had received a quantity of communications through personal contact with school officials, through printed materials, or through their school children. All hypotheses were supported except the one concerning printed material.<sup>3</sup> In 1979, Henderson hypothesized in his doctoral dissertation that: "The quantity of information held by an individual will be positively related to his/her attitude toward his/her school system." After conducting random sample telephone interviews in three urban school districts, Henderson found a positive correlation between quantity of information and attitudes.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, Sickling compared printed media coverage of the Kansas City (Missouri) community colleges for two years, 1965 and 1975. Bond issues for the college had been presented to the public in both years, passing in 1965, but failing in 1975. By using the Sanford-Greendahl Copy Value Rating Scale, Sickling found a drastic decrease in coverage in 1975, a marked decrease in the judged value of the 1975

articles, and a 70 percent decrease in institutional and individual human interest stories from 1965 to 1975.<sup>5</sup>

### Responsiveness to Publics

The second part of the prescription for external communication effectiveness demands adapting information to make it relevant to particular groups of citizens.

In his 1969 case study, Williams recognized the impact of adapting information to particular groups. He related many of the case school's problems to "the lack of information relating to specific local conditions." He wrote:

A second major category of problems was related to the lack of specific information available to local or regional groups pertaining to decisions which were of concern to local or regional schools. Citizens frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the level of information available to them about both present and future oriented situations affecting local schools. A definite lack of consultation with interested community groups increased the alienation between many of these groups and the school system and also contributed to the defensive image of the system.<sup>6</sup>

Williams blamed structural factors, personal factors and system norms for this problem. The structural factors seem particularly worth noting here because Williams contended that due to the centralized decision-making structure of the case school, "regional administrators and local principals were ill-equipped to provide much of the information demanded by citizens."<sup>7</sup>

Studies less directly related to education also appear

to support this part of the prescription. In 1976, Anderson concluded from his study on group discussions that "additional information acts to make attitudes more extreme."<sup>8</sup> A study on discussion polarization effects involved an experiment with two bogus juries. Kaplan found that "informational influences . . . better accounted for postdiscussion judgment shifts than did conformity to other's positions. . . ."<sup>9</sup> While neither of these studies actually drew correlations between relevance of the information presented and attitude change, they both inferred that an individual's initial attitude determined the type of information he would integrate into judgment. The McCain and Wall study supported this inference. These authors contended that the printed materials used in the bond issue campaign were ineffective because the materials were "not adapted to the needs and values of the voters in the district."<sup>10</sup>

#### Communicator Credibility

The above studies do not suggest that administrators should provide misleading or inaccurate information. As Williams noted in his case study, communicating only positive or neutral information is "viewed by numerous publics as an attempt to gloss over weaknesses" and results in "an ethos of distrust on the part of many segments of the public."<sup>11</sup> Thus adapting information to a specific public sometimes requires admitting and openly discussing problems and weaknesses of concern to that public. In fact, such an

approach may increase the communicator's credibility and, thus, the message's believability.

Eagly has conducted two studies that support the importance of communicator credibility. Her first study on the subject was completed in 1975. She wrote that:

. . . message persuasiveness is lowered to the extent that the position advocated in the message is attributed to a particular communicator characteristic rather than to the external reality it supposedly describes.<sup>12</sup>

Eagly's 1978 study revealed similar findings. She considered two types of communicator bias:

. . . knowledge bias refers to the recipient's belief that a communicator's knowledge about external reality is nonveridical, and reporting bias refers to the belief that a communicator's willingness to convey an accurate version of external reality is compromised.<sup>13</sup>

Eagly concluded that, regardless of the type of bias expected, communicators were judged to be more persuasive and unbiased when the expected bias was unconfirmed. For instance, college presidents would be expected always to present information favorable about their colleges. Thus, their credibility is decreased to the extent that they do so and is enhanced to the extent that they present neutral or negative information.

Likewise, Greenberg concluded that even negative information can enhance supportive attitudes and that the amount of information has much greater influence on attitudes than the positive or negative connotations of that information.<sup>14</sup>

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of information has much greater influence on attitudes than the positive or negative connotations of that information.<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusion

The above research indicates that higher education administrators can improve communications with their external publics by providing plenty of honest, unbiased messages which are responsive to the concerns of those publics. However, the amount of direct communications between higher education administrators and the public is minimal. Even if administrators could spend half of their time communicating with external publics, they could not provide the quantity of information that research demonstrates is needed. Thus, the administrators hire public relations and public information practitioners to get information to the public through the news media.

These professional communicators write and distribute hundreds of news and feature stories to newspapers, radio stations, and television stations every year. Yet, a 1979 dissertation by Laakaniemi found that only one percent of the news in American newspapers is devoted to education.<sup>15</sup> Another dissertation by Dickson found that newspaper publishers, editors, and education reporters are satisfied with the present level of education coverage and believe that distributing more news releases about education would not mean a corresponding increase in news coverage.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in

Chapter Two, this study will examine obstacles to getting more releases about higher education published in newspapers.

END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Bradley S. Greenberg, "On Relating Attitude Change and Information Gain," Journal of Communications, (January 1964), p. 170.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas R. Williams, "Urban Schools and External Communications," Administrator's Notebook, 17, No. 4 (1969).

<sup>3</sup>Thomas A. McCain and Victor D. Wall, Jr., "A Communication Perspective of a School Bond Failure," Educational Administration Quarterly, 12, No. 2 (1976), 14.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Lee Henderson, "External Organizational Communications: Relations Between Attitude and Information in School District Populations," (unpub. dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 1979).

<sup>5</sup>Tom Sickling and Brice Harris, Jr., A Study of a Community College Image by a Survey of the Media (ERIC ED 130690), Kansas City Missouri, 1976, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Williams, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup>Williams, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup>Norman H. Anderson and Cheryl C. Granesser, "An Information Integration Analysis of Attitude Change in Group Discussion," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 32, No. 2 (September 1977), p. 214.

<sup>9</sup>Martin F. Kaplan, "Discussion Polarization Effects in a Modified Jury Decision Paradigm: Informational Influence," Sociometry, 40, No. 3 (September 1977), p. 262.

<sup>10</sup>McCain and Wall, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup>Williams, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup>Alice H. Eagly and Shelly Chaiken, "An Attribution Analysis of the Effect of Communicator Characteristics on Opinion Change: The Case of Communicator Attractiveness," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 32, No. 1 (1975), p. 142.

<sup>13</sup>Alice H. Eagly, Wendy Wood, and Shelly Chaiken, "Causal Inferences About Communicators and Their Effect on Opinion Change," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 36, No. 4 (1978), p. 424.

<sup>14</sup>Greenberg, p. 170.

<sup>15</sup>Raymond Edward Laakaniemi, "An Analysis of College and University News as Seen by Education Gatekeepers and College Public Relations Persons," unpub. dissertation, Ohio University, 1979).

<sup>16</sup>James Brain Dickson, "A Study of the Perceptions of Publishers, Editors, and Education Reporters Related to the Desirability and Feasibility of Three Approaches to Increasing Newspaper Coverage of American Education," unpub. dissertation, Ohio University, 1975).



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research is to examine how Oklahoma newspaper characteristics relate to publication decisions regarding different types of articles released from Oklahoma State University's (OSU) public information and agriculture information offices.

#### Implications

The significance of this research problem is noted through the following implications:

1. If statistically significant differences in publication use are found among the different types of releases, then public information practitioners can increase the quantity of information published about higher education by de-emphasizing those types that receive little use and by spending their resources to produce more of those types of releases that research indicates will be published more often.
2. If statistically significant differences in publication use are found among newspapers with different characteristics, then public information practitioners can increase

the quantity of information published about higher education by targeting releases to newspapers which would make them responsive to the release in question.

#### Review of Literature

One study that considered obstacles to getting more releases published was Perry's 1968 dissertation which examined a group of Kentucky newspapers to determine the kinds and amounts of state government news that they published. It revealed that the newspaper editors published only 6.7 percent of all news items and 10.4 percent of all news photos distributed by the state public information practitioners. The editors cited three basic reasons for rejecting most of the releases: (1) they were not localized enough to be readily usable in individual communities; (2) they were "propagandistic;" (3) space was not available to publish more of them.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, it appears that even though public information practitioners provide a quantity of information, little of it is used. They are not adapting the information to specific publics nor providing much neutral or negative information. Hence, they not only fail to fill parts two and three of the prescription for successful external communication, but they also fail to get most of the information past the newspaper gatekeepers. They do not fill part one of the prescription because the quantity of information that they provide never reaches the taxpaying public.

### Differences in Defining News

One reason that more news releases about education are not published is that public information practitioners define "news" differently from the newspaper practitioners who decide what will or will not be published. The Laakaniemi study found no agreement on the news value of stories about higher education between public information practitioners with ten Michigan colleges and the newspaper reporters who handled the news from those colleges. The newsmen rated cross-campus and issue-oriented stories highest while public information practitioners gave single-campus, positively-oriented stories the highest ratings.<sup>2</sup>

These different definitions of news are not surprising since other studies show that many newspaper readers also define news differently from newspaper practitioners. Pasqua developed a readership model of news values for his 1973 dissertation. Using 27 bipolar items, he found that nine accounted for 67 percent of what readers rated newsworthy. The items were depth, drama, complexity, consequence, objectivity, humanity, sympathy, and reader benefit. These ratings differed so much from the newspaper professionals' that Pasqua suggested "traditional assumptions about news values and their input in the writing of news be reevaluated in light of what readers perceive as news values in the reception of news."<sup>3</sup>

Another study that compared the news values of readers and newspaper practitioners was Trotter's 1975 dissertation.

He analyzed the different values given by each group to five news elements: impact, oddity, conflict, prominence, and magnitude. He then classified three types according to the importance given to each element. Nine out of ten of the newspaper practitioners in charge of gatekeeping rated impact, conflict, and magnitude most newsworthy, as did the highly educated readers. Readers in a lower education level preferred stories with impact, oddity, and magnitude while those with the lowest education levels preferred stories with oddity and conflict.<sup>4</sup>

The Newspaper Practitioner's  
Definition of News

Yet, no matter how much disagreement exists between newspaper practitioners and their readers or between them and public information practitioners over news values, all of these studies show agreement among the newspaper practitioners. Since they control the medium of communication between the public information practitioners and newspaper readers, information about education must fit within their definitions of "news," or it will never reach the public. An Oklahoma State University journalism professor has provided a ranking of news elements that can guide public information practitioners to a clearer understanding of that definition. Ward worked with 64 news practitioners in 11 different states asking them to rank stories containing different combinations of five news elements. He defined

the elements as impact, magnitude, known principals, oddity, and conflict. He found impact to be the most valued news element, followed by oddity, conflict and known principals. Contrary to the Trotter study, he did not find magnitude to be significant.<sup>5</sup> (See Appendix A for definitions of news elements.) When different combinations of these elements were ranked, Ward developed 12 rank positions with 1.0 representing the combination with the highest probability of being published by news professionals.<sup>6</sup> Knowing such rankings can enhance the ability of public information practitioners to compose releases that conform to newspaper practitioners definition of news. However, much information released from college and university public information practitioners clearly does not contain any of the above five elements. Yet, the information needs to reach the public, and releases containing such information are published.

Why? What qualities do these releases have that make them publishable? Why are some published while others are not, even though they contain the same type of information? Why does one newspaper publish a release while another does not? These questions have not been adequately examined.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Ashley Perry, "Selection and Use of State News by Weekly Newspapers in Kentucky," unpub dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1968.

<sup>2</sup>Raymond Edward Laakaniemi, "An Analysis of College and University News as Seen by Education Gatekeepers and College Public Relations Persons," unpub dissertation, Ohio University, 1979.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Mario Pasqua, Jr., "A Readership Model of News Value," unpub dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1973.

<sup>4</sup>Edgar Powell Trotter, "A Coorientational Analysis of Gatekeeper, Audience, and Publisher Patterns of News Selections," unpub dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1975.

<sup>5</sup>Walt J. Ward, "Sooner Editors Define the News," First in a Series of Reports for Oklahoma Media, Oklahoma State University, 1981, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup>Ward, p.3.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE RESEARCH DESIGN

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine how Oklahoma newspaper characteristics relate to publication use of seven different types of articles released from Oklahoma State University's public information and agriculture information offices.

#### Subjects

The subjects of this study were 408 articles released to 191 Oklahoma newspapers from OSU's public information and agriculture information offices over a six-month period. Findings may only be generalized to the types of articles used in this study and only cautiously to newspapers outside of Oklahoma. It is also possible that findings would differ for articles from other higher education institutions.

#### Limitations

Hometown articles, those about students, faculty, staff and administrators of interest only to the person's hometown newspaper, were not included in this study. Three studies have already been completed on hometown releases from OSU

with the latest being in 1976. All concluded that hometown releases from OSU are frequently published because they are localized.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, all articles about OSU contain local appeal for the Stillwater News Press and OSU publications. Thus, this study did not consider them, nor did it consider published articles about OSU that did not originate from either the public information or agriculture information offices. This limitation applied to articles released from OSU's sports information office and to editorial-type articles written by OSU faculty, even if the public information or agriculture information offices assisted in mailing the articles.

#### Design

This study was a causal-comparative study that looked for relationships between two independent variables-- 1) Oklahoma newspaper characteristics and 2) seven types of news and information articles released from OSU's public information and agriculture information offices--as they influence the dependent variable, publication of the articles. Neither of the independent variables was manipulated. Both were analyzed "ex post facto."

#### Research Assumptions

It was assumed that the newspaper clippings returned to OSU's public information office by the Oklahoma Press



Clipping Bureau represent a fair sampling of all public information and agriculture information releases which were published . This clipping service covers all Oklahoma newspapers and clips for numerous clients across the state. Past experience with it indicates that some articles are not clipped. However, since the clipping service is a profit motivated business and since OSU pays twenty cents per clipping received in addition to a flat monthly fee, it seems logical to assume, first, that most articles were clipped and, second, that those not clipped were missed randomly.

#### Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Is there a significant interaction between the frequency of newspapers' publication and different types of news releases on the percent of publications?

2. Is there a significant interaction between the circulation of newspapers and different types of news releases on the percent of those releases published?

3. Is there a significant interaction between the distance newspaper is located from the institution and different types of news releases on the percent of those releases published?

4. Is there a significant interaction between the size of newspapers' news staffs and the different types of news releases on the percent of those releases published?

### Statistical Tests

The statistical test used was multivariate repeated measures with a hypothesized alpha level of .05.

### Statistical Assumptions

The statistical assumptions were normality, homogeneity, independence of between levels and dependence of within levels.

### Statistical Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were derived from the research questions.

1. The frequency of newspapers' publications does not interact with the types of news releases to produce significantly different percent of publications.

2. The circulation of newspapers does not interact with the types of news releases to produce significantly different percent of publications.

3. The distance that newspapers are located from the institution does not interact with the types of news releases to produce significantly different percent of publications.

4. The size of newspapers' news staffs does not interact with the types of news releases to produce significantly different percent of publications.

## Procedure

The data for this study were collected by keeping copies of articles mailed from OSU's public information and agriculture information offices over a six-month time period. These copies were kept in notebooks, one for each of the following types:

### Seven Types of Articles

Institutional. This type included all releases that relate to the entire university as well as those about specific colleges, divisions, departments, and centers within the university. It included reports of activities, services, and accomplishments of such units. It also included graduation and honor roll lists.

Coming Events. This type included all articles that announced and/or promoted seminars, workshops, conferences, credit and noncredit courses, meetings, speeches, special events, etc. sponsored by OSU and held on or off the OSU campus. It also included those events sponsored by other organizations but held on campus. These articles were all written and released from either the public information or agriculture information offices before the event.

Past Events. This type included all articles summarizing or based upon past events held on campus as well as off-campus events involving OSU groups and organizations.

It covered the same types of activities as Coming Events. However, articles classified as Past Events were written and released from the information offices after the event.

Consumer Information. This type included all articles that provided information to aid consumers as long as the information was not based on research conducted at OSU. Much of the information told consumers how to do something.

Timely Topics. This type included all articles dealing with topics in the news as long as the articles were not based on research conducted at OSU or did not fit under another type.

Student/Faculty/Alumni Features. This type included all articles about OSU students, faculty, alumni, and administrators that may be of interest to and, therefore, was released to newspapers besides the person's hometown newspaper.

Research Stories. This type included all articles summarizing or based upon research projects conducted at OSU or by OSU personnel.

#### Selection of Types

These types were decided upon by examining two months, of articles released from OSU's public information and agriculture#information offices. Originally, consideration was given to dividing the releases into the following

twelve types: 1) Deaths/Accidents/Bad News, 2) Seminar Announcements, 3) Speech Summaries, 4) Speaker Announcements, 5) Centers/Divisions/Colleges, 6) Research Stories, 7) Meeting Reports, 8) Special Events, 9) Consumer Information, 10) Special Treatment Stories, 11) Timely Topics, and 12) Student/Faculty/Alumni Features.

As overlap was found between and among types, they were collapsed to avoid miscategorization. For example, Seminar Announcements, Speaker Announcements, and Special Events were collapsed into Coming Events. Deaths/Accidents/Bad News and Centers/Divisions/Colleges were collapsed into Institutional. Speech Summaries and Meeting Reports were collapsed into Past Events. It was decided that Special Treatment Stories would be best included within the other types.

#### Data Collection

As articles were released from the public information and agriculture information offices, all newspapers which were mailed each article were recorded in the notebooks. As clippings were received from the clipping service, the name of each newspaper publishing an article was noted on the notebook copy of that article.

Information on Oklahoma newspapers was maintained by the information offices and included the four newspaper characteristics--Frequency, Circulation, Distance, and News Staff Size-- which were examined in this study. The infor-

mation was last brought up to date in the fall of 1982 through a questionnaire mailed by the public information office to all Oklahoma newspapers.

#### Data Analysis

At the end of the six-month period, publication for each type of article was recorded on a Fortran Coding Form using the following procedure. Appropriate time was allowed for all clippings of articles released during the six-month period to be received from the clipping service and recorded in the notebooks. Each of the seven types of articles was treated as a subgroup. The publication information for each type of article was recorded on a Fortran Coding Form as discrete data under two categories: 1) the number of newspapers publishing the articles, 2) the number of newspapers that were mailed the articles but did not publish them.

The newspaper characteristics were recorded on the Fortran Coding Form as discrete data with the following categories:

Frequency--daily, weekly, and twice-weekly.

Circulation--under 1,000; 1,000 to 2,999; 3,000 to 5,999; 6,000 to 19,999; and over 20,000.

Distance from OSU (in miles)--5 to 49; 50 to 99; 100 to 149; 150 to 199; 200 or more.

News Staff Size-- 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6 or more.

The information was then analyzed using SPSSX.

### Summary

This study examined how two independent variables-- 1) four Oklahoma newspaper characteristics and 2) seven types of releases--relate to the dependent variable, the percent of releases published. 408 articles released from Oklahoma State University's public information and agriculture information offices and 191 Oklahoma newspapers were included in the study. A multivariate repeated measures was used to test for interactions between the independent variables.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert L. Cox, "A Variance and Factor Analysis of Reader's Preferences for Three Types of Higher Education News," unpub Master's Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1969.

Marla Morgan Schaefer, "Weekly Editors' Preferences For Three Types of Hometown News Stories," unpub Master's Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1970.

John Lee, "A Content Analysis of News Clippings Concerning Oklahoma State University From Selected Oklahoma Newspaper," unpub paper, 1976.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE RESEARCH RESULTS

Of the four newspaper characteristics, only one, frequency of publication, had a significant interaction with the main effect, types. The main effect, types, was significant for all four analyses. Details of these findings are organized by the research questions.

#### Question One - Frequency

"Is there a significant interaction between the frequency of newspapers' publication and different types of news releases on the percent of publications?" The answer to this question is yes. The newspaper characteristic, frequency of publication, had a significant interaction with types of news releases ( $F=2.33;p=.007$ )

An examination of the means (see Table 1) indicates that the greatest percent of publications was for twice-weekly newspapers for Consumer Information ( $\bar{X}=.82$ ). This mean was 51 points higher than the next highest mean which was for twice-weekly newspapers with Timely Topics. The third highest mean (.23) was tied by twice-weekly newspapers with Coming Events, and weekly newspapers with Consumer Information. Daily newspapers showed a slight preference

for Consumer Information and Research stories. However as Table I below illustrates, this preference is too slight to be meaningful.

TABLE I  
MEANS OF THE PERCENT OF PUBLICATIONS  
FOR FREQUENCY BY TYPES

Type	Weekly		2-Weekly		Daily	
	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd
Coming Events	.16	.30	.23	.37	.09	.13
Past Events	.02	.15	.05	.13	.07	.18
Timely Topics	.08	.20	.31	.48	.07	.23
Institutional	.00	.03	.00	.00	.02	.05
Features	.03	.15	.05	.13	.05	.08
Consumer Infor	.23	.42	.82	.37	.15	.20
Research	.11	.30	.05	.14	.08	.10

The graph of means in Appendix B further illustrates how little daily newspaper editors' preferences differed by types of news releases. The graph shows an almost flat line across types for daily newspapers. The graph also visually demonstrates the preference of twice-weekly and weekly newspaper editors for Consumer Information releases, and the better publication ratio for twice-weekly newspapers over weekly and daily newspapers.

Post hoc tests indicated significant contrasts between Consumer Information and four other types: Past Events ( $F=3.07$ ;  $p=.049$ ), Institutional ( $F=4.56$ ;  $p=.012$ ), Features ( $F=3.33$ ;  $p=.038$ ), and Research ( $f=10.34$ ;  $p=.000$ ). The most significant contrast was between Consumer Information and Research. (See Table II.)

TABLE II  
F TABLE FOR FREQUENCY BY TYPES

Interaction	df	f	sig. of f
Coming Events vs Consumer Infor	8.99	1.11	.330
Past Events vs Consumer Infor	5.95	3.07	.049*
Timely Topics vs Consumer Infor	7.07	.55	.580
Institutional vs Consumer Infor	4.76	4.56	.012*
Features vs Consumer Infor	11.30	3.33	.038*
Research vs Consumer Infor	12.88	10.34	.000*

The main effect, types, was also significant ( $F=174$ ;  $p=.000$ ). Post hoc tests indicated significant contrasts between the type Consumer Information and all other types except Timely Topics. (See Table III.)

TABLE III  
 F TABLE FOR TYPES FROM  
 FREQUENCY ANALYSIS

Interaction	df	f	sig. of f
Coming Events vs Consumer Infor	8.99	12.89	.000*
Past Events vs Consumer Infor	5.95	15.84	.000*
Timely Topics vs Consumer Infor	7.07	.17	.678
Institutional vs Consumer Infor	4.76	70.52	.000*
Features vs Consumer Infor	11.30	36.46	.000*
Research vs Consumer Infor	12.88	23.79	.000*

#### Question Two - Circulation

"Is there a significant interaction between the circulation of newspapers and different types of news releases on the percent of publications?" The answer to this question is no. The interaction between circulation and the main effect, types, was not significant ( $F=.61;p=.928$ ). See Table IV.

TABLE IV

MEANS OF THE PERCENT OF PUBLICATIONS FOR  
TYPES FROM CIRCULATION ANALYSIS

Type	under 1,000		1,000 to 2,999		3,000 to 5,999		6,000 to 19,999		20,000 or more	
	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd
Coming Events	.16	.33	.17	.30	.17	.28	.04	.05	.14	.26
Past Events	.00	.00	.02	.12	.08	.24	.04	.08	.03	.06
Timely Topics	.07	.23	.11	.23	.09	.24	.06	.22	.03	.05
Institutional	.00	.00	.00	.00	.01	.06	.01	.04	.02	.05
Features	.05	.22	.01	.11	.05	.16	.06	.10	.03	.05
Consumer Information	.30	.47	.24	.42	.26	.40	.21	.28	.07	.05
Research	.10	.31	.11	.31	.12	.28	.08	.10	.09	.06

However, the main effect for type was significant ( $F=164;p=.000$ ). Post hoc tests again indicated significant contrasts between Consumer Information and all other types except Timely Topics. (See Table V).

TABLE V  
F TABLE FOR TYPES FROM  
CIRCULATION ANALYSIS

Interaction	df	f	sig. of f
Coming Events vs Consumer Infor	8.79	13.07	.000*
Past Events vs Consumer Infor	6.01	14.49	.000*
Timely Topics vs Consumer Infor	7.06	.19	.660
Institutional vs Consumer Infor	4.84	68.40	.000*
Features vs Consumer Infor	11.45	35.52	.000*
Research vs Consumer Infor	13.83	20.25	.000*

#### Question Three - Distance

"Is there a significant interaction between the distance of newspapers from the institution and different types of news releases on percent of publication?" The answer to this question is no. The interaction between distance and the main effect types failed to show significance ( $F=615.20; P=.370$ ). This is illustrated in Table VI.

TABLE VI

MEANS OF THE PERCENT OF PUBLICATIONS FOR  
TYPES FROM DISTANCE ANALYSIS

Types	0 to 49 miles		50 to 99 miles		100 to 149 miles		150 to 199 miles		200 plus miles	
	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd
Coming Events	.06	.08	.14	.27	.18	.29	.13	.29	.17	.33
Past Events	.02	.09	.04	.17	.02	.06	.04	.17	.08	.24
Timely Topics	.05	.12	.11	.25	.07	.20	.12	.26	.03	.10
Institutional	.00	.00	.01	.05	.00	.02	.00	.00	.02	.05
Features	.09	.27	.02	.12	.02	.05	.02	.06	.09	.24
Consumer Infoma	.12	.28	.23	.39	.20	.37	.38	.48	.22	.38
Research	.03	.09	.08	.24	.09	.25	.13	.32	.21	.38

However, significant differences were found between the types ( $F=15.11;P=.000$ ). Post hoc contrasts were significant for contrasts between Consumer Information and all other types except Timely Topics. (See Table VII.)

TABLE VII  
F TABLE FOR TYPES FROM  
DISTANCE ANALYSIS

Interaction	df	f	sig. of f
Coming Events vs Consumer Infor	8.96	12.18	.001*
Past Events vs Consumer Infor	6.17	15.54	.000*
Timely Topics vs Consumer Infor	6.96	.20	.657
Institutional vs Consumer Infor	4.92	71.80	.000*
Features vs Consumer Infor	11.39	38.68	.000*
Research vs Consumer Infor	14.35	22.95	.000*

#### Question Four - News Staff Size

"Is there a significant interaction between the size of newspapers' news staffs and different types of news releases on percent of publications?" The answer to this question is no. The interaction between news staff size and the main effect types was not significant ( $F=674;p=.246$ ). The lack of significant differences in means can be seen in Table VIII.



TABLE VIII

MEANS OF THE PERCENT OF PUBLICATIONS FOR  
TYPES FROM NEWS STAFF SIZE ANALYSIS

Types	one member		two members		three members		four members		five members		six or more	
	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd
Coming Events	.08	.24	.20	.31	.14	.28	.15	.31	.14	.20	.11	.24
Past Events	.01	.04	.01	.06	.05	.22	.13	.31	.01	.04	.02	.07
Timely Topics	.08	.23	.14	.27	.08	.23	.01	.05	.13	.27	.03	.07
Institutional	.00	.00	.00	.02	.01	.05	.00	.00	.01	.03	.02	.04
Features	.10	.30	.01	.06	.01	.04	.07	.23	.03	.10	.03	.05
Consumer Infor	.19	.40	.31	.45	.25	.41	.13	.25	.29	.43	.15	.27
Research	.10	.30	.13	.31	.08	.26	.04	.07	.09	.25	.11	.21

Significant differences were found between the main effect types with all types except Timely Topics contrasting significantly with Consumer Information. (See Table IX).

TABLE IX  
F TABLE FOR TYPES FROM  
NEWS STAFF SIZE  
ANALYSIS

Interaction	df	f	sig. of f
Coming Events vs Consumer Infor	8.81	13.34	.000*
Past Events vs Consumer Infor	5.59	14.72	.000*
Timely Topics vs Consumer Infor	6.79	.05	.819
Institutional vs Consumer Infor	4.64	68.27	.000*
Features vs Consumer Infor	10.71	36.11	.000*
Research vs Consumer Infor	14.08	21.17	.000*

#### Summary

The answer to three of the research questions is no. Newspaper characteristics of Circulation, Distance, and News Staff Size, did not significantly interact with different types of news releases to influence publication decisions regarding those releases. However, the newspaper characteristic, frequency of publication, did interact with the types of news releases to influence publications.

All four analyses indicated that publication decisions do differ according to the type of news releases being considered. A graph of the entire sample mean for each type of news release is provided (see Appendix B). This graph demonstrates the strong preference for Consumer Information releases. Approximately 24 percent of these releases were published. It shows the next strongest preference to be for Coming Events, of which 15 percent were published. Timely Topics and Research stories appear to be preferred almost equally, with nine and ten percent of these releases being published. Less than five percent of Past Events and Features were published. Institutional releases were the least preferred. Less than one percent of them were published.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

This study indicates that those who keep the gates and determine what will and will not be published in Oklahoma newspapers are more receptive to some types of articles released from higher education institutions than to others and that their receptiveness differs according to their newspaper's frequency of publication.

The overall mean for all types of releases indicates that daily newspapers published an average of 7.6 percent of all articles sent them. Twice-weekly (21.6 percent) and weekly (9.0 percent) published a larger proportion of the releases sent them. Public information practitioners should consider that the odds of getting articles published are better when they are sent to twice-weekly and weekly newspapers than when they are sent to dailies. Since there are over twice as many twice-weekly and weekly newspapers as there are daily newspapers in Oklahoma, public information practitioners should be able to distribute information throughout the state through weekly and twice-weekly newspapers. Of course, daily newspapers should still be served, but public information practitioners should consider that their resources provide a smaller return in publications when spent on daily newspapers.

Newspapers in all three frequency levels published more consumer information releases than any other type of release. Public information practitioners should consider that Consumer Information articles showed the best chance of being published in all four analyses. In each analysis, Consumer Information releases differed significantly in percent of publications with all types except Timely Topics. These results indicate that Timely Topic releases have almost as good of a chance of being published as Consumer Information releases.

The graph of overall means indicates that three types of releases are published so infrequently that their value to public information practitioners should be seriously questioned. These releases are Past Events (four percent published), Features (three percent published), and Institutional (less than one percent published).

These results indicate that newspaper gatekeepers are not receptive to these types of articles regardless of the newspapers' characteristics. This should suggest to public information practitioners that time and resources spent on preparing and distributing such releases may be spent inefficiently and ineffectively.

Since Institutional and Feature articles are well liked by many higher education administrators, public information practitioners may need to educate administrators about newspaper gatekeepers' non-receptiveness to such releases the more effective types. This may not be as necessary for

newspapers located in the same community as the higher education institution since such releases are local. However, percent of publications showed no better use for newspapers located within 50 miles of the institution than for those located further away.

One explanation for the difference in newspaper gatekeepers' receptiveness to these types of releases and the other four types may relate to the reader service provided by the other types. Coming Events, Timely Topics, Consumer Information and Research articles provide information that directly affects and relates to the day-to-day lives of newspaper readers. Although the Pasqua and Trotter studies show differences between readers' and newspaper professionals' definitions of news,<sup>1</sup> newspapers are profit-motivated businesses. and their profit at least indirectly relates to how well they serve their readers. Thus, it is only smart business for them to publish articles that serve readers, especially if those articles are provided free.

Past Events, Features, and Institutional releases do not as directly affect or relate to readers' day-to-day lives. Institutional articles fall into the category that many newspaper practitioners call "brag stories." They generally serve only the institution's interest, being geared more toward promotion than toward providing relevant information to newspaper readers. Considering Eagly's studies on credibility,<sup>2</sup> Institutional articles also lack credibility since most of them only present positive

information about the institution. Past Events concentrate on what newspaper practitioners call "old news." This is especially true if a week or more is spent writing and getting the story approved before it can be distributed. Features from higher education institutions are almost always about students, faculty, or administrators, none of which are well known principals. Ward's study found no better use of stories with moderately known principals than stories about unknowns.<sup>3</sup> Thus, publication of features appears to be primarily limited to the principals' hometown newspapers. Although features generally require greater resources to produce than do hometowners, they do not appear to have wider publication appeal in spite of their human interest approach.

Since Institutional, Past Events, and Feature articles show less chance of being published, public information practitioners should be able to increase the quantity of information published about higher education by de-emphasizing these types of releases and by spending their resources to produce more Coming Events, Timely Topics, Consumer Information, and Research articles.

Although statistically significant interactions were not found between different levels of the other three newspaper characteristics and types of releases, some of the descriptive statistics concerning the levels of the other newspaper characteristics are worth noting.

The overall means for each circulation level shows a

negative relationship between publication of releases and circulation size. (See graph in Appendix C.) In other words, those newspapers with the smallest circulations, under 1,000, published the most. As circulation increased, the proportion of releases published appears to have decreased, although levels two and three are the same. This could infer to public information practitioners that the smaller the newspaper's circulation, the more receptive it will be to higher education releases. This does not mean that public information practitioners should discontinue sending releases to the larger circulation newspapers since an article published in them reaches more people.

In searching for an explanation of why publications relate negatively with circulation, news staff size was examined with the idea that it too might relate negatively with publication. If that had been the case, it would have been probable to assume that the increased publication for small circulation newspapers really related more to small news staffs (i.e. The newspapers with smaller staffs publish more releases because they have fewer people to write copy and, thus, must rely more on releases to fill their news holes.) However, news staff size did not relate negatively with publication of releases. The highest overall mean (11.43) was for newspapers with two members on their news staffs. The next highest was for newspapers with five members (10.00). (See graph in Appendix C.)

In considering the newspapers' distance from OSU, logic



might cause many public information practitioners to believe that those newspapers located closest to their institutions would be more likely to publish their releases merely due to proximity, but this study failed to provide support for such logic. The overall means for each distance level indicates that those newspapers located between 0 to 49 miles away from OSU had the lowest percent of publications (5.29). This could have occurred because those newspapers compete with the Stillwater paper which publishes a large percent of releases from Oklahoma State University. Those newspapers located 150 to 199 miles and 200 or more miles from OSU had the highest percent of publications (11.71 each).

These findings indicate that, for the most part, the percent of publications increased as distance from OSU increased. In other words, this study not only failed to support a positive relationship between proximity and publications, it indicated that a negative relationship may exist. (See graph in Appendix C.) This appears to be true even for Coming Events articles which many public information practitioners send only to newspapers within an hour's drive from the institution. This study showed cause to reexamine such practices, at least for public information practitioners.

These findings imply that public information practitioners can increase the quantity of information published about higher education without increasing costs by transferring resources from Institutional, Features, and Past

Events to the other types which are more likely to be published, and by targeting each release to newspapers with characteristics which make them responsive to releases.

#### Suggestions for Further Study

Similar studies to this one are needed to determine how consistently the findings are generalizable to newspapers from other states and to articles released from other types of higher education institutions. An identical study from another state university could test the former while a study involving one or more community colleges could test the latter.

A comparable study on releases to broadcast gatekeepers could help separate effective from non-effective releases for the broadcast media. Such a study could consider differences in effectiveness by 1) printed vs taped releases, 2) 10, 20, 30, and 60 second releases, 3) various techniques and topics. A limitation to such a study is that there are few if any businesses which provide the information on broadcast releases that clipping services provide on print releases. Thus, acquiring a percent of broadcasted to non broadcasted releases would be difficult.

Studies with more generalizability than case studies need to be conducted to test the relationship between quantity of information about an institution and support for that institution. Such studies could test for differences between publicly and privately operated institutions.

This study was limited to determining differences in newspaper gatekeepers' selection and rejection of releases. Other studies could examine different types of readers' selection and rejection of the seven different types of releases. Such studies could also seek to determine what writing styles and techniques communicate to readers best under different conditions.

Other studies regarding print gatekeepers' reception of releases could consider 1) the average amount of time between release dates and publication dates by the seven different types of releases, 2) the difference in publication rates between releases mailed alone and those mailed with photographs.

Studies evaluating the effectiveness and cost benefits of various public information practices should be helpful to practitioners. Studies designed to assess the contribution of public information activities to public and private institutions could also serve practitioners.

Such research could enable the field to become more exact and to help administrators fulfill the prescription for successful external communications. In short, it could make a great difference in the public support that higher education enjoys in the future.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Edgar Powell Trotter, "A Coorientational Analysis of Gatekeeper, Audience, and Publisher Patterns of News Selections," unpub dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1975.

<sup>2</sup>Alice H. Eagly and Shelly Chaiken, "An Attribution Analysis of the Effect of Communicator Characteristics on Opinion Change: The Case of Communicator Attractiveness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32, No.1 (1975), p. 142.

Alice H. Eagly, Wendy Wood, and Shelly Chaiken, "Causal Inferences About Communicators and Their Effect on Opinion Change," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36, No. 4 (1978), p. 424.

<sup>3</sup>Walt J. Ward, "Sooner Editors Define the News," First in a Series of Reports for Oklahoma Media, Oklahoma State University, 1981, p. 4.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

DEFINITIONS OF NEWS ELEMENTS



## NEWS ELEMENTS AS DEFINED BY WARD\*

IMPACT - Any physical or non-physical event in which a large number of readers participate--or which affects, now or in the future, a large number of persons in the community. "Affect" is used in the "Impact" sense. Impact can be damaging or enhancing.

MAGNITUDE - Any physical or non-physical event in which a large number of persons attend, or which involves gains, losses, expenditures or accomplishments. Magnitude is significant only from the quantitative point of view. It does not represent effect on a large number of readers, as does the Impact element.

KNOWN PRINCIPALS - Principals in the story are well known through repeated past publicity or position in society and/or community. Principals only moderately known rate little better than unknowns.

ODDITY - Any action or event that is rarer than just the unusual. Generally, the action or event has a "twist"--that is, it is different from the day-to-day turn of events . . . or opposite from what we've learned to expect, and, thus, predict in our culture and time. Lack of precedent, generally, though not necessarily, is indicated.

CONFLICT - Any open clash between persons, groups, animals, or involving a clash with any of those and nature. The clash can be verbal or physical. The conflict must obviously be intense, with distinct "movement against" by one or more of the opposing forces. Physical conflict rates better than verbal conflict.

\*Walt J. Ward, "Sooner Editors Define the News,"  
First in a Series of Reports for Oklahoma Media, Oklahoma  
State University, 1981, p. 4.

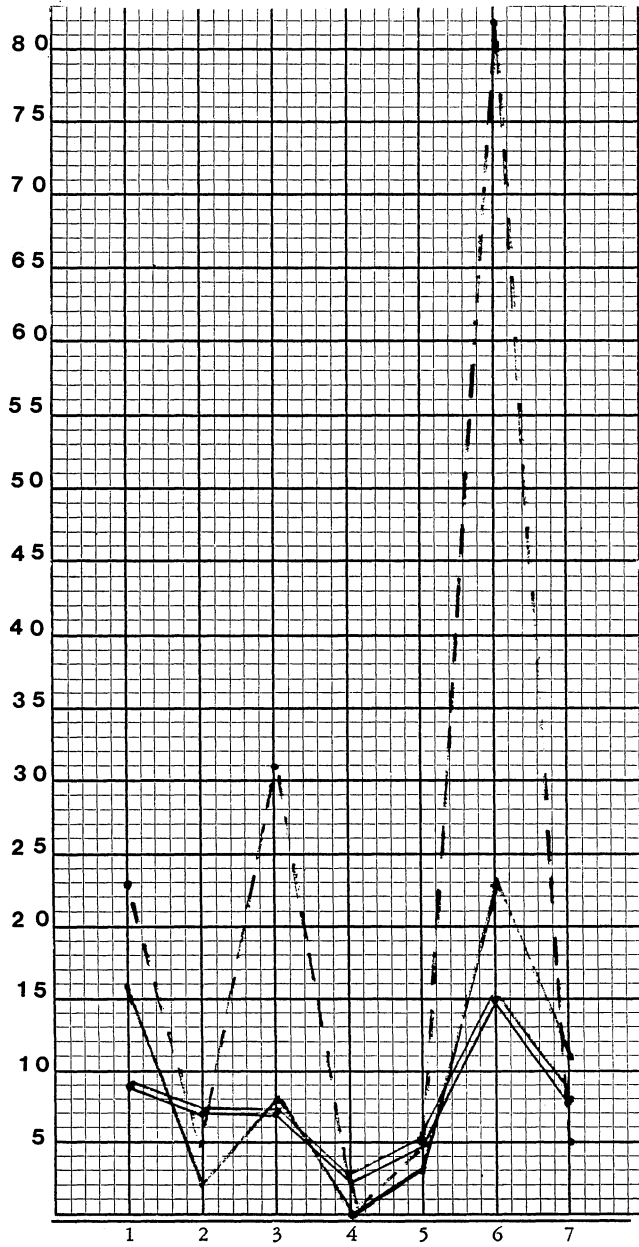
APPENDIX B

GRAPHS OF SIGNIFICANT ANALYSIS

### GRAPH OF MEANS FOR FREQUENCY WITH TYPES

MEAN  
PUBLICATIONS

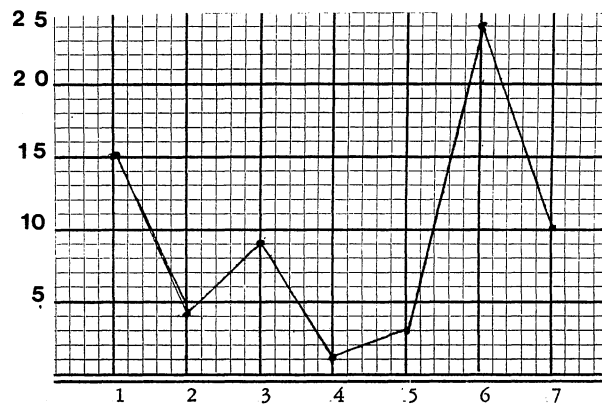
\_\_\_\_\_ = WEEKLY  
 - - - - - = 2-WEEKLY  
 = = = = = = DAILY



1 = COMING EVENTS	4 = INSTITUTIONAL	7 = RESEARCH
2 = PAST EVENTS	5 = FEATURES	
3 = TIMELY TOPICS	6 = CONSUMER INFORMATION	

GRAPH OF OVERALL MEANS FOR TYPES

OVERALL MEAN  
PUBLICATIONS



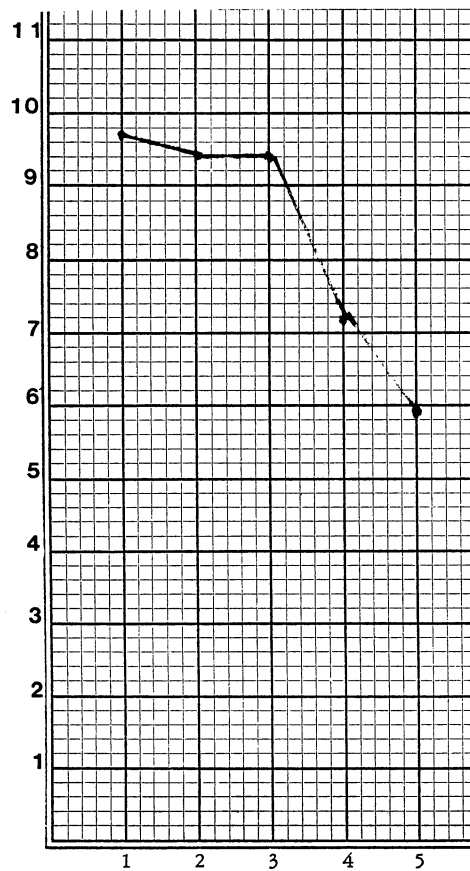
1 = COMING EVENTS      4 = INSTITUTIONAL      7 = RESEARCH  
2 = PAST EVENTS      5 = FEATURES  
3 = TIMELY TOPICS      6 = CONSUMER INFORMATION

APPENDIX C

GRAPHS OF NEWSPAPER CHARACTERISTICS' LEVELS

GRAPH OF OVERALL MEANS FOR CIRCULATION LEVELS

OVERALL MEAN  
PUBLICATIONS

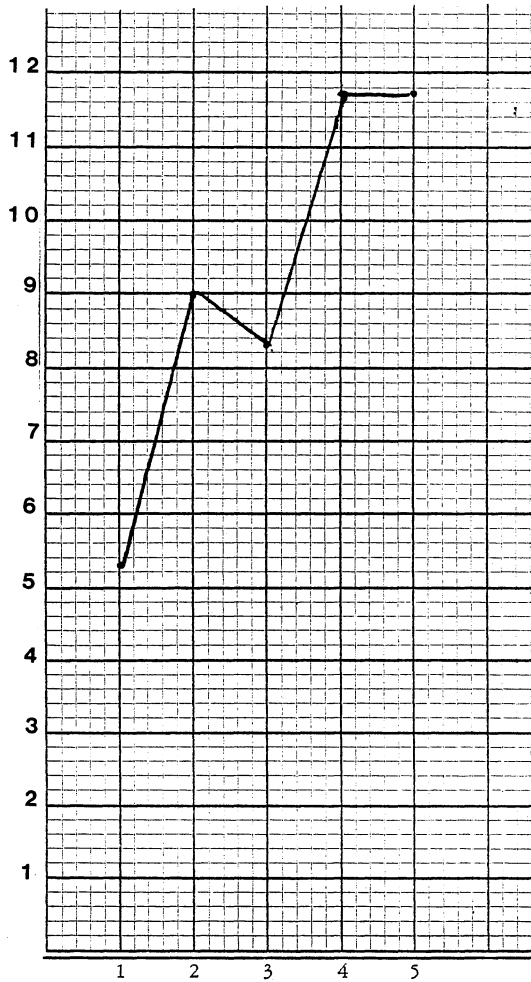


1 = under 1,000  
2 = 1,000 to 2,999  
3 = 3,000 to 5,999

4 = 6,000 to 19,999  
5 = 20,000 or more

GRAPH OF OVERALL MEANS FOR DISTANCE LEVELS

OVERALL MEAN  
PUBLICATIONS

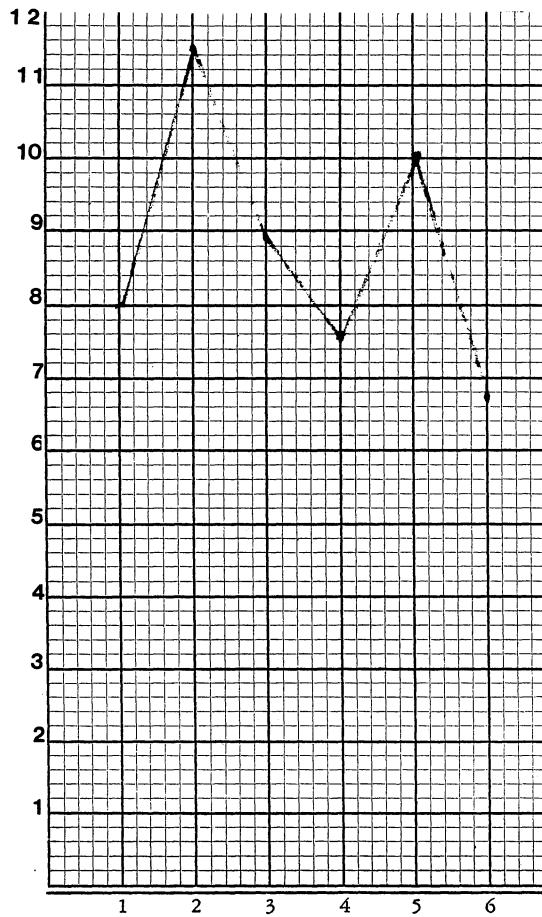


1 = 0 to 49 miles  
2 = 50 to 99 miles  
3 = 100 to 149 miles

4 = 150 to 199 miles  
5 = 200 or more miles

GRAPH OF OVERALL MEANS FOR NEWS STAFF SIZE LEVELS

OVERALL MEAN  
PUBLICATIONS



1 = 1 member  
2 = 2 members  
3 = 3 members

4 = 4 members  
5 = 5 members  
6 = 6 or more members



VITA <sup>2</sup>

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