

WEEKLY EDITORS' PREFERENCES  
FOR THREE TYPES OF  
HOMETOWN NEWS STORIES

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## PREFACE

This thesis was aimed at determining certain Oklahoma weekly newspaper editors' relative preferences of three types of hometown news stories, in regard to their use. The information was sought from 42 editors. The author speculated that information gained from the editors would serve to more clearly define the role which hometown newspapers play in the function of the university news bureau. The author also felt that the editors would also be better served as a result of the study, if valid information could be gathered, and that they, in turn, would give their readers a more interesting product.

Many persons contributed to this study. Thanks goes to Robert L. Cox, formerly of Oklahoma State University news bureau, whose assistance in formulating the study is deeply appreciated. Significant contributions also were made by the author's graduate committee of Lemuel Groom, chairman, and Dr. Harry E. Heath and Dr. Walter J. Ward, committee members.

Others who assisted were Welden Barnes, Division of Public Information Director for OSU, and Robert McCulloch, news bureau director. Both gave counsel and advice which were useful to the author.

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In addition, the respondents themselves are to be thanked. Without their cooperation, this study would not have been possible.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this study was to answer the question: Do Oklahoma weekly newspaper editors hold preferences from among three types of hometown news stories from Oklahoma State University's news bureau?

The answer was hypothesized to be: no. The author felt that editors would prefer the stories almost equally, and any differences would be slight. This opinion formed the null hypothesis. The fact that weekly newspaper editors almost universally regard the local angle or "hometown" as one of the most usable of releases has been pointed out in several studies.

The point of this study was to try to determine if, within the general framework of hometown news stories from the university news bureau, editors have preferences for certain types of these stories.

The news bureau is one of three sections in the Division of Public Information. The others are radio-television and publications, each with their own directors and separate functions.

Currently, the news bureau has seven full-time writers, plus a half-time graduate student on assistantship, a

half-time writer, a darkroom technician-photographer, half-time darkroom helper, and a secretary.

The bureau operates somewhat like a newspaper, with staffers covering the campus, generally on a beat basis. A large number of day-to-day stories are sent to a general mailing list, with copies to campus radio stations and the radio-television bureau. Major stories also go to the wire services.

Stories with a specialized audience are sent to publications which serve those audiences, such as the Oklahoma Professional Engineer, the Daily Law Journal Record, etc.

One staff member is a full-time 4-H and youth extension reporter, and another covers extension activities on a statewide basis, as well as campus extension matters.

#### Review of Literature

The mail study was conducted in the Oklahoma communities where the weekly newspapers are located. The information found by this study could be useful to the university news bureau in several ways. Hometown stories, sometimes overlooked, may be relegated to a position of little importance, to be done "when there is time." These stories, as most editors and news bureaus realize, are not trivia and do deserve attention since they are used a great deal.

Robert L. Cox, in his study of readership preference for different types of news stories, commented that a simple survey conducted by mail could provide editors with a

means of stating their preferences.<sup>1</sup> This study has followed that suggestion, within a narrowly defined area.

No attempt has been made to determine why editors choose as they do. Interest in this study is centered on what editors prefer, or say they prefer, in the area of hometown news stories from Oklahoma State University.

Three types of hometown news stories were used. Sports news was not included, nor was intramural sports, since these subjects are not covered by the news bureau, but by a separate sports information office. There is probably some hometown material available here, but the author did not include it as it would not fit easily into the categories set up.

Five judges ranked 24 stories in categories as a means of checking the author's judgment of these categories. The judges categorized the stories as the author had, with one exception. This exception was replaced with a story which fit the category more exactly. The categories are operationally defined in Chapter II. Three facets of hometown stories appear to be natural within the university community: curricular, non-curricular, and non-university. There are no sub-groups within these groups, and the categories accommodate a variety of stories which occur at the university. Many hometown stories from the university are

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<sup>1</sup>Robert L. Cox, "A Variance and Factor Analysis of Readers' Preferences for Three Types of Higher Education News," Master's Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1969, p. 58.

quite similar, and some are repetitive, but the number of stories is quite large. An attempt was made to find literature which might relate to weekly editors' preferences to categories of hometown news stories. No study of this nature was found, but there are studies which concern editors' uses of stories from university news bureaus.

In order to explore every possible avenue of research, letters were written to heads of schools of journalism at University of Kansas, Northwestern University, University of Wisconsin, University of Iowa, Iowa State University, University of Missouri, University of Texas, University of Colorado, Kansas State University, University of Nebraska, and University of Oklahoma, asking for titles of works which might be of assistance.\*

Letters also were sent to American College Public Relations Association and the Oklahoma Press Association. One work which was recommended almost unanimously, and which deals with the general topic of university public relations, was Stewart Harral's Public Relations for Higher Education. His book examines in detail the functions of a university news bureau and explores its publics. The work examines the whole problem involved in the relations of colleges and universities to the public at large. This publication affirms that hometown editors do want hometown news stories, and that of all information they receive from higher

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\*See Appendix A.

education, this is the type most used.<sup>2</sup> Harral also affirms that the small town weekly, for the most part, is neglected. Weeklies get swallowed up in the general category of "newspapers" or "media" as hometown stories disappear under the general topic "public relations" or "news."

Harral quotes editors as saying the local angle could be stressed much more than it is; that unless a story has a local angle, it usually ends up in the wastebasket. He advocates the continuous study of the small town press as a news medium in order to utilize it fully, understand its functions, objectives and treatment of news.<sup>3</sup>

Another source which proved helpful was a master's thesis from University of Oklahoma by Leonard Tipton, titled "Public Information Programs of Five Oklahoma Colleges."

Tipton says:

One of the really important objectives of college information services as expressed by Oklahoma practitioners is keeping constituents informed as to the main activities of hometown students. Perhaps the main reason for this is that editors stress local news. Most of the public information officers in this study contend that this kind of story, despite its lack of specific interpretation, does them the most good. One weakness which seems apparent in the operation of the public information programs at all of the colleges is that little or no attempt is made to evaluate the program. There is a growing awareness among educational public

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<sup>2</sup> Stewart Harral, Public Relations for Higher Education, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1942, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

relations personnel that evaluation needs to be stressed more.<sup>4</sup>

He then suggests various tools, pre- and post-testing, sampling, reader interest studies, readability tests, etc. He also notes that his survey for his thesis indicated areas of significant disagreement, not only in the kinds of stories editors would like to receive, but also in their evaluation of current practices.<sup>5</sup> His study was conducted at Central State College, Northeastern State College, Southeastern State College, Southwestern State College, and East Central State College.

James E. Mitchell's "Acceptance of Oklahoma State University Public Information Office News Releases by Oklahoma Daily and Weekly Newspapers," found that editors of both weekly and small daily newspapers have little space for Oklahoma State University news, except for locally-oriented releases and some agricultural stories.<sup>6</sup>

He found that so-called prestige stories got little or no play, and that stories on campus events and research were used very little.<sup>7</sup> His study was begun in January, 1960,

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<sup>4</sup> Leonard Tipton, "Public Information Programs of Five Oklahoma Colleges," Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1966, pp. 18-19, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> James E. Mitchell, "Acceptance of Oklahoma State University Public Information Office News Releases by Oklahoma Daily and Weekly Newspapers," Master's report, Oklahoma State University, 1960, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

and he noted that no extensive study of acceptance had been made prior to that time. He ended his content analysis in May.

Another study was conducted in Oregon by Theodore H. Carlson. His thesis, "A Study of Oregon State University News Bureau News Releases Used by Selected Oregon Daily and Weekly Newspapers," found that hometown news is used more on the front pages of weeklies than in any other type of news.<sup>8</sup>

His study compared with another study conducted at Oregon in 1956. He explains it as being undertaken to better understand the news release program as it operates and as it is received by the newspapers in Oregon.

In addition, his study found that research progress reports are accepted well by both dailies and weeklies, hometown stories are more used in both weeklies and dailies than are any other type of story from the university, and that dailies print more releases than weeklies.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Theodore H. Carlson, "A Study of Oregon State University News Bureau News Releases Used by Selected Oregon Daily and Weekly Newspapers," Master's thesis, University of Oregon, 1967, p. 65.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

## CHAPTER II

### DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

In order to determine editors' preferences for three types of hometown news stories, it was necessary to find out if such news could be categorized into mutually exclusive and exhaustive news facets. Some guidelines were set up to help evaluate the stories to be included:

1. The news item's theme had to center around a student and his activity.
2. The story had to indicate that a person was a part of the university community as a student.

All the items in the universe were capable of being assigned to one of the three categories, so were considered exhaustive. Since the items did not appear to be readily assigned to more than one of the categories, they were considered to be mutually exclusive.

#### Selection of Categories

After searching file copies of hometown news stories, there seemed to be three major categories into which all hometown stories would fit. Since all stories dealt with students, their activities fell into Curricular,

Non-Curricular, or Non-University categories. These three categories, as well as the term Student, are defined as follows:

Curricular--Stories in which subjects are involved in topics directly traceable to the university educational program in which they are enrolled (field trips, honor roll, internships, student teaching, recitals, honorary organizations, etc.).

Non-Curricular--University related, but not traceable exclusively to the student's educational program or major (Varsity Revue, drama, Greek life, campus beauty titles, committee memberships, campus political or special interest clubs, student government, etc.).

Non-University--Any story not Curricular or Non-Curricular in nature, but which involves a student in a role independent of the university, making his attendance at Oklahoma State University only an incidental part of the story. (Joining Peace Corp, volunteer projects, obituaries, counseling outside the university, church honors, instruction of others, non-campus beauty titles, non-university trips, etc.).

Student--Any person, any age, enrolled at Oklahoma

State University in a full or part-time study program.

The stories used were, in most cases, stories written from July, 1968 to August, 1969, while working for the news bureau. The exceptions were stories in the Non-University category. These stories are scarce since they do not involve the university except in a coincidental way. Because of this problem, some stories in the category were contrived.

The stories selected were submitted to five persons to be judges as the operational definitions indicated. The judges were asked to give their opinions about which stories fit which definitions. The author already had categorized the stories, and there was only one consistent disagreement. This item was changed for one which fit the category more readily. The judges were Welden Barnes, Division of Public Information Director; Robert McCulloh, assistant director of the division and news bureau director; John Tiger, public relations assistant for extension engineering; Robert L. Cox, master's degree candidate and writer for the news bureau; and Darrel Miller, owner of his own weekly newspaper, editor of another weekly and writer at the news bureau.\*

A key was made with a list of the story themes and the category into which each one was placed. The stories are listed as they appear on the questionnaire, and are keyed to

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\*See Appendix B.

categories by the code C - Curricular, NC - Non-Curricular, and NU - Non-University, as follows:

1	NU	Miss Blake wins title
2	NU	Johnston returns from India
3	C	Miss Farrar assigned position
4	C	Brown initiated to Phi Kappa Phi
5	NC	Mingilton named to top 10
6	C	Scholarship to Blackledge
7	C	Agnew named to Blue Key
8	NC	Miss Miller in Operation Entertainment
9	NC	Miss Steph in comedy
10	NU	Miss Barkley to Vietnam
11	NU	Farrar gives family letters
12	C	Miss Sinew in senior recital
13	NC	Coltharp in TV program on careers
14	NC	Acacia elects Crowden
15	NU	Miss Gitter teaching at camp
16	C	Anderson to Leningrad University
17	NU	Miss Faulk in Project Help
18	NC	Armstrong President of Phi Alpha Mu
19	C	Gay scores perfect mark on exam
20	NU	Blake will serve as counselor
21	NU	Miss Walker to join Peace Corps
22	NC	Brown to emcee Bob Hope Shows
23	NC	Miss Farrel pledge of Angle Flight
24	C	Miss Brown to internship in New York

#### The Questionnaire

A seven-point, bi-polar scale was devised for use with each item in the study. No numbers were placed beneath the respondent areas on the scale in an attempt to reduce respondent bias (to avoid the problem of having respondents settle on a "favorite number" or "neutral number" on the

scale). Each respondent received a set of instructions with the questionnaire containing an abstract of news items and, in those instructions, a scale appeared below the respondent spaces.\*

An example of the 24 stories which appeared on the questionnaire, and the scale below the story, follows:

EXAMPLE: Mary Faulk of Yourtown is one of 13 students from Oklahoma State University participating in an independent endeavor--Project Help. The project assists local persons who are considered under privileged. 17.

Most likely use	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Least likely use
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(The name Yourtown was used in all stories, and editors were instructed to consider this the name of their town.)

This particular item is a Non-University item. All items were abstracted to one paragraph and most were no longer than three paragraphs in their original form. The number "17" beside the item is its consecutive position in the questionnaire. The system of random selection with replacement was used to place the items in the questionnaire.

Values ranging from 7 to 1 were attached to the response positions on the scale, from left to right. The seven-point scale provided a middle ground with the digit "4" and gave respondents a bit more choice than an ordinary

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\*See Appendix C.

five-point scale would provide. The scale does not try to measure agreement or disagreement, only likelihood of use.

This particular scale is self-rating; that is, the participants rank the item on the scale in the position numerically which is most meaningful to them. Since it is self-rating, there is no "halo effect" which occurs during rating being done by someone other than the respondent. The rater ranks the respondent's choices and may develop a stereotype in his mind about all individual's responses.<sup>1</sup>

The "generosity error" tendency of the rater to overestimate desirable qualities also is minimized by self-rating. One source of unreliability in this scale might occur from the frame of reference each editor employs when ranking the story. The object being measured in this study, however, is relatively objective and should be uniformly understood by editors.

Kerlinger notes that:

Numerical rating scales are perhaps the easiest to construct and use. They also yield numbers that can be directly used in statistical analysis. In addition, because the numbers may represent equal intervals in the minds of observers, they may approach interval measurement.<sup>2</sup>

The scale does not show a gradation of agreement or

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<sup>1</sup>Fred N. Kerlinger, Foundations of Behavioral Research, (New York, 1964), p. 516-517.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 515.

disagreement, other than a numerical one. It was chosen for these reasons:

1. It can be administered through the mail.
2. It was impossible to visit each of the respondents to observe, interview or administer a measurement instrument.

Eight different examples of each type of news story were used. This means that for each of the three categories, there were eight examples placed randomly on the pages of the questionnaire. Each story was trimmed to give editors the gist, but required little actual reading time.

#### Sample of Respondents

Consideration then turned to the number of respondents wanted. To approach the problem, a stratified sample was drawn from a list of 212 weeklies listed in the Oklahoma Press Association directory. Some weeklies were omitted because they were trade publications, college newspapers, special interest weeklies and the like. The state was quartered from a 1968 map in the Oklahoma Press Association directory.<sup>3</sup>

The quarters were slightly adjusted to yield 54 weeklies in the northwest and southwest quarters, and 47 weeklies in the northeast and southeast quarters. This adjustment evened an imbalance caused by Oklahoma and Tulsa

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<sup>3</sup>1968 Oklahoma Newspaper Directory. Published by the Oklahoma Press Service, Inc., Oklahoma City, 1968, pp. 8-9.

counties, and by the lack of newspapers in the northwest counties.

In order to reduce bias by beginning with the first newspaper on the list from each quarter, five numbers were put into a hat and one number was drawn for the beginning point on each list. For example, the number 1 was drawn for the southwest quarter, so the author began with the first newspaper on the list for that quarter. The number 3 was drawn for the remaining three quarters, so the third newspaper on each of the three remaining lists was the beginning point. Ten newspapers were chosen from the quarters with 47 newspapers listed, and 11 were chosen from the quarters with a total of 54 newspapers, making a list of 42 newspapers.

Editors of these newspapers were contacted by mail with an explanation of the problem and a request for their assistance. The editors could indicate on a return postage paid postal card whether or not they cared to participate.\* Of the 42, 28 agreed to participate, one said he could not, and one disqualified his newspaper as being a legal publication, bringing total response to 30. The 12 who did not respond were replaced by choosing the next newspaper on the list in their quarters. Due to lack of time, the replacements were not queried in advance, but were sent letters of explanation and the questionnaire, and a return post paid envelope in which to submit either their answers or the

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\*See Appendix D.

blank questionnaire (if they chose not to participate). The replacements were not told that they were replacements, but were treated as though they were "first choice."

Of the 42 questionnaires mailed, 37 were returned and 30 were usable. Seven were discarded due to incomplete information or incorrect manner of response. The five not returned were replacements who were not queried in advance.

In an attempt to increase the questionnaire return, letters of reminder were sent to editors who had not answered about six weeks after the questionnaires were mailed.\* This served to bring in some questionnaires which had not been returned. Responses were not tabulated as they were received, but were filed until complete tabulation began.

Data were subjected to a one-way analysis of variance with no interaction expected. The analysis was used to locate and compute different variances which make up total variance. The variances are between-group and within-group. Variance between groups is due, presumably, to experimental manipulation of the independent variable levels (in this case, three categories of stories).

This between groups variance is an index of dispersion among the mean scores assigned to the three categories of news by the editors. Within group variance, or error variance, exists from a cause or causes which may not be

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\*See Appendix E.

known. Probable causes may be given, but error variance still exists, to an extent. So, the analysis of variance is used to answer the research question--to determine if there is a preference on the parts of weekly newspaper editors from among the stories by pitting the amount of between variance against the amount of error variance. Obviously, if the error variance is too large (variance from unknown sources) the between variance is nullified. In other words, something is operating, other than the news categories, to make the scores vary.

## CHAPTER III

### FINDINGS: WEEKLY EDITORS' PREFERENCES FOR THREE TYPES OF HOMETOWN NEWS STORIES

Three independent variables--Curricular, Non-Curricular and Non-University--are pitted against each other in this study to determine if editors vary in their likelihood of use (dependent variable) of three types of hometown news stories. A one-way analysis of variance was used to answer the question. One fundamental question formed the basis of this research: Do Oklahoma weekly newspaper editors hold preferences from among three types of hometown news stories from Oklahoma State University's news bureau?

At this point, the reader should be reminded of the various data used in computing the one-way analysis of variance. First, 30 editors each rated 24 stories along a seven point scale from "most likely use" to "least likely use." Each of the 24 stories contained one of three independent variables: Curricular, Non-Curricular or Non-University.

This figure illustrates how the levels of variables are juxtaposed for the one-way analysis:

<u>EDITORS</u>	<u>STORIES</u>		
	<u>Curricular</u>	<u>Non-Curricular</u>	<u>Non-University</u>
	8	8	8
	24 total items		

Figure 1. Levels of Independent Variables to Illustrate Distribution of News Items

The figure 8 in the cells of Figure 1 represent the number of items in that category with which respondents dealt. In other words, "8" simply means there were eight stories which were classified "Curricular," 8 which were "Non-Curricular," and 8 which were "Non-University."

Over-all, then, the one-way analysis of variance involved 720 decisions made by respondents ( $24 \times 30$ ).<sup>\*</sup> That is, each of 30 persons designated his degree of preference for 24 stories which had various levels of Curricular, Non-Curricular and Non-University variables "built into" them.

Kerlinger points out that variance is a measure of the dispersion of a set of scores:

It (variance) tells us how much the scores are spread out. The variance, then, is a measure of the spread of the scores. It is a description of the extent to which the scores differ from each other.<sup>1</sup>

The author was specifically interested in determining

<sup>\*</sup>See Appendix F.

<sup>1</sup>Fred N. Kerlinger, Foundations of Behavioral Research, (New York, 1964), p. 95.

whether there was a between-groups or experimental variance and, if there was, whether or not the variance was significant. "Significant" means that the observed difference between the mean scores for the three categories of news was too large to have occurred by mere chance fluctuation.

Between variance was computed and found to be 1,397. Within variance was 6,759, making total variance 8,156.

When these variances were computed, the investigator turned to finding the F-ratio, in this manner:

Source of Variance	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F
Between groups (Curricular, Non-Curricular, Non-University)	3-1=2	1,397	698	2.2
Within groups	24-3=21	6,759	321	
TOTAL	24-1=23	8,156		

$$F = \frac{698}{321} = 2.2$$

The F-ratio simply means that, when applied to an F-table, the number 2.2 is not high enough to be considered an indication of a significant difference between the groups. In other words, the between variance or mean square of 698 does not exceed the within groups or error variance of 321 enough to say that it was due to anything other than chance. The error variance was so large, compared with the between variance that the author was forced to conclude that too many forces other than types of

stories were affecting the editors' preferences. (The between variance was nullified by the within variance.)

The mean scores for the categories were:

<u>Curricular</u>	<u>Non-Curricular</u>	<u>Non-University</u>
5.51	5.06	5.67

These scores indicate high popularity of hometown news stories, no matter what the type.

Editors rankings, broken down into means, rated stories this way, by category:

<u>Curricular</u>		<u>Non-Curricular</u>		<u>Non-University</u>	
Rank	Story No.	Rank	Story No.	Rank	Story No.
181	16	191	5	191	2
180	19	180	22	184	21
171	4	161	18	182	1
171	24	149	14	169	10
167	6	145	23	168	17
164	3	133	8	156	11
146	12	131	9	156	15
143	7	126	13	154	20

The editors' rankings, in consecutive order from high to low are:

<u>Editors' Ranking</u>	<u>Numerical Order in Questionnaire</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Theme</u>
191	2	NU	Johnston returns/India
191	5	NC	Mingilton, top 10
184	21	NU	Miss Walker/Peace Corps
182	1	NU	Miss Blake/Beauty Title
181	16	C	Anderson at Leningrad

Editors' Ranking	Numerical Order in Questionnaire	Category	Theme
180	19	C	Gray/perfect score
180	22	NC	Brown emcee of Hope Show
171	4	C	Brown initiated; PKP
171	24	C	Magazine internship
169	10	NU	Girl to Vietnam
168	17	NU	Project Help
167	6	C	Scholarship to youth
164	3	C	Miss Farrar/student teacher
161	18	NC	Armstrong Prex.
156	11	NU	Letters to library
156	15	NU	Camp instruction
154	20	NU	Blake/counselor
149	14	NC	Accacia elects pres.
146	12	C	Senior recital
145	23	NC	Angel Flight pledge
143	7	C	Career workshop
133	8	NC	Operation Entertainment
131	9	NC	Comedy play
126	13	NC	TV appearance

The greatest variance of scores within a group occurred in the Non-Curricular category, with a spread of 65 from the high of 191 to the low of 126. This means that editors ranked the highest and lowest of all 24 stories in the same category - Non-Curricular.

The Curricular category showed the second highest spread of scores within the group. There was a spread of 38 from the highest to the lowest score in this category, but the Non-University category was almost identical, with a

spread of 37. (Curricular spread from 181 to 143; Non-University from 191 to 154.) These variances comprised the large error in the analysis - error whose source cannot be explained. It could be due to variation of news values among the editors or to some "unaccounted-for" aspect of some of the stories.

This figure gives a clearer picture of the error variance:

<u>VARIANCE</u>	<u>STORIES</u>		
	<u>Curricular</u>	<u>Non-Curricular</u>	<u>Non-University</u>
	65	38	37

Figure 2. Illustration of Variance Between Groups of Stories

Since there is no significant difference between the three types of stories, there may, then, be a difference in values placed upon the stories within the groups.

Examination of the high- and low-ranked stories may indicate some subtle characteristic which makes editors rank them as they do.

The lowest ranked story, in the Non-Curricular category, is rather obvious. It mentions a television channel, and newspaper editors are still likely to consider this a

taboo. The second lowest ranked story, in the same category, concerned a "local" girl's appearance in a comedy presentation on campus. Editor's might feel this is "trivia" in terms of significance to their readers. Also, they might not be as oriented toward theatrical presentations as to a variety show, such as the Bob Hope show (a hometown story mentioning this production was ranked seventh).

The story which ranked first with editors concerned an outstanding ROTC cadet's return from a trip to India, a trip he was awarded in recognition of his outstanding work. This story was in the Non-University category (the military awarded the trip). Possible reasons for its top ranking are that it is a counterbalance to many stories about campus disorder, shows the "good" side of a hometown boy, and would appeal to most readers. It is also rather significant in terms of "hard news" value.

The second highest-ranked story, in the Non-Curricular category, concerned a student being named one of the top 10 seniors in the College of Arts and Sciences. The story, again, is of a positive nature, reflects well on the individual (and his parent or parents) and is a "newsy" type of story. Two of the top eight ranked stories were in the Non-University category (the category with the least differences in scores), three were Curricular stories and two were Non-Curricular stories. There was only one Non-University story

in the eight lowest-ranked stories, and five Non-Curricular stories.

The middle-ranked eight stories contained four Non-University stories, three Curricular stories and one Non-Curricular story.

This would seem to indicate that Non-Curricular stories are least preferred with rankings of 2, 7, 14, 18, 20, 22, 23 and 24.

Non-University stories ranked 1, 3, 4, 10, 11, 15, 16 and 17 and Curricular stories ranked 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 19 and 21. Non-University stories, then, seemed to be ranked highest and had the least spread of scores within the group.

These findings, it should be noted, are not scientific, but may show how the stories were valued in general by editors.

Since the Non-University stories seem, in the final analysis, to be most (although only slightly) preferred, it might seem that editors like local angles above all, and that they might be prone to use Non-University related news before they would use a release that was strictly about a student within his university environment.

The null hypothesis of this study was that the editors would show no preference for a certain category of hometown news story, and that hypothesis is supported by the data in this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For this study, three independent types of hometown news stories were pitted against the editors' dependent preferences in order to determine whether or not those editors held preferences among the three variables. The variables were derived from study of hometown news stories which dealt with various aspects of student life. The only requirement for possible use in this study was that the story be a "hometown" news story, sent to a student's hometown newspaper.

The types of hometown stories were narrowed to three, then abstracted, by the author. A complete list was submitted to five judges who were asked to agree or disagree with the categorization. The judges disagreed consistently on one story, and it was replaced with a more appropriate one.

These stories were placed at random on a questionnaire submitted to 42 editors of weekly newspapers in Oklahoma. Thirty-seven individuals returned completed questionnaires, and 30 of the questionnaire responses were usable. They were tabulated by one-way analysis of variance.

## Summary

The reader can consult the F-ratio in Chapter III to see the result of the one-way analysis of variance. This analysis shows that the between-group variance for stories in categories Curricular, Non-Curricular and Non-University was not statistically significant. Although editors seemingly prefer some types of stories over others, the preference was no more than could be expected by chance. They still want hometown news, as indicated by the mean preferences for all three types of stories.

For example:

I know of no case in the 17 years that I have operated the \_\_\_\_\_ that we have ever failed to use any kind of a story from OSU or any other college about a local student. Even those of little consequence have been used and read avidly by parents and relatives who seldom hear in any other way what the kid is doing in school.

Another editor in the study said:

... not one of the examples included in this study would be left out of the \_\_\_\_\_. Stories with the names of hometown persons receive great priority over releases from government agencies, industrial firms and countless others. If a hometown grad is named star chickenpicker for the Month of June at Southwest Panhandle Tech, it will almost certainly be front page news here.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

What does this information mean to a practitioner in the field of university news? What can be said to those

whose job it is to write about university students? The author offers the following suggestions, based on her own philosophy.

First, considerable attention should be paid to producing more and better hometown news stories. The old adage "names make news" may very well be true, but it is up to each practitioner to develop his own organized plan of producing these types of stories in a way which will serve each editor best and, consequently, give the university the most thorough coverage.

How to accomplish this has been a problem for most university public relations offices, but some relatively simple measures would serve to aid a great deal.

1. A record book listing each newspaper in Oklahoma on a separate sheet would allow room to mark down a student's name, the topic of the story mailed about him and the date mailed. This reference allows checkbacks to see (a) whether a story has been completed and (b) whether a newspaper has had any releases recently. This measure might prevent the neglect which sometimes occurs to various newspapers.
2. A system whereby students mark their hometowns, newspapers, hobbies, unusual activities, etc., during registration would be an invaluable aid. Students should also

give newspapers in other areas, for example their former homes, which also might be interested in the stories about them.

3. Sources of interesting news about students are often neglected. These include counselors, housemothers, organization officers, student activities office, and even off-campus organizations such as church groups, local civic groups, etc. While the task of "running down" these leads might seem monumental, it would be worth it in terms of interesting stories discovered.
4. Simple group pictures of officers, groups, honorary organizations, taken in "area coverage" divisions, is now done at OSU on a rather limited scale. This practice should be encouraged in view of the fact that weekly newspapers often use "canned" art. The obvious fault with this is that not all weeklies have photoengravers and would perhaps not use anything but a zinc or mat. The art might stand a better chance of making page one than a two paragraph story which often is buried in filler material.

Since the target for these stories will almost invariably be hit, care should be taken to see that these stories are up to professional standards. Sloppy writing should not

be tolerated.

A three-month subscription to clipping service from the Oklahoma Press Association has been initiated at the news bureau since this study began. This service should be evaluated carefully to see where problem areas lie.

Last, telephone calls and regular visits to state media directors cannot be overrated. Although time-consuming, personal contact is a vital public relations tool. Getting to know editors makes it easier to help them.

Whatever methods or method are used, let editors tell what they want. They strongly rely on news about "homefolks" as part of their fare. The indication that they will use almost any story with a local name in it leaves the campus news bureau in the position of being obligated to produce quality releases in an organized and professional manner.

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APPENDIX A

LETTERS TO JOURNALISM SCHOOLS

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

While conducting research to propose a thesis I have found that there is little literature available concerning the general topic of weekly newspapers, and specifically the role public information offices play in performing services to weekly newspapers.

As head of your school of journalism, you may be aware of some material which is not readily available and also may have access to newly-completed master's and doctoral works in this field.

If you know of such works, would you send me the titles, so I may obtain copies through inter-library loan?

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours very truly,

Mrs. Marla M. Schaefer

APPENDIX B

INSTRUCTIONS TO FIVE JUDGES  
OF STORIES

As part of my research for my thesis, it is advisable for me to check my categorization of news stories with reliable judges in order to try to assure the proper stories are in the proper categories. This check of content validity asks that you mark the stories in line with the operational definitions listed below. In making your decision, just mark the story C - Curricular  
 NC - Non-Curricular  
 or NU - Non-University

#### Definitions

- Curricular:** Stories in which subjects are involved in topics directly traceable to the university educational program in which they are enrolled (field trips, honor roll, internships, student teaching, recitals, honorary organizations, etc.).
- Non-Curricular:** University related, but not traceable exclusively to the student's educational program or major (Varsity Revue, drama, Greek life, campus beauty titles, committee memberships, campus political or special interest clubs, student government, etc.).
- Non-University:** Any story not Curricular or Non-Curricular in nature, but which involves a student in a role independent of the university, making his attendance at Oklahoma State University only an incidental part of the story. (Joining Peace Corp, volunteer projects, obituaries, counseling outside the university, church honors, instruction of others, non-campus beauty titles, non-university trips, etc.)

Marla M. Schaefer

(Judges also were given a set of the 24 stories, as seen in Appendix C.)

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUCTIONS

DATA SHEET

Marla Schaefer  
 News Bureau  
 Division of Public Info.  
 Oklahoma State University  
 Stillwater, Okla. 74074

August, 1969

Dear Editor:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. You are providing needed information and we hope the results of the project will enable us to serve you better.

Enclosed is the questionnaire, and a data sheet. Both are coded by the name of your newspaper only, but you may include your own name if you wish. Here's all you have to do.

1. Fill in the data sheet.
2. Turn to the next page and begin the questionnaire, answering in this manner:

SAMPLE

Yourtown's Sally Blake has been named Miss Cranberry of America in competition at Chicago. She is a junior at Oklahoma State University.

most likely use	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	least likely use
		X						

The "6" has been marked, meaning you would probably use the story. If you had marked the "1" it would mean that you would be almost certain not to use it. So, the scale goes from a "top" value of seven to a "bottom" value of one. And that's all there is to it.

You merely mark the stories on the basis of how likely you are to use them and return the questionnaire and data sheet to me in the envelope provided. If you have requested results of the study, I will send them to you in January. Thank you again for your cooperation and assistance.

Yours truly,

Mrs. Marla Schaefer

DATA SHEET

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Married \_\_\_\_\_

Single \_\_\_\_\_ No. of Children \_\_\_\_\_

Ages of Children \_\_\_\_\_

If children or child attend college or university, please  
give name of institution/s \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle nearest educational level you attained:

Grade	8	10	12			
College		2 yrs	3 yrs.	4 yrs.	5 or more years	
Other	_____					

(please specify)

Name of last educational institution attended \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever attended Oklahoma State University? Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
 No \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a member of a school board? Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
 No \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a native of Oklahoma? Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
 No \_\_\_\_\_

If no, how long have you lived in Oklahoma? \_\_\_\_\_

How many miles from Stillwater is your newspaper?

0 - 25		150 - 175
25 - 50		175 - 200
50 - 75	circle	200 - 225
75 - 100	nearest	225 - 250
100 - 125		250 - 275
125 - 150		275 - 300

Is there a two or four year college in your county or circula-  
tion area?

\_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_ yes

QUESTIONNAIRE

EDITOR:

PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL STORIES CONTAIN A REFERENCE TO "YOURTOWN." THIS IS USED IN PLACE OF THE NAMES OF ACTUAL TOWNS IN OKLAHOMA, AND YOU SHOULD INTERPRET THE STORY TO APPLY TO YOUR TOWN AND SHOULD ASSUME THE STUDENT NAMED IS FROM YOUR TOWN.

Yourtown's Sally Blake has been named Miss Cranberry of America in competition at Chicago. She is a junior at Oklahoma State University. 1.

most  
likely  
use

least  
likely  
use

Oklahoma State University Outstanding Army ROTC cadet Wayne Johnston of Yourtown has returned from a trip to India. He is one of three such outstanding cadets in the nation. 2.

most  
likely  
use

least  
likely  
use

Bonnye Farrar of Yourtown has been assigned a student teaching position in Marysville, Okla. She will student teach for six weeks. 3.

most  
likely  
use

least  
likely  
use

Jim Brown of Yourtown has been initiated into Phi Kappa Phi national scholastic honor society at Oklahoma State University 4.

most  
likely  
use

least  
likely  
use

Jesse Mingilton of Yourtown has been named one of Oklahoma State University's top 10 seniors by the Arts and Sciences Council there. 5.

most  
likely  
use

least  
likely  
use

A \$300 scholarship has been granted to Steven Blackledge of Yourtown to help finance studies at Oklahoma State University school of business. 6.

most  
likely  
use

least  
likely  
use

Jane Andrews of Yourtown attended the sixth annual career workshop at Kirkpatrick Fine Arts Center as part of home economics studies at Oklahoma State University.

7.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Ruth Miller, Yourtown sophomore, is among members of the Oklahoma State University Barracuda Aquatic Club who will present "Operation Entertainment" for the public Thursday and Friday.

8.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Ann Steph, Yourtown junior, will portray Agnes in "The School for Wives," a comedy production to be presented at Oklahoma State University.

9.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Oklahoma State University senior Betty Barkley will begin training this month to become a missionary to Danang, Vietnam. She is a 1965 graduate of Yourtown High School.

10.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Henry Farrar, Yourtown student at Oklahoma State University, has contributed family letters, a journal and rare books to the OSU library. Farrar will graduate at the end of this term.

11.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Marilyn Sinew of Yourtown will be presented in her senior recital by the Oklahoma State University department of music on Sunday. 12.

most  
likely  
use

least  
likely  
use

Larry Coltharp, Yourtown, will appear on XYZ-TV's farm show at 7 a.m. Thursday to discuss careers in turf management. He is an agronomy major at Oklahoma State University. 13.

most  
likely  
use

least  
likely  
use

Acacia social fraternity at Oklahoma State University has elected Steve Cowden of Yourtown to serve as president for the coming year. 14.

most  
likely  
use

least  
likely  
use

Mary Gitter, Yourtown, will teach baton arts at a local summer band camp. She is Oklahoma State University's featured twirler. 15.

most  
likely  
use

least  
likely  
use

An Oklahoma State University student, Bruce Anderson of Yourtown, is participating in an advanced Russian language institute at Leningrad University this summer. 16.

most  
likely  
use

least  
likely  
use

Mary Faulk, Yourtown, is one of 13 OSU students participating in an independent endeavor - Project Help. The project assists local people who are considered underprivileged.

17.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Blaine Armstrong, Yourtown, has been elected president of Phi Alpha Mu industrial engineering society at Oklahoma State University.

18.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Tom Gay, Yourtown sophomore, is one of two students in the U.S. to achieve a perfect score on an examination on economics.

19.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Milton Blake, Oklahoma State University student from Yourtown, will serve as a counselor for Boys State, held on campus this month.

20.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Yourtown student Michele Walker, who attends Oklahoma State University, has volunteered to spend two years in the Peace Corps, beginning next month. She receives her bachelor's degree this month.

21.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Appearing with Bob Hope in three state performances is Oklahoma State University student Mike Brown, a pre-law major from Yourtown. He will act as emcee for the performances. 22.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Linda Farrel of Yourtown is among 17 Oklahoma State University coeds chosen pledges of Thunderbird Angel Flight. 23.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

Margaret Brown, Oklahoma State University senior from Yourtown, is one of 35 journalism majors from 35 states participating in an intern program in New York City. 24.

most  
likely  
use

\_\_\_\_\_

least  
likely  
use

APPENDIX D

QUERY SENT TO EDITORS

Dear Editor:

I am a journalism major at Oklahoma State University, where I am completing requirements for a master's degree. As part of the requirements, I am conducting thesis research among 20 Oklahoma weekly newspapers, and your newspaper was selected at random to participate.

I am requesting each editor to help me determine weekly editors' attitudes toward OSU public information hometown stories in terms of which ones they would be more likely to use.

The research is conducted in this manner: I send you a packet of sample stories, one per card, with a scale beneath each story. You rank the story on the basis of how likely you would be to use it. The entire process should take no more than an hour of your time.

I would appreciate your assistance in this project, and you may receive a copy of the research results upon request. Please return the enclosed post card indicating whether or not you desire to participate in this research. If you choose to take part, you will be mailed a packet with detailed instructions in about one month.

Thank you.

Yours very truly,

Marla M. Schaefer

APPENDIX E

REMINDER TO EDITORS

I am writing once again to request your help with a research project I am conducting for my master's degree. I would appreciate it if you could help me.

As I explained, I will send you a packet of 24 sample stories and all you have to do is rank the stories on a scale. The entire process should not take more than one hour of your time.

Since your newspaper has been chosen at random, my findings will be more accurate if you agree to help.

I have enclosed a post card on which you can mark whether or not you wish to participate. Please let me know as soon as possible if you can help. I realize editors are busier than most of us, but if you could spare a few minutes to fill out the data and questionnaire, it would be an invaluable aid to my research.

If you request it, I will send you a copy of the results and conclusions of this study.

Yours very truly,

Mrs. Marla Schaefer  
News Bureau

APPENDIX F

TABULATION OF DATA

Stories

Editors	Stories																							
	NU 1	NU 2	C 3	C 4	NC 5	C 6	C 7	NC 8	NC 9	NU 10	NU 11	C 12	NC 13	NC 14	NU 15	C 16	NU 17	NC 18	C 19	NU 20	NU 21	NC 22	NC 23	C 24
1	5	7	2	4	6	2	2	2	2	4	4	3	5	4	5	6	4	6	6	6	7	7	5	6
2	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	2	4	4	3	3	3	5	6	6	3	4	6	6	6	5	3	5
3	7	6	7	7	7	6	6	2	5	4	4	4	6	6	6	7	6	7	7	3	7	2	5	7
4	5	5	5	3	5	7	4	4	4	4	7	3	1	4	4	5	5	4	6	5	6	7	4	5
5	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	6	7	7	7	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
6	7	7	6	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	7	7	7	7	7	7
7	7	7	6	6	6	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	3	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	6	6	5	5
8	7	6	6	4	6	6	4	4	3	6	6	2	2	2	5	6	4	3	6	3	4	6	4	3
9	7	6	6	4	6	6	4	4	7	7	7	7	4	2	7	6	5	7	7	3	7	7	7	7
10	7	6	7	4	7	1	7	3	3	6	7	1	5	7	7	4	5	6	6	3	7	6	2	4
11	2	6	2	4	4	3	1	3	2	5	6	6	4	5	1	6	6	1	6	3	7	6	6	6
12	6	6	3	4	6	6	5	5	4	5	5	5	6	7	6	6	6	5	6	5	6	6	6	6
13	5	7	7	7	7	7	5	5	5	7	6	3	3	5	5	5	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	7
14	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	5	5	7	6	5	5	7	6	7	6	8	7	6	6	7	7	7
15	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
16	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	5	5	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
17	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	6	5	5	6	4	4
18	7	7	7	6	6	5	4	4	4	6	4	4	5	6	3	3	6	6	5	6	6	7	7	7
19	7	7	4	1	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	6	6	6	6	4	5	6	6	5	7
20	6	5	5	4	7	5	5	4	5	4	6	1	4	2	7	5	4	3	3	5	4	4	3	4
21	7	7	7	6	7	5	4	6	3	7	4	4	5	4	3	6	4	2	1	7	7	6	3	2
22	7	7	7	7	7	5	4	6	4	7	4	6	5	6	6	6	3	2	7	7	7	7	5	7
23	4	4	5	4	7	7	2	3	2	7	4	4	4	2	4	7	6	2	3	6	3	7	3	6
24	4	6	5	6	6	6	3	2	3	6	6	4	4	4	4	5	4	2	3	4	7	7	6	6
25	7	3	6	6	6	7	2	2	2	5	3	3	3	2	3	3	5	2	6	2	6	4	3	3
26	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	6	7	6	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
27	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
28	4	5	3	7	7	5	6	4	3	5	6	6	3	4	4	5	6	5	6	5	4	5	5	6
29	6	7	1	6	7	3	3	3	3	6	3	4	1	4	7	7	7	7	6	3	6	4	2	2
30	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	7	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	6
Totals	182	191	164	171	191	167	143	133	131	169	156	146	126	149	156	181	168	161	180	154	184	180	145	171

VITA

Marla Morgan Schaefer

Candidate for the Degree of  
Master of Science

Thesis: WEEKLY EDITORS' PREFERENCES FOR THREE TYPES OF  
HOMETOWN NEWS STORIES

Major Field: Journalism

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1944, daughter of Francis C. and Margaret M.  
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