

The Higher Ed Beat

Survey of Higher Education Media

Conducted by the Education Writers Association

With support from Lumina Foundation on Education

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Late in 2002 the Education Writers Association (EWA) surveyed media representatives across the nation about higher education issues and the way colleges and universities are covered. The survey, funded through a grant from Lumina Foundation on Education, marked the beginning of a long-term project whose goal is to raise media awareness and knowledge of higher education issues.

Policymakers read news stories and pay attention to critical concerns raised by the media. To improve coverage, reporters, editors and policymakers need a better understanding of the higher education beat. For example, higher education is covered at many newspapers by general education reporters who may write a story on kindergarten behavior one day, on college tuition the next. One of the goals of this project is to determine how these reporters can be helped to provide thoughtful and thorough coverage of critical issues. Armed with this information, EWA hopes to structure a long-term training program for higher education reporters. By elevating key issues, the bar on higher education coverage can be raised.

The survey form was sent to newspapers with a circulation over 25,000, EWA members, and radio and television outlets in the top markets. It was designed to provide better knowledge about the structure of reporting on the higher education beat, to identify factors that inhibit the coverage of colleges and universities, to determine issues reporters are writing about and to learn what reporters and editors think are the most important issues in higher education. Follow-up interviews were conducted early in 2003 with a random selection of reporters who had filled out the questionnaire.

This report's findings are based on responses from editors and reporters at 101 daily newspapers. Although the majority of reporters and editors (63 percent) are from papers with circulation less than 100,000, the survey is slightly skewed toward the nation's larger newspapers in terms of the proportion of total newspapers. Seventy-three percent of those who responded cover higher education on a part-time basis, while 80 percent cover three or more institutions (public and/or private).

The survey results are being used to design two seminars for news directors, editors and reporters from all media. The discussions and presentations at these seminars will assist reporters to better understand difficult issues. Those attending the seminars will in turn provide feedback about issues in the higher education beat, concerns they have covering the beat and how EWA can provide resources to improve coverage.

The Education Writers Association survey of higher education coverage in 2002 found reporters absorbed by the financial crisis engulfing the nation's public and private colleges and universities.

Across the land, state higher education governing boards and private boards of trustees raised tuition to compensate for budget cuts. The gradual but damaging shift in revenue sources from state aid (that is, taxpayers) to tuition (that is, parents and students) continued in 2002, and a weak stock market ate away at endowments. At least 13 states actually reduced appropriations for higher education, and there were negative returns on endowments for the second year in a row. Large increases in enrollment caused a "double whammy" at many institutions, which had more students to educate with fewer dollars.

The double whammy was felt most keenly in states with rapidly growing enrollment and major budget deficits. "The poorest students are being squeezed out," said a reporter for an urban California newspaper. California approached 2003 with a state budget shortfall of well more than \$30 billion and the possibility of major tuition increases.

Of 37 topics covered by reporters and editors in the survey, financial stress and tuition increases were the top two. And this didn't take into account other finance-related topics, such as endowments and fund-raising (the No. 6 topic) and student loans and debts (the 19th ranked topic).

New programs and curriculum trends and features about faculty research and programs also were popular among reporters last year. Rounding out the top 10 were stories about international programs and foreign students, college rankings, student racial diversity and crime, safety and security.

At the bottom of the list, stories about remedial education ranked 32nd, followed by student health issues, student gender issues, for-profit institutions, class size and, 37th and last, grade inflation. In the year after the *Boston Globe* published prize-winning stories about the abundance of honors graduates at Harvard, few reporters pursued the topic.

But the volume of stories told only part of the story. The EWA survey listed 37 higher education topics in six broad categories and asked reporters and editors to indicate their most important topics and those topics their news organizations actually covered in 2002. There were some interesting differences.

TABLE 1: Rank Order of Higher Education Stories in 2002, By Topic

Rank	Issue	Number	Rank	Issue	Number
1.	Financial stresses/budget cuts	96	20.	Retention/attrition	48
2.	Tuition costs/rising cost of college	95	21.	Teacher education	48
3.	Major campus renovations	90	22.	Use of SAT/ACT tests	48
4.	New programs/curriculum trends	79	23.	Faculty gender/race issues	45
5.	Features (faculty/research/programs	78	24.	Advice of HS seniors/parents	44
6.	Endowments/fund raising	77	25.	Tenure/lack of tenure	43
7.	Inter'l programs/foreign students	73	26.	Application process	42
8.	College rankings	69	27.	Research parks/spin-off companies	41
9.	Student racial diversity	66	28.	Pre-paid tuition/savings plans	36
10.	Crime/safety/security	60	29.	Affirmative action	35
11.	College president searches	58	30.	Faculty unionization/militancy	33
12.	Academics & sports	58	31.	Faculty academic freedom	32
13.	Adding campus amenities	58	32.	Remedial education	30
14.	Alcohol/drug abuse	57	33.	Student health issues	27
15.	Distance/online learning	56	34.	Student gender issues	26
16.	Campus activism	52	35.	For-profit institutions	24
17.	Scholarships/aid by merit or need	50	36.	Class size	24
18.	Top salaries/perks	48	37.	Grade inflation	17
19.	Students loans & debts	48			

Nearly 44 percent of the topics covered fell under the broad categories of academics and finance, and in this part of the survey academic coverage narrowly outweighed coverage of financial issues, probably because the survey listed 10 topics under academics and only six under finance.

Again, many papers covered the financial stresses in higher education, endowments, student debts and rising tuition. These stories were almost as prominent as academic-related coverage, representing more than 20 percent of the topics covered. But even more stories had to do with new programs and trends, followed by college rankings, academics and sports, and distance learning – all in the academic categorys.

Student-related stories made up almost 19 percent of the total. The topic in this category that drew the most checks was international programs/foreign students, closely followed by racial diversity, crime/safety/security and alcohol/drug abuse.

About 15 percent of the total stories were about personnel and institutional issues. The top stories in this category focused on campus renovations, followed by college president searches and campus amenities.

Stories about faculty made up 14 percent of the total, while admissions stories claimed about 7 percent. The top stories in these two categories were features on faculty research, gender and race issues, tenure, use of SAT/ACT tests and admissions advice.

But news organizations didn't necessarily publish stories reporters and editors felt were most important.

TABLE 2: Higher Education Stories

Written in Past Year by Category

Subject Category	Number	Percent
Personnel/Institution	289	14.8
Financial	403	20.6
Academics	448	23.0
Admissions	134	6.9
Faculty	273	14.0
Students	365	18.7

For example, while about one in five stories written about higher education in 2002 dealt with finance, reporters regarded it as the most important category, with 30 percent of the total checks. And while 15 percent of stories written in 2002 were about personnel and institutional issues, such as presidential searches and campus renovations, these issues accounted for only 9 percent of the reporters' top issues.

In follow-up interviews, several reporters said that while they had spent considerable time reporting on presidential searches – to the extent of filing freedom of information requests – such stories weren't all that satisfying. "I spent a lot of time on [presidential searches]," said a reporter for an 80,000-circulation daily in Georgia, "but once the president is named, your reporting means nothing in the end."

There were also differences in the number of stories written about students (about 19 percent of the total) and reporters' ranking of student issues (less than 15 percent of all checks). Issues about academics and faculty were about the same in a comparison of stories written and issues considered important.

TABLE 3: Most Important Issues by Category

Subject Category	Number	Percent
Personnel/Institution	46	9.0
Financial	154	30.3
Academics	117	23.0
Admissions	35	6.9
Faculty	60	11.8
Students	75	14.7
Other	22	4.3
Total	509	

How did the list of actual stories published in 2002 jibe with the stories considered most important by reporters and editors? Stories about financial stress and tuition were covered by four of every five newspapers in the sample. These two categories were also at the top of the reporters' list of most important issues.

"I spent much of the year covering affirmative action," said a reporter from a large Michigan daily, "but the biggest topic of the year for my newspaper was the financing of higher education and the tuition hikes."

Among the topics of the other top 10 stories written in 2002, five also appeared among the top 10 in the ranking of most important higher education issues. Close behind the two finance issues were articles about major campus renovations. Renovations ranked eighth among the stories considered most important.

The third-place ranking of student racial diversity among important issues may be the result of the much discussed affirmative action cases at the University of Michigan.

Three such disconnects were stories about endowments and fund-raising; international programs and foreign students, and college rankings. All were in the bottom 10 in the ranking of important issues. Many reporters are skeptical of the yearly rankings of *U.S. News & World Report* and other magazines but feel compelled to report them – or they say they're forced by editors to do so.

"Editors are entranced by rankings," said a reporter from a Middle Atlantic daily, "and they think the public is, too."

Three other disconnects appear in the opposite direction. Two of these issues, retention and attrition of college students and teacher education, are both ranked fifth of 37 compelling issues. However, among stories written, both are ranked 18th of 37 topics. In other words, reporters think student retention and teacher education are well worth writing about, but, generally, they're not reporting these issues. And reporters consider remedial education in college important – eighth in the list of such issues – though they produced relatively few stories on the topic; remediation ranked 30th in the list of stories published.

"The whole issue of college student retention is badly underreported," said a North Carolina reporter. "We haven't yet figured out the difference between a high school dropout and a college dropout, and there's a big difference."

COMPARISON OF STORIES PUBLISHED AND TOP ISSUES

TABLE 4: Most Important Issues			TABLE 5: Stories Published		
Rank	Issue	Number	Rank	Issue	Number
1.	Financial stresses/budget cuts	96	1.	Tuition costs/rising cost of college	67
2.	Tuition costs/rising cost of college	95	2.	Financial stresses/budget cuts	58
3.	Major campus renovations	90	3.	Student racial diversity	32
4.	New programs/curriculum trends	79	4.	New programs/curriculum trends	31
5.	Features (faculty/research/programs)	78	5.	Retention/attrition	20
6.	Endowments/fund raising	77	6.	Teacher education	20
7.	Inter'l programs/foreign students	73	7.	Crime/safety/security	20
8.	College rankings	69	8.	Major campus renovations	16
9.	Student racial diversity	66	9.	Remedial education	16
10.	Crime/safety/security	60	10.	Features (faculty/research/programs)	15
11.	College president searches	58	11.	Student loans and debts	14
12.	Academics & sports	58	12.	Application process	14
13.	Adding campus amenities	58	13.	Affirmative action	13
14.	Alcohol/drug abuse	57	14.	Faculty academic freedom	13
15.	Distance/online learning	56	15.	Scholarships/aid by merit or need	12
16.	Campus activism	52	16.	Use of SAT/ACT tests	12
17.	Scholarships/aid by merit or need	50	17.	Alcohol/drug abuse	12
18.	Top salaries/perks	48	18.	Tenure/lack of tenure	11
19.	Students loans & debts	48	19.	College president searches	10
20.	Retention/attrition	48	20.	Academics & sports	9
21.	Teacher education	48	21.	Advice for seniors/parents	9
22.	Use of SAT/ACT tests	48	22.	Research parks/spin-off companies	9
23.	Faculty gender/race issues	45	23.	Grade inflation	7
24.	Advice of hs seniors/parents	44	24.	Faculty gender & race issues	7
25.	Tenure/lack of tenure	43	25.	Top salaries/perks	5
26.	Application process	42	26.	Distance/online learning	5
27.	Research parks/spin-off companies	41	27.	Faculty unionization/militancy	5
28.	Pre-paid tuition/savings plans	36	28.	Student gender issues	5
29.	Affirmative action	35	29.	Endowments/fund raising	3
30.	Faculty unionization/militancy	33	30.	For profit institutions	3
31.	Faculty academic freedom	32	31.	Class size	3
32.	Remedial education	30	32.	College rankings	3
33.	Student health issues	27	33.	Adding campus amenities	2
34.	Student gender issues	26	34.	Inter'l programs, foreign students	2
35.	For-profit institutions	24	35.	Student health issues	2
36.	Class size	24	36.	Campus activism	2
37.	Grade inflation	17	37.	Prepaid tuition/savings plans	0

Another set of disconnects: Campus amenities, distance and online learning ranked among the top 20 stories written but were near the bottom of issues the reporters considered most urgent. Conversely, reporters said affirmative action and faculty academic freedom were among the 20 most important issues, but they were near the bottom of the list of stories actually written.(This may have changed after the Supreme Court’s much-publicized hearing and decision in the University of Michigan affirmative action cases.)

ISSUES BY SIZE OF NEWSPAPER

The survey also looked at coverage by size of newspaper, dividing the field into four categories, from small (circulation 25,000 to 50,000) to very large (over 250,000).

Tuition costs and financial stress dominated coverage in all four categories, not surprising given the number of reporters and editors who included these issues in their top five picks. Smaller papers (25,000-50,000) were somewhat more likely to select student-related stories and issues that are more often written as daily news — renovations, alcohol abuse, crime and safety. Larger papers (over 100,000 circulation) were more interested in issues that require research and analysis, such as student retention/attrition and affirmative action. Among the top 10 lists of all four groups, however, were many issues in common.

TABLE 6: Top 10 Issues by Size of Newspaper

25,000-50,000	50,000-100,000	100,000-250,000	250,000+
1. Tuition costs	1. Tuition costs	1. Tuition costs	1. Tuition costs
2. Financial stress	2. Financial stress	2. Financial stress	2. Financial stress
3. Crime/safety	3. New programs	3. New programs	3. Racial diversity
4. Tenure	4. Racial diversity	4. Racial diversity	4. New programs
5. Student loans	5. Campus renovation	5. Affirmative action	5. Retention/attrition
6. Alcohol/drug abuse	6. Academics/sports	6. Remedial ed	6. Teacher education
Campus renovation	7. Crime/safety	7. Scholarships	7. Affirmative action
New programs	8. Alcohol/drug abuse	8. Retention/attrition	8. Applications
Racial diversity	9. Applications	9. Applications	9. Research parks
Teacher ed	Academic freedom	10. Faculty features	President searches
	Research parks		Distance learning
	Retention/attrition		
	Student loans		

THE UNWRITTEN STORIES

The EWA also wanted to get an idea of the stories reporters wanted to write but, for whatever reason, never could get around to completing. Every reporter, of course, has a “to-do” list, and higher education writers are no exception. The survey sought to determine the “to-do” stories and uncover the impediments to full and complete coverage.

The survey asked each reporter to list three stories at the top of his or her “to-do” list. Reporters listed 207 such stories, and not surprisingly, stories relating to budgets, endowments, tuition costs, loans, debts and scholarships were prominent. Indeed, almost a quarter of the “to-do” stories related to finance.

Academic issues also were high on the lists, accounting for about 21 percent of what might be called the “unwritten” stories. Remedial education and student retention dominated in this category. Specifically, the reporters wanted to look into the increasing time students take to earn a degree. They wanted to profile graduates and examine graduation rates of student athletes and look into remedial education at community colleges – all time-consuming projects.

TABLE 7: “To-Do” List Stories by Category

SUBJECT CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENT
PERSONNEL/INSTITUTION	24	11.6
Financial	48	23.2
Academics	43	20.8
Admissions	8	3.9
Faculty	18	8.7
Students	26	12.6
Governance	24	11.6

Stories about students, personnel and administration comprised about 25 percent of the “to-do” stories. The most prominent issues relating to college administration were campus renovations, salaries and fringe benefits, and the economic and cultural impact of colleges. Issues relating to diversity were among the most mentioned stories about students. Also in this category were stories about alcohol and drug abuse, student life, crime and safety and impacts of the war on terrorism.

Not surprisingly, the “to-do” list was headed by stories that take time to report and write. “I’d like to do much more reporting about how our colleges are trying to reach out to Spanish-speaking and other minority students,” said a higher education reporter in West Texas. “But those stories take time if you do them right. You’ve got to try to get into the community and get to know the people you’re writing about. So those stories get pushed back [to the “to-do” list.]”

The governance category, which accounted for about 12 percent of stories on the “to-do” lists, did not appear among the issues in the later survey question. Reporters were interested in writing about new systems in Florida and Texas, the impact of state grants, state infrastructures and university systems. Others wanted to look at community colleges, especially the colleges’ enrollment trends, changing roles and relationships with four-year colleges. Other issues in this category listed by reporters were education reform and partnerships between colleges and other agencies.

Topics in the faculty category, about 9 percent of the “to-do” lists, included the aging of professors, productivity, unionization, gender issues, tenure and research. As for the latter, reporters’ interest ranged from the new trend of undergraduate research to the tracking of federal grants to research parks and spin-off companies.

About 4 percent of the “to-do” stories dealt with admissions advice and process, early decision policies, recruitment and the use of standardized tests.

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The number of stories actually written about faculty and students was greater in 2002 than the appearance of these stories on “to-do” lists. This could be because of the accessibility of student/faculty stories and reader interest.

IMPEDIMENTS TO GOOD COVERAGE

The survey also asked reporters about the roadblocks to effective coverage.

A vast majority, 87 percent, cited lack of time, especially in covering stories at the top of their “to-do” lists. This was true across the spectrum of higher education reporting, from the smallest to the largest papers, from every region, and from those working full- or part-time.

“I cover half of two states, some 30 colleges in all,” said a reporter from the Midwest who covers higher education exclusively. “There isn’t much time to get into a story in depth.”

The higher education reporter for New Jersey’s largest-circulation daily may own the record. She covers 19 community colleges, 11 small to medium-size colleges and universities, one large state university, 21 small private colleges and five larger private colleges – 57 schools in all!

The second most critical factor, checked by a third of the newspaper reporters and editors, was difficulty in getting information from colleges and universities. Knowing how to get information, whom to contact at institutions and how to assert the media’s legal rights might change the type of issues covered in higher education.

Also affecting coverage was a lack of knowledge of the issues (20 percent) and, to some extent, lack of support from editors (14 percent). Only five reporters said they perceived a lack of reader interest.

TABLE 8: Factors that Impede Coverage

REASON	NUMBER OF REPORTERS	PERCENT OF REPORTERS*
Lack of time	80	87.0
Lack of reader interest	5	5.4
Lack of support from editors	13	14.1
Knowledge/info about issues	18	19.6
Difficult to get info from colleges	31	33.7
Other**	11	12.3

* Number of reporters responding to this question: 92

**Daily/breaking news, size of beats, lack of information, postponed, lack of staff

What keeps reporters from working on stories? “Tons of breaking news,” “daily demands,” “interrupted by other stories.” Said one reporter from a mid-size Midwestern paper, “Love my editor, but he never has time to discuss planning with me.” From a smaller paper, a reporter described a large beat that includes two geographic communities, government, business, human interest and youth issues in addition to higher education.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BEAT

Since a lack of time was cited by so many reporters as a hindrance to good coverage, it’s not surprising that most reporters – about three-fourths of those who responded to the survey – cover higher education on a part-time basis, often as part of a general education beat. (Because the response rate from nonprint media was too small to draw conclusions, only data about newspapers are included in this report.)

TABLE 9: Fulltime/Part-Time Reporters at Newspapers	
Papers with only part-time reporters:	61
Total part-time reporters:	87
Papers with only full-time reporters:	23
Total full-time reporters:	24
Papers with full- & part-time reporters:	8
Total part-time reporters:	15
Total full-time reporters:	13
Total # of papers:	92
Full-time reporters:	37
Part-time reporters	102

About two-thirds of the newspapers in the survey (66.3 percent) assign reporters only part-time to the higher education beat. A fourth of the newspapers cover the beat with only full-time higher education reporters. Less than 10 percent (8.7) of the newspapers cover the beat with both full-time higher education reporters and part-time reporters who also may be covering other assignments.

The full-time/part-time breakdown of higher education coverage may not be indicative of newspapers (with circulation over 25,000) as a whole. The survey results, for example, are skewed to larger papers that probably have larger staffs. In addition, papers that regularly cover higher education because of the proximity of colleges or other factors might have been more likely to respond to the survey.

The breakdown of full-time/part-time status of reporters by size of newspaper is not surprising. Almost all (93.3 percent) papers with circulation between 25,000 and 50,000 cover higher education on a part-time basis. While the reporters working on the higher education beat may work full-time, they also are assigned other beats, such as elementary/secondary education.

On the other end of the spectrum, almost all of the papers with circulation over 250,000 (92.3 percent) assign the higher education beat to full-time or to both full- and part-time reporters.

TABLE 10: Coverage By Size of Paper

Type of Coverage	25,000-50,000		50,000-100,000		100,000-150,000		250,000+	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Part-time	28	93.3	24	88.9	6	31.6	1	7.7
Fulltime	1	3.3	3	11.1	10	52.6	8	61.5
Both FT/PT	1	3.3	0	0	3	15.8	4	10.8
Total	30		27		19		13	

COVERAGE BY REGION

The way newspapers assign reporters to cover higher education varies by region of the U.S. Most of the newspaper reporters in the Midwest cover higher education on a part-time basis. Meanwhile, half of the papers in the West assign higher education as a full-time beat or on a full-time and part-time basis.

About a third of papers in the Northeast (31.6 percent) assign higher education as a full-time beat or as a full-time and part-time beat. In the South, the number of papers with full-time higher education reporters is somewhat higher, about 43 percent of all newspapers. The differences cannot be explained by data in this survey, but they may be a result of differences in the concentration of higher education institutions in the region.

One paper in North Carolina's "Research Triangle," where there are three major universities, has three full-time higher education reporters.

"We're in a different mode here," says the newspaper's executive editor. "Higher education is our bread and butter."

But the higher education beat is ever changing – and not in the direction of comprehensive coverage, if follow-up interviews early in 2003 are an indication. Belt-tightening at newspapers across the country resulted in diminished coverage of colleges and universities. A Texas paper which had reported three part-time reporters on higher education had assigned all three to other beats. And a Midwestern reporter at a paper owned by a major national publisher said she'd been pulled aside regularly to cover stories on the kindergarten-12 beat.

"Readers are hurt because there's not as much higher education coverage," she said.

And everywhere, newspapers had cut back on travel and other expenses – even on long-distance telephone calls. "I'm covering people with the same financial constraints I'm feeling in my own newsroom," said a Tennessee higher education reporter.

TABLE II: Full-time and Part-Time Coverage by Region

Type of Coverage	Mid States		Northeast		South		West	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Part-time	20	90.9	13	68.4	20	57.1	8	50.0
Fulltime	1	4.5	3	15.8	14	40.0	5	31.3
Both FT/PT	1	4.5	3	15.8	1	2.9	3	18.7
Total	22		19		35		16	

NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS COVERED

How many schools do reporters cover, and what are their types? The sheer number of institutions included in higher education beats can be staggering. The majority of reporters in the sample – 80 percent – cover three or more institutions. Because more than half of the reporters are assigned to higher education part-time, the difficulty of covering individual institutions in depth becomes obvious. Without external resources and support, reporters have little time to get beyond press releases issued by institutions.

The survey found the number of colleges and universities on a beat ranges from one to more than 30.

For example, of the 73 reporters who responded to the question, about half cover from one to four institutions. Twenty percent cover only one or two colleges or universities. About a third cover five to 12 institutions, while 15 percent cover 13 or more. Reporters from large papers may cover more than 30 colleges and universities.

The breakdown for the coverage of private institutions is similar: About 64 percent cover one to three institutions; 22 percent cover four to six colleges and about 14 percent cover seven or more.

Seventy-three reporters responded to the question about their coverage of public and private colleges and universities. About a fourth cover public institutions only, while over three-fourths cover both private and public institutions. No reporters cover private institutions exclusively.

TABLE 12 : Public/Private Institutions

Covered by Reporters

Institution	#	%
Public only	17	23.3
Private only	0	
Public & Private	56	76.7
All	73	

Reporters who responded to this question said they cover 550 colleges and universities: 336 public and 214 private. Almost 90 percent indicated they cover one or more community colleges. About two-thirds said they cover small or medium-size public colleges and universities, and another 65 percent cover major public universities. About two-thirds of the reporters said they cover small private institutions; about a fourth cover large private colleges.s

TABLE 13: Type of Institutions Covered by Reporters

Institution Type	#	Reporters % of total	#	Institutions % of total
Public Colleges/Universities			336	
Community Colleges	65	89.0	156	46.4
Small/Medium	48	65.8	105	31.3
Large	47	64.8	75	22.3
Private Colleges/Universities			214	
Small	49	67.1	175	81.8
Large	28	38.4	39	18.2

TABLE 14: Number of Institutions Covered by Reporters

Institutions	Reporters	
	No.	Percent
Public	73	
1 – 3	41	56.2
4 – 6	22	30.1
7+	10	13.7
Private	55	
1 – 3	35	63.6
4 – 6	12	21.8
7+	8	14.5
All Institutions	73	
1 – 4	36	49.3
5 – 12	26	35.6
13 – 20	7	9.6

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nearly one in five of the reporters in the survey said they are handicapped by lack of knowledge of higher education issues. Given the breadth of coverage expected of reporters, many do not have the time or background to provide in-depth reporting of complex issues. These reporters need a better understanding of the issues and hints for gaining access to resources and information. This is especially true of those who must cover the entire education beat, kindergarten through “grade 16.”

Yet the survey found only 32 reporters attended any training, workshops or professional meetings about higher education in 2002. Most said they attended seminars sponsored by the Education Writers Association or the Hechinger Institute, an organization housed at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Of the 32 who attended a workshop or professional meeting, a fourth participated in an EWA seminar and more than one-half attended a Hechinger session. A few others attended an Associated Press-sponsored event, seminars on athletics, fundraising, sports compliance, alcohol and drug abuse and courses about higher education finance. Two reporters said they attended regional events in Texas and Florida sponsored by colleges and economic development and business coalitions.

SURVEY RESPONSE

About 1,200 surveys were mailed in November 2002 to daily newspapers with circulation over 25,000, the active EWA membership and radio and television media in the top five markets. The mailing was limited to papers with more than 25,000 circulation because they are more likely to cover higher education on a regular basis than smaller papers. The total number of dailies in the United States, according to *Editor & Publisher*, was 1,468 in 2001. The number of dailies with circulation exceeding 25,000 was 419.

Reporters and editors were invited to complete the paper survey and return it to EWA by mail or to complete an online survey on the EWA website. Of the 117 responses, 83 (71 percent) were mailed, and 34 (29 percent) were completed online. The response rate for the survey was about 9.75 percent, which means the sample size was adequate to provide an accurate picture.

About 90 percent of those who responded were reporters or editors at daily newspapers.

Responses from institutes, freelance reporters, and others came from the membership lists of EWA. For the most part, the nonprint media did not respond to the survey. The radio responses came from National Public Radio (NPR) outlets in the major markets. The lack of response from radio and television could be a result of how reporters are assigned to cover higher education in those media. The response from nonprint media wasn't adequate to draw any conclusions about their coverage of higher education.

Of the newspaper responses, almost 37 percent came from papers with a circulation over 100,000, 22 percent from papers with circulation between 100,000 and 150,000 and about 15 percent from papers with circulation above 250,000. The rest of the response came from newspapers with circulation between 25,000 and 100,000 (about 34 percent between 25,000 and 50,000, and 30 percent between 50,000 and 100,000).

TABLE 15: Survey Respondents

	No.	Percent
NEWSPAPER		89.7
Editor	13	
Reporter	92	
RADIO		3.4
Editor	1	
Reporter/anchor	3	
INSTITUTE		2.6
Editor	2	2
Reporter	1	1
FREELANCE REPORTER	2	1.7
Other	3	2.6
Total		117

TABLE 16: Newspaper Respondents by Circulation

	Survey		E&P **	
	#	%	#	%
25,000-50,000	34*	33.7	201	48.0
50,001-100,000	30	29.7	113	27.0
100,001-250,000	22	21.8	65	15.5
250,000+	15	14.8	40	9.5
Total	101		419	

* Includes 2 EWA respondents from papers with less than 25,000 circulation

**September 2001 data from *Editor & Publisher*

The EWA survey was skewed toward larger dailies if one looks at the distribution of all daily newspapers by circulation in the United States as reported by *Editor & Publisher*. According to *Editor & Publisher* data for dailies with circulation over 25,000, about 25 percent have a circulation over 100,000; about half have a circulation between 25,000 and 50,000; and another 25 percent publish between 50,000 and 100,000 issues.

Among those who responded to the EWA survey, smaller dailies weren't as well represented as papers with a circulation over 100,000. This could have been a result of the survey topic. Larger papers are more likely to assign more reporters and provide more in-depth coverage of higher education. These papers also might be more likely to respond to the survey. However, in follow-up phone calls, several smaller papers indicated they provide significant coverage of higher education. Reporters at these papers said colleges in their towns play a major role in community life.

Papers in the traditional Southern states comprised the largest group in the survey, almost 40 percent of the total. Mid-American papers (from Kentucky and Ohio to North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri) made up 24 percent of the total; the Northeast and Atlantic states (Maine to Maryland), 20 percent; and the West (all others, including Hawaii and Alaska), 17 percent.

TABLE 17: Newspaper Respondents by Region¹(Footnotes)

	Survey		E&P*	
	#	%	#	%
Northeast	20	19.8	258	17.6
South	40	39.6	441	30.0
Mid	24	23.8	491	33.4
West	17	16.8	278	18.9
Total	101		1,468	

**Editor & Publisher*, 2001 data, all dailies

In comparing the regional breakdown of the survey to *E&P* data for all dailies, the number of responses from the South was higher than the actual distribution of all dailies. Meanwhile, the response from the Midwest was slightly lower. Differences in the West and Northeast were less significant. The difference in distribution could be a result of the inclusion of all dailies in the *E&P* data. Data for newspapers with circulation over 25,000 by region is not available. The disparities between the survey and *E&P* data do not preclude conclusions being drawn about regions with these caveats.

¹REGIONAL BREAKDOWN:

Northeast

Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland

South:

Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee

Mid:

Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, , Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Missouri

West:

Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California, Hawaii, Alaska