

# DIVERSITY IN THE NEWSROOM

While student journalists have the responsibility of creating fair, accurate and balanced stories, they are also required to report on topics that are relevant to every identity in their schools and surrounding communities.

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**I**n 1987, researcher Kirk Johnson conducted a study on two predominantly black neighborhoods

in Boston. Eighty-five percent of stories covered over a month-long period by mainstream media outlets “reinforced negative stereotypes” of Black members of the community.

However, when the same neighborhoods were covered by Black-owned publications over the same period of time, coverage extended to illustrate a fuller image of the community, with 57 percent of stories focusing on educational as well as entrepreneurial efforts.

Student journalists at the 2018 Southern Interscholastic Press Association conference tackle these same issues.

## ***DIVERSIFYING THE NEWSROOM***

SIPA adviser A.J. Chambers believes it is the duty of student journalists to accurately report on their school environments.

“At the school that I work at, it’s 67 percent African-American, 14 percent Hispanic and 4 percent White. So, that the minority of the school are White students,” Chambers said. “When you say the name of



TEAM

# A JOURNALIST

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OLA HIGH SCHOOL JUNIOR**

our school, people are like, ‘Ooh, rough school,’ and it’s not. It has a reputation that does not match it. I think student journalists can change that.”

For Chambers, a diversity of content within a journalistic publication means students are looking outside of the obvious targets for stories and representing the school culture appropriately.

“It’s important to tell stories of people different than you. Instead of telling the star football player, the star cheerleader’s story, why not go in the corner and get the outcast in the corner of the cafeteria or the art student who has his hair covering his face ‘cause he doesn’t want to communicate? Those are the stories that I think are important,” Chambers said.

Chambers believes diversity in staff and in content go hand-in-hand, and it is important to actively discuss both.

“Diversifying the newsroom is just as important as diversifying the school. You can’t tell people’s stories if you cannot relate in some way,” Chambers said. “Our staff is constantly talking about diversity. Some people are scared to talk about it. Why be scared of it when it’s looking us right in the face?”

### **REFLECTING ON STAFF CULTURE**

For Ola High School juniors and Reflection Yearbook staffers Maia McDonald and Kenedi Mitchell, the staff of their publication is an accurate representation of their school population.

“Our staff is very representative of the demographics represented within our school,” Mitchell said. “Our

*“If you’re not open to hearing what other people that are different from you have to say, then you’re not gonna able to get just a fresh perspective. It’s not gonna be an interesting story to read.”*

**— MERRIT REDDEN,  
WANDO HIGH SCHOOL  
SOPHOMORE**

school is predominantly White, so there is a good percentage of our staff that is White, but there’s also another good percentage of us that are Black.”

Despite this, however, McDonald sees an imbalance in the topics covered by her publication’s staff.

“Especially with interracial dating at our school -- there’s nothing wrong with people from different races dating. However, when racist people date somebody because they fetishize their race, that’s where the issue comes in. They’ll be fetishizing these people, which causes such a huge issue -- especially covering that as a staff,” McDonald said. “Covering it as a staff is so difficult because these people like to pretend like it’s not an issue, and it is an issue and it’s important to us.”

According to McDonald, the imbalance is purported by an emphasis on one segment of the student culture over another.

“We’re a very, very Christian school. Everything is sponsored by at least one of two churches, or probably both in the area. So, we cover all things like that, we’re very respectful of that, because those things are important. It’s a part of our school. It’s a part of our school’s culture,” McDonald said. “(But) why are the other things that are a part of our school’s culture erased or hidden?”

McDonald believes that the lack of agreement among staff members regarding certain issues leads to a lack of coverage of the issues within their publication.

“It’s very frustrating trying to find that balance and trying to be truly represented,” McDonald said. “In terms of staff members of different colors, there’s diversity. But in terms of what we cover and how we cover it, there’s very little diversity.”

### **BREAKING BARRIERS**

Melanie Elguezal, a junior at Coral Gables Senior High School in Miami, believes there is less diversity

among southern journalism programs, unlike the program she is a part of.

“(Southern student journalists) are less diverse.

There’s not a lot of Hispanic immigrants,” Elguezal said. “(Hispanic immigrants) see a lot more of different cultures than you guys do.”

Elguezal believes lack of diversity in journalistic coverage is a problem that can be combated by staff members expanding their horizons in terms of those they interview.

“As journalists, especially in high school, we tend to interview people who we feel more comfortable with, like our friends, or people we know. I think if we try and stray away from that, and interview people who we don’t feel as comfortable with, that’d be a good way to have the most coverage in the publication. For sure, I think there is (a bias),” Elguezal said. “If you keep covering the same type of people, that becomes kind of routine.”

For Cavalier Yearbook staffer Gabriela Jimenez, a junior at Coral Gables Senior High School, a unique problem her staff faces is a language barrier within the school community.

“In our school, we actually have kids that speak Spanish, so some of our kids in our staff, they don’t speak Spanish, so it’s harder for them to interview kids that speak Spanish, ‘cause they only speak English,” Jimenez said.

Despite this issue, according to Elguezal, making efforts to include the different parts of the school community has helped bridge the gap between members of the school population in the context of journalism.

“I remember last year, we did a Spanish spread, so we can cover that part of the school who doesn’t speak English, but they can still have a role and a part of yearbook,” Elguezal said.