

Montana YMCA Youth & Government Program

Press Manual

2006 Edition

“Democracy must be learned by each generation.”

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The Press Corps

Montana YMCA Youth and Government has a dedicated press corps at every session. A daily newspaper is published, with an additional voter's guide printed prior to the primary election.

When volunteers, equipment, and technical support exist, other elements of news reporting may be incorporated, including videotaping events or posting session news on the Internet.

The Press Corps

Reporters are usually students who are freshmen, sophomores, or juniors. Usually this is their first year in the program. However, any student with an interest in journalism may be a reporter. As a rule, about 20 people create the most efficient press staff, so schools are limited to just one or at the most two reporters so we don't have too many people.

Reporters are each asked to submit a 150-250 word editorial on a timely political topic, due March 15.

In addition to reporters, a Newspaper Editor is appointed to lead the press corps. This is a position filled by a Junior or Senior upon application. Interested Reporters apply for the job in February.

The Editor oversees all aspects of the daily session newspaper and reporters. The Editor gets to name the paper, create the masthead, assign staff, direct coverage of events, and so on. An adult advisor assists the Editor.

Goals of the Press Program

The session newspaper and all other press activities have the following four main goals:

1. To inform all participants about the news of the session across all program areas.
2. To provide an archival record of that year's program for future reference.
3. To educate participants about Civic Journalism.
4. To help youth reporters learn more about political reporting and journalism in general.

Nuts and Bolts of the News

The Reporter's Job

Each reporter creates at least one story, picture/cartoon, feature, or other contribution every day.

Some jobs reporters do include:

- Copy/Layout Editor - second in command to the Editor in Chief.
- Proofreader/Staff typist
- Staff Artist/Cartoonist/Crossword maker
- Features editor
- Legislative Beat - reporters cover all committees and, working in shifts, also cover the House and Senate floor sessions. Please remember that the Press should cover the sessions from the Galleries and stay off the floor except to give a message to someone if requesting an interview.
- Model Supreme Court News
- Social - to cover horoscopes, Advice, gossip, social activities, Fort Harrison.
- Opinion - who is also Lobbyist Editorials page editor.
- Executive Branch news - Governor, Lt. Governor, Secretary of State, Cabinet members, potential vetoes, administration goals, feature interviews, etc.
- Elections editor
- Classifieds editor
- Capitol Beat/Roving Reporters - to find interesting things about the Capitol, real State Government or the Capitol staff.
- Photographer/videographer (if equipment is available)
- And more! Positions are created as needed.

About the Session Paper

Traditionally, the paper runs eight pages daily - four 8-1/2" x 11" sheets printed front and back. It might be longer if there are enough reporters to justify more articles, but the press is not to waste space just to fill eight pages, either!

There are plenty of opinion pieces in the paper - All Lobbyists are required to write a short editorial. Therefore, reporters may need to type lobbyist editorials into the computer or otherwise be sure that these pieces are published. On the other hand, reporters are not to actually help the lobbyists write their pieces!

Classified ads are sometimes sold in order for the press to raise money for extra Pizza, film and developing, etc. However, it is very important that the Classifieds editor screen personal ads and only publish those with printable remarks.

The Schedule

The work of the press begins with a press workshop that starts immediately after registration and flows directly into work putting together the voter's guide and regular editions of the paper that need to both come out the next day. Press conferences are held Sunday evening for Primary Candidates and again on Tuesday

morning for the winners that go on to the General Election. The press deadline is in the early afternoon each day, after which there is a meeting where everyone decides what will be covered (and by who) for the evening and the next day.

Rules for Reporters

- Always remember that we are guests in the Capitol and need to be considerate of the regular staff that works in the building.
- For that reason, be particularly quiet, mature, self-controlled, and respectful to all people. Treat ANY adult you encounter with polite, mature behavior and the utmost respect - They could be the real Governor's right hand person, or the Director of a State agency, or simply very busy, and you don't want to be in their way.
- Be unobtrusive. You are looking for a story, not trying to BE the story.
- Stay quiet in the halls. Reporters are the most mobile participants in the program and need to be considerate of others.
- Don't loiter in the halls. If you aren't on your way to cover a story, head for the press room.
- Be aware that a press room gets noisy, so keep the doors closed if music is playing or if a meeting is going on.

Journalism Ethics, Style, and Content

Ethics

At the Montana YMCA Youth and Government Program, all participants are challenged to accept and demonstrate the positive values of Caring, Honesty, Respect and Responsibility.

Think twice before making fun of someone in print. Remember that people here are in high school. Seek the truth, report the whole story, and have fun, but do not carelessly hurt the feelings of others or badly embarrass someone over a minor slip-up in their behavior.

It's OK to quote floor speeches and amusing public moments, but avoid reporting private errors or overheard remarks that were not

intended for a public setting. Real reporters may ferret out scandals and cover-ups, but at Youth and Government, the scandals aren't going to shake the foundations of government.

Objectivity, fairness, and nonpartisanship is important in good reporting. Opinions are acceptable on the Editorial page, but otherwise the job of the journalist is to seek out the real story and report it.

Be **accurate** in you write and don't make stuff up. This isn't the National Enquirer. Be careful to quote people precisely and not report things they didn't actually say.

Style

Journalists "write short." The most important information comes first, with supporting details and less important information following later in the piece. Don't use two words when one will do, don't use a long word when a short word will do. Quit when the story is told.

Remember that the computer software has a spell checker. Use it! Also, dictionaries and a thesaurus are always available in the press room. Editing and proofreading are not only the jobs of the editor and copy people, but the responsibility of ALL.

Content

The Press program helps teach people about political reporting and civic journalism. As such, reporting the WHOLE story matters. A good reporter doesn't simply tell "both sides" of a story, but goes deeper, looking for ALL sides of the story and the way things affect ordinary people.

In particular, the Montana YMCA Youth and Government Program supports the Civic Journalism approach to reporting on political events.

This means Youth and Government reporters need to ask questions about the things that readers really need to know, and remember to LISTEN to the responses from people they interview, asking good follow up questions when needed.

The challenge for the overall daily paper is to strike a balance between the fun articles and the serious ones. A good paper is both entertaining and informative.

What is Civic Journalism?

As explained by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press, Civic Journalism is an effort by print and broadcast journalists to reach out to the public more aggressively in the reporting process, to listen to how citizens frame their problems and what citizens see as solutions to those problems, then to use that information to enrich their newspaper or broadcast report. It is being practiced by real newspapers and television stations in many cities, big and small¹.

As Rick Thames of the Charlotte Observer said at the Democracy Place Civic Journalism Forum, "Civic journalism recognizes that the real strength of this country rests with its citizens, and that it is the responsibility of those of us in the media, and in other positions of power and influence to do all we can to equip citizens with what they need to solve the challenges we face...It was the collective wisdom of citizens, not the so called experts, not the talking heads and certainly not we journalists, that built this nation--and has kept it on course for more than 200 years.

"Those of us who advocate civic journalism place a high value on understanding the concerns of citizens and then providing them what they need to deal with those concerns. That's not pandering. That's public service--journalism's highest calling."²

¹ "What is Civic Journalism?" [Pew Center for Civic Journalism](http://democracyplace.soundprint.org/pew.html), 9 Jan. 2006 <<http://democracyplace.soundprint.org/pew.html>>.

² Thames, Rick. "Civic Catalyst Newsletter." [Pew Center for Civic Journalism](http://www.pewcenter.org/doingc/civiccat/displayCivcat.php?id=156), 9 Jan. 2006 <<http://www.pewcenter.org/doingc/civiccat/displayCivcat.php?id=156>>.