

Montana Newspaper Association

PRESS PASS

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ISSUE 8

In Print. Online. For You.



National Newspaper Week

#newspapersyourway

2023 marks the 83rd celebration of National Newspaper Week. Since 1940, Newspaper Association Managers has sponsored and supported National Newspaper Week, a week long promotion of the newspaper industry in the United States and Canada.

All of the materials are developed from data derived from the Coda Ventures nationwide study conducted for America's Newspapers and built around the evolution of newspapers and the fact that newspaper readers are from all generations, community leaders and voters.

On the website you will find promotional print ads, social media ads, web ads, guest columns and editorial cartoons, all available for download at no charge to daily and non-daily newspapers across North America.

PLAN TO CELEBRATE National Newspaper Week by devoting as many column inches as possible to reinforce the importance of your newspaper to your communities, and also by sharing the message on your social media platforms over the course of the week.

MAKE IT LOCAL by editorializing about your newspaper's unique relevance. This can be about your duties as government watchdog, your coverage of community events, publication of timely public notices, etc.

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READERSHIP STUDY HIGHLIGHTS ON LOCAL NEWSPAPER STRENGTHS

The 2023 Local Newspaper Study shows our publications and websites continue to be the information leaders in their local communities.

From print to digital to social, Americans are consuming more news than ever before, and they are looking to local newspapers as the most accurate and reliable source of original news reporting.

Newspaper readers are active in their communities. When Americans say “they read the local newspapers,” that means they are accessing local newspaper content over any number of print and/or digital platforms. Here are a few highlight results from the study:

- 8 out of 10 Americans read print or digitally access newspaper content every month.**
- 49% of newspaper readers are male and 51% female. 78% are under the age of 65, 61% are homeowners, 67% have household income greater than \$50,000 and 71% have lived in the community for more than 5 years.**
- 43% of Americans believe newspapers are the most accurate source of original reporting compared to 33% for local TV, 17% for social media and 7% for local radio.**
- 66% of Americans believe that publishing public notices in newspapers should be required.**
- The top 5 reasons people read newspapers: stay informed, feel connected with the community, decide where they stand on local issues, find places and things to do and to talk to other people about community news.**

To access the full study, click [HERE](#)



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION HOTLINE

FOI HOTLINE: OUR WATCHDOG PARTNER NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

The Montana Freedom of Information Hotline already fielded more than 100 calls in the first eight months of 2023, helping journalists and members of the public.

Montana FOI attorney Mike Meloy said most of the calls have been about how to get access to records. Meloy said government entities have been emboldened and are finding new ways to block access to public records. Often, he said, the method they use is to quote an astronomical charge, as high as \$2,000, for their search and processing costs. Many members of the public give up at that point and just end up frustrated, Meloy said.

As government transparency in our state continues to become cloudier, the FOI Hotline is needed more than ever. Meloy, a longtime Montana FOI attorney, for decades has helped ensure government agencies adhere to the Montana Constitution, staffs the hotline and promptly responds to inquiries by:

Phone: (406) 442-8670 or Email: mike@meloylawfirm.com

When journalists or citizens can't get into a meeting or access a public record, the FOI hotline gives them a place to go.

Montana's Constitution says: "No person shall be deprived of the right to examine documents or to observe the deliberation of all public bodies or agencies of state government and its subdivisions, except in cases in which the demand of individual privacy clearly exceeds the merits of public disclosure."

The Montana FOI Hotline board met Sept. 7 and reviewed its finances and outlook. As of today, the hotline has barely enough funds to cover its 2023 costs. It will start 2024 with less than \$5 in checking.

To continue serving journalists and the public, donations are needed. The hotline is made possible mainly through donations from Montana media organizations. In the past, the hotline was able to obtain more grant funding, but many of those sources have evaporated.

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FOI HOTLINE: CONTINUED

Early each year the hotline sends a solicitation to Montana's 69 newspapers and 125 TV and radio outlets. The FOI Hotline board voted to keep tiered donation levels the same:

\$75 for small weekly newspapers and radio stations.

\$150 for large weekly and small daily newspapers.

\$300 for TV stations and medium-size daily newspapers.

\$500 for large daily newspapers.

"It is important that every newspaper or broadcaster send a check. It's a low-cost way to provide FOI assistance," Melody Martinsen said in a fund-raising request earlier this year. Martinsen, who has been on the hotline board since 2001 and president since 2013, pointed out that the going rate for an attorney is \$200 for 30 minutes.

Tax-deductible donations to the Montana Freedom of Information Hotline, a 501(c)(3), may be sent to:

Montana FOI Hotline
c/o Treasurer Mike Dennison
507 N. Rodney St.
Helena, MT 59601

In other action during its annual meeting, the FOI Hotline board thanked Gary Moseman, who stepped down as treasurer, for his years of service to the board. Moseman has long been a tireless FOI advocate in his years as managing editor at the Great Falls Tribune and as a member of the FOI Hotline board.

For the coming year the FOI Hotline board officers elected to serve are: Martinsen, Choteau Acantha, president; Lee Banville, University of Montana School of Journalism, vice president; Mike Dennison, longtime Montana journalist, retired, treasurer; and Jim Strauss, Montana Newspaper Association, secretary.

The FOI Hotline board also discussed bringing back its annual award to honor a Montanan who has gone above and beyond to champion freedom of information in Montana. Strauss volunteered to research options for doing that. Further details to come.



MNA internship grants help develop young journalists

The Montana Newspaper Foundation awarded five \$2,000 grants to help fund summer internships. MNA members winning the grants were the Boulder Monitor, the Lake County Leader, the Tobacco Valley News, the Cascade Courier and the Daily Inter Lake. Here is the story of one intern's summer experience:

Max Dupras, the Leader's intern reporter, is passionate about at least two things: writing and sports. He's honing his skills at both this summer, as well as taking photographs and covering local news and events.

"I didn't know I wanted to be a journalist until I got to college," says the Missoula native. "It's something that was never really in my scope as a kid."

He was involved in Sentinel High School's student newspaper, which gave him a taste for reporting, and his love of sports propelled him to enroll in the University of Montana's School of Journalism.

"I always loved sports – that was why I kind of got into it," he says.

Dupras enters his senior year this fall as sports editor for the Montana Kaimin, the school's student newspaper. Covering the Grizzlies will be his central mission – a task that begins in earnest when football practice starts in early August.

"One of the really valuable things I've learned is sports are such a really big part of a community – especially small communities where families come out to see their kids play."

He also understands that there's more to journalism than football, basketball and volleyball. "I've realized that whether I do sports or not, journalism as a whole means a lot for communities that need their stories to be told," he says.

Among his assignments, he covered a recent Ronan City Council meeting, the Arlee powwow and Fourth of July parade, a new cake shop in Polson, a roundtable on vagrants, the Mission Valley Mariners, and the Buffalo Run in St. Ignatius.

He appreciates the opportunity to "round out and tighten" his writing by covering non-sports events. "I'm already experiencing challenges here trying to figure out ways to make those stories more interesting and figure out what's missing," he says. "I think small communities in general throughout Mission Valley deserve to be shown in both a positive and critical light."

Although Dupras grew up in Missoula, he spent time in Arlee where a high school friend lived, and his family has property near Polson. His visits to the Flathead Reservation offered a window on small-town life.

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Montana press working to ensure it retains Capitol space

The Montana Newspaper Association is working with the Montana Broadcasters Association and journalists on the ground in Helena to ensure press members will continue to have office space in the Capitol.

As part of HB 856, which was passed during the 2023 session of the Montana Legislature, all office space in the Capitol is being reviewed and evaluated for best possible use by the Legislative Council. The space had been under the purview of the Department of Administration.

The MNA has appeared at multiple committee meetings and early indications are encouraging. The Legislative Council is still in the early stages of planning Capitol space, but press needs are included in all the early documents. In fact, the working documents show the press gaining space.

MNA Director of Communications & Development Jim Strauss cautions that the council is in the early stages of reviewing space but adds that press concerns were clearly heard and are being used to help shape the plan. Timetable is for the draft report for Capitol space to be completed by Oct. 24 and the final report submitted by Oct. 31.

Strauss praised members of the council for being accessible and listening to media concerns and credited Helena journalists for effectively presenting the need for press space in the Capitol.

“Without space in the Capitol, the timeliness and depth of reporting would be diminished,” Strauss said. “Montanans across the state depend on Capitol journalists to keep them informed of developments during the fast-moving session. In addition, it also benefits legislators to have easy access to members of the media.

“Members of the council clearly appreciated that,” Strauss said. “They want their constituents to be informed during the session, allowing them a chance to comment on and help shape proposed legislation. That’s better for all Montanans, and it only happens with timely, thorough reporting.”

As part of the space review process, a series of stakeholder meetings were held. Initially, the media were not included in those sessions, but when a request was made to be added, Capitol Space Committee chair Rhonda Knudsen (R-Culbertson) was very receptive to the idea.

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UM COURSES TEACHES HOW TO CUT THROUGH THE B.S.

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Of the 1,681 courses taught this fall at the University of Montana, JRNL 102Y definitely grabs attention. Not so much for its catalog title, of course, but for its name: Calling Bullshit.

An online course, Calling Bullshit examines why it's so easy to spread misinformation and untruths and why it's so hard to combat it, while exploring what citizens can do to become better consumers and producers of factual information.

"The name is definitely provocative, but the class is not about the cussword," said course instructor Professor Lee Banville, director of UM's School of Journalism. "It's about information literacy. People need to be both better sharers of information and better consumers of information."

Because the subject is indeed serious, Banville chose a more appropriately earnest title when he launched the course in 2021. News Literacy, however, generated about as much excitement from students as one might expect.

"We had about 20 students in the class because, let's face it, the title was boring," Banville said. "Calling it B.S., we had 40 students this summer and 102 are enrolled this fall."

The idea for the class – and its unconventional title – isn't entirely original. The University of Washington also sponsors a course titled Calling Bullshit, and its instructors, Professor Carl Bergstrom and Associate Professor Jevin West, wrote a book on the subject with the same title. Their emphasis though is on the misuse of data, Banville said, whereas UM's looks more at how to spot and debunk misinformation in journalism and social media.

Banville talked with both UW professors while formulating his syllabus and uses their book as the course textbook.

"I blended UW's more science-oriented focus with a journalism-literacy focus to create a new course," Banville said. "But I kept the name, because ... well, because."

Political science senior Lauren Van Cleaf finished Calling Bullshit this summer and said the "title sold me." The curriculum, she added, was surprising rigorous, giving her skills she will use in her career and in life.

"The one big thing we learned is not to inherently trust the media, but also not to be paranoid about the media," said Van Cleaf, who is considering going to law school after graduation. "You have to analyze what you read. Is the evidence being presented reliable? Are sources being named?"

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NNA: Proposed exempt wage hike would hurt many papers

The National Newspaper Association is concerned that a major salary increase may be required at many newspapers, if a U.S. Department of Labor proposal is approved.

The DOL is proposing raising the minimum required salary for exempt employees from \$35,568 annually to \$55,068, a 54.8% increase. For employees considered exempt as highly compensated employees, the minimum pay would increase from \$107,432 to \$143,988.

The proposal is not yet final. Companies and individuals will have an opportunity to comment on the proposal, with a deadline set at 60 days after the proposed rule is published in the Federal Register. NNA will notify its members when the deadline is set, along with information about how to comment.

For employees to be classified as exempt, meaning the individual does not qualify for overtime pay, three criteria must be met. They must be:

- paid on a salary basis, regardless of hours worked,
- paid a salary above the exempt minimum and
- perform duties considered exempt under DOL regulations. A summary of those requirements can be found on the DOL website.

Most community newspaper employees are not considered exempt employees under DOL rules because their duties do not meet the requirements. Exemption from wage and hour rules would continue to apply for newspapers with less than 4,000 circulation.

NNA Chair John Galer, publisher of the Journal-News in Hillsboro, Illinois, said the steep increase proposed would add pressures to many newspapers that already are struggling.

“The problem with this proposal, like so many that are well-intended by political bodies, is that while governments can make promises to employees, it cannot tell businesses where the money is going to come from the fulfill these promises,” Galer said. “In our industry, new revenues are hard to find. Most newspapers will have to plan for their survival simply by cutting out more jobs. In the end, no one wins.”

CUT THROUGH THE B.S.: CONTINUED

“The one big thing we learned is not to inherently trust the media, but also not to be paranoid about the media,” said Van Cleaf, who is considering going to law school after graduation. “You have to analyze what you read. Is the evidence being presented reliable? Are sources being named?”

Britta Sago, another summer graduate of the class, said she’s always been “a little bit subversive” when explaining her decision to enroll in a course with a decidedly unusual title.

“But I like to stay up-to-date on events, and I struggle to identify good reporting and reliable sources,” said Sago, a senior majoring in social work. “We learned in class how to break apart stories and determine if the sources were legitimate.

“Regardless of your political affiliations, this is important,” she added, “particularly with what is happening in our country.”

Freelance writer Bowman Leigh, who earned a master’s in UM’s School of Journalism, will serve an adjunct professor this fall, instructing students enrolled in Calling Bullshit.

She agreed that the rancorous state of current social dialogue makes this class particularly timely, but the ultimate goal is to educate students to become critical thinkers regardless of where the country leans politically from year to year.

“The title may be a little playful,” Leigh said, “but I can’t think of a better skill set to teach our students than to not take things at face value. It’s valuable really for all consumers of news and media.”

In the coming semesters, Banville and Leigh would like to expand the number of students who can take the course, but they want to keep class sizes small enough to foster two-way dialogue that respects other points of view.

People don’t need to be “fixed,” Banville stressed, just because they disagree with you.

“We want there to be more than a one-way conversation in class because the subject itself needs to be more than a one-way conversation,” Banville said. “So, we’re trying to find the Goldilocks between the two.”

He cautions students that recognizing B.S. and calling it out sometimes takes fortitude.

“I have a friend who is a professional fact checker, and we were commiserating recently about her struggles correcting misinformation about tofu shrinking brain tumors,” Banville said. “It’s not easy trying to debunk bad information. It’s a ton of work.”

And that title?

Banville said he wanted a course name that “hit” students upside the head, but even he struggled at times with Calling Bullshit.

“When I was filling out the paperwork to start the course, I kept thinking I can’t believe I am submitting this form, and I even used an asterisk in place of the ‘i’ at first,” he recalled. “I was waiting for someone to push back, and no one did.

“Yeah, the name is provocative,” he said, “but information literacy is incredibly important to society and our democracy.”

Contact: Dave Kuntz, UM director of strategic communications, 406-243-5659, dave.kuntz@umontana.edu.

MONTANA LEGISLATIVE ISSUES CONTINUED

Several Helena journalists participated in a stakeholder Zoom call and outlined their needs and concerns.

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In addition, Holly Michels, head of the Montana State Bureau, worked with other journalists who currently have space in the Capitol to send a detailed letter to Legislative Council leadership outlining the importance of retaining press space in the Capitol. Parts of the letter were read during a Legislative Council meeting.

“As mentioned earlier, we are still in the early stages of space review; however, the efforts of MNA members to reach out to legislators with their concerns ensures the importance of press space is weighed as decisions are made,” Strauss said.

The MNA will continue to monitor Legislative Council meetings, along with any other interim meetings that affect Montana media.

MNF INTERNS: CONTINUED

“It was really cool to see that perspective – to see what different issues affected people in Arlee and see that while we live in the same state there are so many different things in cities only about 30 minutes away from each other.”

Dupras also interned as a general assignment reporter last summer for the Belgrade News, where he covered everything from sports to local government and infrastructure.

He was employed by GrizVision, a production company that films Grizzly games for ESPN, and now works for a local ABC Fox station called Nonstop Local as a production assistant, operating cameras and audio.

In contemporary journalism, experience with film and audio is definitely plus. However, Dupras still aspires to a career in print journalism. He’s devoted to newspapers, despite the hurdles the business has faced due to declining readership and advertising. “I know print media is in a weird spot, but I love a good newspaper,” he says.

“I got into print because I love writing – of all the aspects of journalism it’s the thing I work the hardest at,” he adds. “It’s the thing that makes me the happiest when I do it well.”