

Adviser Watch: Lynn Waldsmith



Q How long have you been advising publications?

A This is my sixth year teaching at Mercy as well as my sixth year of serving as adviser to Newsprint— Mercy's student newspaper.

Q How did you wind up advising?

A Actually, I made a mid-life career change after spending most of my professional career in journalism. After graduating from Michigan State, I spent four years working in Detroit newsrooms as a writer for WXYZ news/talk radio, then WXYZ and WDIV television. I had a double love for both journalism and English, but I ended up going back to school to obtain a master's degree in English with an emphasis on writing from the University of Minnesota. After that I came back to Michigan and worked in public relations while doing freelance writing for various publications as well as teaching writing at Wayne State and U-M Dearborn. Finally I landed

a reporter's job at The Detroit News and worked there for 7 years before, during and after the infamous strike of '95.

Over time I realized that I really loved teaching and that I would love to ideally teach both journalism and English, so I had to go back to school to get certified. I did my student teaching at Mercy and got incredibly lucky when they offered me a position once I had my credentials to teach high school students

Q Most of MIPA's members advise publications in public school settings. Do you feel that you face any additional challenges or are afforded any additional benefits because you teach at an all-girls Catholic school?

A I think it's a mix. Obviously since we are a private, Catholic high school we have stricter policies in general than public schools with regard to dress code or student misconduct. But I would characterize Mercy as progressive, liberal, and evening cutting edge in terms of our one-to-one computer tablet initiative and all the outstanding programs we have here.

Since I'm a football fan I regret that we can't provide coverage for that as a school sport. But we have every other sport you can imagine. And it's great to work in an environment where girls gain more confidence and usually excel in the absence of boys. Another benefit is that we produce Newsprint as an actual advanced journalism class, which cuts down on the amount of time we have to put in after school.

Q Do you have a favorite textbook or resource that you couldn't do your job without?

A I've used a lot of lesson plans from hsj.org and although no textbook is ideal because journalism and technology is evolving so rapidly, I like Who, What, Where, Why and How by James Glen Stovall.

Mostly I just make an effort to keep up with the news in order to use lots of real world examples to show students examples of good or bad writing, biased reporting, challenges to the First Amendment, etc. Our free subscription to the e-edition of the Detroit Free Press comes in real handy for this. And I've created a blog called



"Waldsmith's Dispatch" for my journalism students that I update with weekly postings where I pose questions, or showcase articles or video clips to reinforce things we've discussed in class. (See mhsnijournalism.blogspot.com)

Q What is one bit of advice you would want to give to aspiring journalism teachers?

A Give and take. You need to teach students everything you can about how to approach and write a story. But once you've put them through "boot camp", so to speak, you have to step back and let them shine (or sometimes fail) on their own. Give them the knowledge and the tools they need, but then don't micro-manage. Then it's time to learn from them.

Q What is your favorite part of teaching publications?

A Seeing them smile when everyone is reading the new issue. Seeing the tremendous pride they take in their work -- knowing their hard work and best effort has paid off.

Q You usually send quite a large group of students to

MIPA's summer workshop? Why do you view the workshop as important for your students and what do you feel they bring back to your program?

A Since journalism is only a one-semester course at Mercy, I have to devote the vast majority of time to teaching students the basic fundamentals of journalism -- in other words, writing journalistically. I simply don't have much time to focus on the basics of design. So I highly encourage those new to the staff (reporters) to take the InDesign course at MIPA while I also encourage my seniors (editors) to take the course that's the best fit with their job description. Those who attend come back incredibly motivated, which inspires other students to go.

Q What is your proudest moment as a teacher?

A Probably graduation. Of course it's great to win awards or to see how proud students are of their finished product. But at graduation it always hits me how some of those kids up on the stage couldn't even write a headline just a few years ago and now they're young adults who can write and think critically like journalists do.

QUESTIONS BY
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