

Study finds high school media lacking in diversity, online presence

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(Phys.org)—The American media landscape is rapidly changing but still has a strong presence in high schools across the nation, according to research from the University of Kansas. However, the schools that don't have their own media are largely poor and have high minority populations, often depriving the students of a vital educational opportunity.

Peter Bobkowski, assistant professor of journalism at KU, surveyed more than 1,000 high schools in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The findings, which show that 96 percent of schools provide some opportunity to participate in student media, were published in the *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* [journal](#). Mark Goodman and Candace Perkins Bowen, journalism professors at Kent State University, were co-authors.

While the Internet has steadily become a larger part of media over the past decade-plus, the survey found that only 33 percent of schools have an online media component. That low figure is likely attributed to a number of factors, but the researchers argue it is doing a disservice to students.

"Given that this is the 'always connected generation,' these students grew up with the Internet," Bobkowski said. "Our conclusion is not enough schools are providing students opportunities to learn about responsibly producing online media."

The lack of online media may be due to lack of teachers with knowledge of the subject, a lack of resources, school administrators reluctant to give students the opportunity to use a medium that can be more controversial and reach a wider audience, or a number of other factors. Regardless of the reason, online media is the reality of today's journalism and by not having access to creating it in schools, students are not receiving a full journalistic education.

Researchers hope to extend the study to find out why schools are not adopting online media.

"I think the next step is to find out what the barriers are," Bobkowski said. "I'd like to see what the rate of increase is from one year to the next. A followup study will let us assess that."

Online components may be small, but print newspapers are still strongly represented in American high schools. Newspapers are present in 64 percent of American high schools, and there are more student papers than commercial daily and weekly newspapers combined.

There are still a large number of schools with newspapers or some form of media, but the survey found those that don't provide student media are generally poorer, smaller or have a large minority population. Schools that reported having no student media had an average of 54 percent of students who qualified for free or reduced price lunch, compared to 41 percent in schools that do. The average school without student media had a 56 percent minority population compared to 35 percent of schools with media.

While newspapers are well-represented among high school media, the yearbook is still king. Among schools with some form of student media, 94 percent reported having a yearbook, while 64 percent had newspapers, 29 percent had TV programs and 3 percent had radio. The

finding is not surprising, Bobkowski said, as yearbook companies have paid representatives who service schools while the other media do not.

The significance of student media, the researchers argue, is the educational opportunity it provides for all students, not just those who plan to major in journalism in college. They were encouraged to find that 86 percent of high [school](#) newspapers were produced in relationship to a class, not just as an extracurricular activity, while TV programs and yearbooks reported 83 and 80 percent in the same category, respectively. Research has shown that student journalists are more engaged in current events and perform better in core subjects than [students](#) with no media or journalism background or education.

"Journalism education addresses a lot of the core standards," Bobkowski said. "Critical thinking, information gathering, writing and use of technology are taught in an applied way."

Provided by University of Kansas

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