Supervising the Campus Media: U.S. Survey Finds Varied Approaches, Little Administration Interference

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ABSTRACT

Media Advisory Boards have been created by many colleges to mediate communication between administration and student media organizations. This national survey provided rich baseline data on how these boards are distributed across the United States, what kinds of schools are more likely to adopt media boards, and to whom these boards report. The study examined several neglected issues raised by the literature, such as the primary functions of Media Boards, the magnitude of the boards' sanctioning power, administrative influence on the boards, adviser satisfaction with board performance, and means of assessment. The results can inform administrators as to the variables that both describe and predict board effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

In contrast to most traditional media systems that depend largely on advertising revenue, the college student media ecosystem is a peculiar one. The stage for student voices is often funded, in part, by school administrations. If administrators take issue with news stories written by either impulsive or investigative student journalists, the reporters at public universities in the United States are able to advocate for their First Amendment rights and defend their work. Private school counterparts, however, enjoy far less free speech protection, even though arguments have been made to extend such rights to privately owned institutions (Lisosky, 2010).

Media Advisory Boards, sometimes called Publication Boards, have been increasingly popular across higher education institutions since the 1990s (Henderson, 2004) as a way to strike a balance between respecting the rights of the Fourth Estate and the need of colleges to protect their public images. These boards are typically comprised of student journalists, administrators, advisers to the student media, faculty members, students at large, and working journalism professionals. They can offer a variety of advice to the student press and function as a buffer between administration and student media (Click, 1993).

Despite an abundance of literature centering on the legal rights of college media rights in general, few studies have focused on Media Advisory Boards. They are a key mechanism in the ecosystem and a sometime peacemaker. They can help facilitate communication between student journalists and administration, provide oversight, and minimize confrontations that find their way to media outlets other than the school's own. Empirical research on Media Advisory Boards is even scarcer.

This study focuses on several issues revolving around the existence and operation of Media Advisory Boards. First, it provides a panoramic view of Media Boards across U.S. colleges. How often do media boards exist? What characteristics of a school help explain Media Board adoption? Second, we describe board characteristics, such as board longevity, composition, and organizational structure. Third, we explore into some of the key functions and responsibilities of Media Boards. Fourth, this study examines assessment measures used by boards nationwide, including self-evaluation and satisfaction rating.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It would be difficult to understand fully the various issues of Media Advisory Boards without looking at the college press context. Friction often arises when there is a disagreement between student journalists and the admin-

istration regarding the role student media should play. To the student journalist, a campus publication largely mirrors publications outside the Ivory Tower, only on a smaller scale. Student work for their own news organizations not only to learn skills required for future journalism jobs, but more importantly to experience core journalistic values such as advocating for justice and providing a voice for the underprivileged (Brandon, 2001). Administrators may or may not agree with these perceptions. When the president of Flagler College prioritized his student newspaper's mission as "to promote the image and reputation of the institution" in 2007 (Perhach, 2007), his position attested Mencher's (1965) warning issued more than forty years earlier that administration might regard the student press more of a "public relations arm" than a "laboratory of life" (p. 216).

School authorities tend to react immediately to "problematic" student media content, and student journalists often fight back by accusing administrators of First Amendment violations. Nonetheless, it does not take long for administrations to realize that such contention can be costly. Even though most of these battles do not end up in courts, wrestling with the student press often leads to unflattering publicity of the administration, especially when students have become increasingly more experienced in resorting to local and national media outlets to seek support. The Student Press Law Center, one of the major watchdogs for student free speech rights, regularly reports possible First Amendment infringements across universities and colleges nationwide (Student Press Law Center, 2009a). Additionally, traditional and social media have been showing growing interest in monitoring college media censorship in recent years (Creeley, 2012; Reimold, 2010).

Despite these advantages that college media enjoy, they sometimes are reluctant to fight the battle. Various forms of punishment can be imposed by administrators against a student publication or its staff, including defunding a publication (Student Press Law Center, 2001), terminating an office lease (Student Press Law Center, 2003b), charging a publication with violations of a student conduct code (Student Press Law Center, 2009b), and even threatening a student's graduation (Student Press Law Center, 2010a). Moreover, students often fear that while they may be winning a battle, they are losing the war in the long run. For example, Ocean County College settled a First Amendment lawsuit brought by three student journalists involved in investigative stories on the administrative corruption in 2005. They claimed a First Amendment rights violation and called for the college to reinstate an adviser. A settlement was reached promising the reinstatement and a more defined publication oversight. However, the adviser was later fired again, and a clearly structured

oversight remained largely absent (Student Press Law Center, 2010b).

Media Boards are often proposed during contentious times either by student media who feel the urge to find a third-part channel to initiate conversations with school administrators before the situation escalates into theatricality, or by administrators who want to use an advisory board to oversee college media without directly clashing with news staff. The lack of a mediating mechanism usually fails to offer a channel for mutually respecting dialogues. For example, students protested when officials at Flagler College in Florida changed quotes and edited content of an article. The conflict could have been avoided, according to the student media advisor, if there had been an advisory board to help mediate conflicts and disputes (Perhach, 2007).

Issues revolving around Media Boards typically stem from various kinds of administrative control over student media. Administrative and legal structures determine the degree of such control, ranging from direct control (Bert, 1952) and semi-autonomous, to completely independent (Duscha & Fischer, 1973).

William Click's (1993) book *Governing College Student Publications* has one of the most in-depth discussions on Media Boards. The chapter in his book devoted to Media Boards, however, stemmed more from experience-based reflection than empirical investigation. He described commonly practiced responsibilities and authority of a board, typical board size, selection, and composition. For instance, he suggested a "laymen vs. experts" approach to construct a board by balancing expert members "with training and expertise in journalism, law and business" and lay members "who represent leaders in general and who may be uninformed" about journalism and publishing businesses (p. 18). Benigni, Ferguson, and McGee (2011) also commented on board composition and strongly recommended using local experts and journalism professionals in all advisory boards in communication programs.

Other research findings on Media Boards seem to be scattered across broader academic studies. Kopenhaver (2009) surveyed college media advisors and found that 22.7 per cent of the schools had a Media Advisory Board as the legal "publisher." The Media Board was the publisher at 34.5 per cent at four-year public schools and 12.1 per cent at four-year private schools. The study also discovered that most student media reported to Student Affairs or an academic department, and none of them reported to a Media Board. Advisers were less likely to be involved in

Media Boards with only 13.3 per cent of full time advisers "responsible to a publication/media board or its chair, a decrease from 21.4 per cent in 2005" (p. 25). A more recent study of media boards, taken from this same dataset and designed for an audience of college media advisers, emphasized high levels of satisfaction among the advisers as to how the boards operated (Xie & Simon, 2012).

Depending on the magnitude of control, Media Boards, albeit well-intended, may be received in starkly different ways by campus actors. One interest group may fear a board will turn into a manipulative tool used by an opposing group in covert ways. For example, five top editors and the faculty advisor at Utica College in New York resigned when school officials proposed forming an oversight board. The resigned staff members worried that an advisory board of any sort might undermine editorial authority, control content illegally, and become detrimental to the students in general (Student Press Law Center, 2003c).

Disputes on Media Boards mainly hinged on three board characteristics: function, administrative presence, and sanctioning power. Disagreements exist in regard to what functions a Media Board should carry and what purposes it should serve. When the University of Nevada, Las Vegas attempted to remove the authority of Editor-in-Chief selection from the Media Board and instead transfer it to the student government, both faculty and the news staff protested, arguing that the change would simply turn the student newspaper into a student government newspaper. An agreement was later reached between the student government and the newspaper to return the authority to the advisory board (Student Press Law Center, 2012).

Another kind of controversy has to do with the level of administrative presence on the board. Editors at Boston College in Massachusetts called the proposal to form a Media Board including at least one administrator an attempt to limit the newspaper's independence (Student Press Law Center, 2003b). In a lawsuit settlement between the University of Northern Colorado and its student newspaper, the administration gave up its authority to appoint members of the publication board (Student Press Law Center, 2004).

Finally, there have been frequent complaints about the role that Media Boards play in sanctioning students for perceived malfeasance. Many Media Boards can vote to remove editors based on the inappropriateness of the content published (Student Press Law Center, 2003a). The former executive editor of The Carolinian, a student newspaper of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, said that the advisory board made him sign a contract stating that he would be accountable for (1) advertising revenue and business practices, (2) preparation for a budget for the fiscal year and (3) meeting as often as

necessary with the adviser, who was appointed by the Office of Student Life. Considering the heavy burden on the editor and considerable sanctioning power accompanying these requirements, the newspaper staff decided to stop printing The Carolinian halfway through the fall 2002 semester until a new media board was established that the newspaper could trust (Student Press Law Center, 2003a).

Studies have examined various aspects of Media Advisory Boards and Advisory Boards in journalism programs over the years, although very few focused exclusively on media boards. In a 2004 study, Henderson surveyed 61 Journalism and Mass Communication programs with current or former departmental advisory boards. She found interest in academic advisory boards in general had "recently experienced something of a resurgence" (p. 60) with more than half of the respondent acknowledging the growing popularity of advisory boards in journalism programs. She included a list of areas where boards have interacted with students, and one area was "student newspaper procedures" (Henderson, 2004).

In sum, we found several weaknesses in the literature that call for a more systemic investigation on Media Boards. First, research findings were too often too scattered to provide a comprehensive view of Media Boards across the United States. Second, most of the empirical research results were more descriptive than inferential and therefore could hardly be connected holistically to other variables in the college media environment. Third, even though researchers started to study the presence of Media Boards as early as the late 1980s (Kopenhaver & Spielberger, 1989), investigation on how well or poorly media boards are actually operating has been largely missing.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the lack of previous research on media advisory boards, this study first aims to provide baseline information on the boards to give the reader a sense of where they exist and how they vary.

RQ1: How do school characteristics, such as geographic location, enrollment size, public or private status, and two-year or four-year enrollment, relate to the existence of media boards in schools?

We then investigated a series of research questions, arising from the literature, regarding three major board characters: function, administrative presence, and sanctioning power. RQ2 to RQ4 tap into each of the three areas.

RQ2: What are the most common functions of Media Advisory Boards?

RQ3: What are the types of sanctioning power that Media Advisory Boards have?

RQ4: What is the perceived influence of the school administration on the operation of Media Advisory Boards?

As reviewed earlier, administrative influence has been central to most media board related disputes. To better understand this crucial dimension of issue, we looked at factors that may contribute to perceived administrative influence in a structural way. Potential factors, according to the literature, came from three levels—institutional, organizational, and individual. Institutional factors, such as private vs. public schools, relates to the discrepancies of free speech rights between public and private institutions (Lisosky, 2010). Administration presence on media boards—an organizational factor—seemed to be a frequent cause of friction (Student Press Law Center, 2002, 2003c, 2004). Because this study measured administrative influence via advisers' perceptions, we also wanted to find out how individual parameters, namely advisors' demographics, helped predict perceived administrative influence.

RQ5: How do school types (public vs. private, two-year vs. four-year), administration presence, and advisers' demographic characteristics help to explain an adviser's perception of administrative influence on media boards?

Given student complaints on some individual campuses about media advisory boards being heavy handed, the survey examined the level of satisfaction with the way the boards handled eight issues, most of which had the potential for being divisive. Most statements were cast in a positive frame and asked advisers to judge their own boards against an ideal situation, from a journalism point of view.

RQ6: Is there general satisfaction with board performance?

The final area of inquiry measured board effectiveness. In this time of increased importance placed on assessment of student learning outcomes (Avery, 2003; Posner, 2011) and moving from a stress on teaching to a stress on learning (Means, 2010), how does a school determine whether a board is effective?

RQ7. What means of assessment, if any, does the advisory board currently utilize?

RQ8. How effective is the current method of assessment?

METHOD

Participants

The study focused on U.S. colleges where an employee was affiliated with College Media Advisers; CMA, recently renamed College Media Association, is the primary trade group for university and college media advisers. It includes print, broadcast, web, and yearbook advisers. An initial CMA mailing list of 641 members in Spring 2011 was pared to eliminate entries with missing or false e-mail addresses and duplicates. A working population of 621 CMA members became the population of the study.

Survey

Advisers were sent an online invitation to participate in a survey anonymously. Those who did not respond within three weeks received a reminder e-mail. Only one response per school was included. Six schools reported the existence of a second Media Advisory Board; data on the second board were not included due to the small n. Eleven responses were discarded because they failed to answer a majority of questions or their responses defied face validity.

The final sample included 157 completed responses out of 621 requests, yielding a response rate of 25.3 per cent. The validity of a sample can be demonstrated, in part, by how well the sample characteristics mirror the parameters of the population being studied. There was a strong match on two key variables. About 68 per cent of the CMA population worked at public colleges and universities, compared to 66 per cent of the survey's final sample. Eighty-one per cent of the CMA population worked at a four-year school, compared to 84 per cent of the survey respondents. Researchers expected the type of school (public vs. private, four-year vs. two-year) would help explain some of the variance in issues, such as whether a school had a Media Advisory Board.

A substantial percentage of respondents (62 of 157, or 39.5 per cent) reported that they did not have a Media Advisory Board at their school, allowing the researchers to compare the characteristics of schools with a board (95, or 60.5 per cent) and those without one. As we later note in limitations, relying solely on advisers for information does provide insight from someone engaged in the process, but it may not necessarily reflect the way others associated with the board feel about an issue.

The method produced a cross-section of boards that varied in many organizational characteristics:

- The average (median) board had been in existence for 25 years. Seventeen percent of schools with boards reported they have been in existence for five years or less.

- Seventy-fix percent reported operating under a set of bylaws; 68 per cent recorded minutes at meetings.

- The most common model was an advisory board that focused on the school newspaper and, in some cases, various other print activities (which could include the yearbook, a general interest magazine, and/or a literary magazine). A majority of the respondents (48 of the 97 schools, or 52 per cent), said they used this approach; 29 of the 48 focused solely on the campus newspaper. In contrast, a second model focused on a combined board for both broadcast and print activities; 39 schools, or 42 per cent, used this approach. Six schools reported using separate boards for individual student media activities. (They are reported separately here, but also could be listed under both print and broadcast.) Four schools reported a board dealing with just broadcast media.

- The size of media boards varied considerably, ranging from 3 to 43 members, with an average (median) size of 12 members. Student journalists (20 per cent) and faculty (20 per cent) were most heavily represented, followed by representatives of the student body (19 per cent). In contrast, administrators (11 per cent) and student government (6 per cent) representatives were much less visible in board composition. Given the average board has 12 members, a typical board might have two to three members who are student journalists, two additional students, one to two administrators, one to two formal advisers, two (additional) faculty members, one media professional, and another, varied member, such as a student government representative.

Only 51 schools with boards responded to a question about where the board was housed in the school's organization chart. The locations varied widely. One third of the boards (33.3 per cent) were described as wholly independent and not directly affiliated with any specific part of the university. In contrast, 17.6 per cent were housed in Student Affairs or in a mixture of settings including Student Affairs, and 13.7 per cent were directly affiliated with a specific department or other academic unit. For the final 35.3 per cent, a wide variety of other locations were mentioned, including through presidential appointment, through the faculty senate or a university committee, or reporting to the chancellor or Board of Regents.

RESULTS

RQ1 looked at a number of school characteristics, such as geographic location, two-year vs. four-year status, public vs. private, enrollment size, and aimed to find out which characteristics helped explain whether or not a school chose to have a media board.

The media advisory boards were not distributed evenly across geographic regions. Nearly three quarters (73.2 per cent) of schools surveyed in the South had a board, and they also existed at 61.8 per cent of Midwest schools surveyed. In contrast, only 46.2 per cent of school in the Northeast and 40.0 per cent of those in the West reported having such a board (U.S. Census regions were used to group states). The regional differences were significant (χ^2 = 9.56, df = 3, p = .02; Cramer's V = .25).

The type of school (two-year vs. four-year) also correlated significantly with the existence of a media board. About one-third of the two-year schools (34.6 per cent) reported having a board, versus almost two thirds (65.6 per cent) of the four-year institutions (χ^2 = 8.74, df = 1, p = .00; Cramer's V = .24).

Enrollment size was not a good predictor; the presence of the board was similarly distributed across small, medium, and large institutions. Public colleges were no more likely to embrace or reject media boards than their private counterparts.

In an attempt to answer RQ2, 11 administrative roles of media advisory boards were identified from the literature, including "select student media leaders," "serve as a bridge with administrators," and "offer post-publication critiques." The respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 (not important at all) to 5 (extremely important) the importance they assign to each function (Table 1).

Selecting the Editor-in-Chief, Station Manager or other top position received a mean score of 4.22, the highest score of the 11 variables used. Also receiving high scores were "Serve as a neutral sounding board if content is challenged" (mean = 3.11) and "Defend student media if content is challenged" (3.09). The lowest ranked functions were "preview content before release" (1.85); "select other staff leaders" (1.99); and "integrate the journalism curriculum" (2.00).

The advisers seem to see the board's role in broad terms rather than micromanaging the content or selecting of all staff leaders. Support for a "neutral sounding board" sug-

TABLE 1 PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF 11 COLLEGE MEDIA ADVISORY BOARD FUNCTIONS		
Funtion	Mean	SD
Select Editor-in-Chief/ Station Manager or other top position	4.22	1.38
Serve as a neutral sounding board if content is challenged	3.11	1.40
Defend student media if content is challenged	3.09	1.38
Serve as a bridge between the student media and administration	2.94	1.40
Give suggestions to improve workflow and production	2.36	1.25
Supervise the adviser	2.27	1.33
Provide ideas for media content	2.12	1.13
Critique content after release	2.08	1.16
Integrate the journalism curriculum	2.00	1.04
Select other staff leaders	1.99	1.18
Preview content before release	1.85	1.01

Note:
n=95. Responses were based the question: "How would you describe the current functions of the advisory board?" and ranged from 1 "not important at all" to 5 "extremely important." Results rank ordered by mean.

TABLE 2 ULTIMATE SANCTION A BOARD COULD TAKE AGAINST A STUDENT MEDIA LEADER FOR MALFEASANCE	
Dismissal	60.0%
Recommended dismissal	22.1%
Publicize its unhappiness with student	6.3%
None; no ultimate sanction	6.3%
Other	5.0%
Total	99.7%

Note. n = 95. Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

To tap a related dimension, we asked respondents how they would "rate the influence of the administration on the board's operation" (Table 3). Again, while the literature includes scattered yet highly publicized complaints about administrative influence on boards, the results suggest such influence would be the exception rather than the rule. While 8 per cent of advisers said the administration was influential or very influential, 31 per cent said it was somewhat influential and 61 per cent said it was not influential at all. Given that boards usually include administration members and that they are often set up to serve as a buffer, the results might suggest administrators do not feel the need to exercise additional influence.

TABLE 3 PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION ON OPERATION OF MEDIA ADVISORY BOARD	
Very influential	4.0%
Influential	4.0%
Somewhat Influential	31.0%
Not influential at all	61.0%
Total	100.0%

Note:
n = 95. Responses were based on the question "How would you rate the influence of the administration on the board's operation?"

gests the board is there in case friction occurs between the student media outlet and the administration or any other external critic. The national norm as adviser –to maximize the educational value of campus media and avoid pre-publication censorship (College Media Advisers, n.d.) –is reflected in the low importance accorded to "preview content before release."

A consistent theme in the research findings here is that the boards govern with a light touch. But many have the ability to play a larger role in the management of the campus news organization if they wished to do so. For RQ3, we asked what the ultimate sanction was that a board could take against a student media leader for malfeasance (Table 2).

Some 57 of the 95 respondents, or 60 per cent, said the board could dismiss the student outright from his or her campus media duties. Another 22.1 per cent said the board could recommend dismissal, while 6.3 per cent said the ultimate sanction was to publicize its unhappiness with the student. Some 6.3 per cent said their board had no ultimate sanction, while 5 per cent offered other, varied responses.

RQ5 focused on predictive factors at institutional, organizational, and individual levels that explain the variability in perceived administrative influence. A multiple regression, $R^2 = .27$, $F(8, 79) = 3.73$, $p = .00$, showed a greater administrative presence on media boards ($\beta = .40$, $p = .000$) and, oddly, adviser's gender ($\beta = -.21$, $p = .046$) significantly predicted perceived administrative influence. Heavier administrative presence was significantly correlated to higher administrative influence, and male ad-

visers tended to perceive higher administrative influence than did female advisers (Table 4). Institutional variables such as public vs. private status, however, were not statistically associated with administrative influence.

RQ6 focuses on whether there is general satisfaction with board performance regarding eight issues taken from the literature, most of which had the potential for being divisive. Most statements asked advisers to judge their own board against an ideal situation from a journalism point of view. Answers ranged from a high of 5 (strongly agree with the statement) to a low of 1 (strongly disagree).

While advisers on individual campuses have complained about media advisory boards being heavy handed, here the boards generally received high marks. The strongest agreement came with a question on whether the board "understands that some student errors are part of the learning process," consistent with the overall goal of a college or university (mean = 4.16; 5 = "strongly agree"). The advisers also were more likely to agree with such statements as they were "generally satisfied with the board" (3.79), appreciate the watchdog role that a student media organization can assume (3.77), and felt the board was effective in its oversight role (3.75)

In contrast, there was little agreement with the statement, "The board would prefer the student organization to be more of a positive, public relations tool for the school." The question received the lowest mean score (1.92) of the eight indicators measured.

The final area of inquiry focused on measuring board effectiveness. Given the growing desire in academe to establish a formal means to measure success, in RQ7 we also asked schools how they assessed board performance. Assessment can take many forms, and it often calls for comparing performance against set criteria. (e.g., using a rubric, and/or establishing student learning outcomes at the start of the semester, then measuring how well students did in meeting the desired outcomes). We hoped the survey would generate a variety of approaches that could be used by other schools.

More than a quarter of the schools – 24 of 95, or 25.3 per cent – reported no form of assessment. The others reported a wide variety of ways of gauging a board's effectiveness, many of which would not meet the common criteria for academic assessment. The most popular answer referenced reliance on regular reports, meetings or interviews (nine responses, or 9 per cent). Other techniques included casual observation and general awareness of the media organization (six responses, or 6 per cent), formal evaluation of staff (three mentions, or 3 per cent), and informal discussion of media content at a board meeting (also three mentions, 3 per cent). Three schools said academic officials other than the board assess board performance.

Only four of the 95 schools described a process that might be able to pass muster as a means of assessment, broadly cast, and possibly serve as a model for other schools. The advantage of each approach is listed at the end of the bullet.

- The Faculty Advisers submit reports directly to the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, a Board member. The advisers, in consultation with the student editor, identified goals for the publication at the beginning of the year and submitted an assessment of how well the goals were met at the end of the year. The Board, itself, is not assessed except as it functions as a subcommittee of the Fac-

TABLE 4 SUMMARY OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR PERCEIVED ADMINISTRATIVE INFLUENCE				
Predictor	**B**	**β**	**t**	**Sig. (p)**
Public vs. Private	.10	.06	.54	.590
Two vs. Four Year	.07	.03	.26	.793
Administrative Presence	2.29	.40	3.84	.000**
Gender	-.36	-.21	-2.02	.046*
Age	.01	.18	1.44	.154
Education	.14	.11	1.09	.278
Media Experience	-.01	-.07	-.63	.529
Advising Experience	-.01	-.07	-.66	.510
Note: *p < .05; **p <.01.				

TABLE 5 SATISFACTION WITH EIGHT MEDIA ADVISORY BOARD FUNCTIONS		
Functions	**Mean**	**SD**
The board understands that some student errors are part of the learning process.	4.16	0.93
As an adviser, I am generally satisfied with the advisory board.	3.79	1.09
The board appreciates the watchdog role that a student media organization can assume.	3.77	1.13
On balance, the board has had a positive impact on the student organization.	3.75	1.12
The board is effective in its role of overseeing the student organization.	3.51	1.19
The board can supply some continuity at times when the quality of the student organization dips due to graduation or other reasons.	2.62	1.29
I would recommend changes to the board's operation.	2.42	1.38
The board would prefer the student organization to be more of a positive, public relations tool for the school.	1.92	1.10

Note:
n = 95. Responses ranged from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree), based on the question "Do you agree/disagree with the following statements?" Results rank ordered by mean.

ulty Senate. (Use of desired outcomes, established at start of year and then analyzed at the end)

- Readership and online usage surveys, response from students and community, advertising revenues and job placement. (Multi-method, including reliance on customer surveys)

- The board uses a rubric to grade the quality of the student newspaper. (A rubric usually consists of multiple indicators established ahead of time; each can be rated from high to low.)

- Spring and fall assessment of each of the six top student media leaders using an established form. (Again, standards established ahead of time and then applied in analyzing performance – in this case the media leaders instead of the board itself.)

Based on the form of assessment used (or not used), all advisers were asked to rate the perceived effectiveness of the method (Table 6). One quarter of schools (25.3 per cent) said there was no assessment conducted of board performance. Another 11.6 per cent described their assessment effort as not at all effective. Of the remainder, 28.4 per cent of assessment efforts were described as somewhat effective, 25.3 per cent were described as effective, and 9.5 per cent (9 of the 91 examined) were rated as extremely effective.

DISCUSSION

U.S. college administrators use a variety of methods to supervise and manage student activities on campus. One of the most difficult areas to manage is college media outlets such as a campus newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations. There is a long

tradition of independence associated with these endeavors. Administrators also may find any decision, recommendation or even casual comment turned into a news story as student editors use their media outlet to push back against any issue with which they disagree.

This study details how many schools use a Publication Board or a Media Advisory Board as a buffer between student editors and the administrators who often help fund the media organization. The boards vary widely in their duties. Some select an Editor-in-Chief or station manager. Some preview content before release; others critique content after release. Some supervise any faculty adviser; others work to integrate the media organization into the journalism or mass communication curriculum.

Beyond their responsibility, the boards can vary widely in their focus (a single media operation vs. both the campus newspaper and TV station); their composition; and where they are housed at the college or university.

TABLE 6 EFFECTIVENESS OF ASSESSMENT METHOD USED BY MEDIA ADVISORY BOARD	
Extremely effective	9.5%
Effective	25.3%
Somewhat effective	28.4%
Not at all effective	11.6%
No assessment; not present	25.3%
TOTAL	100.1%

Note:
n = 95. Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

This exploratory study, based on a survey of advisers to college media organizations, is part of the first formal national examination of the boards and therefore is designed to provide baseline data and explore implications for student affairs and higher education. Earlier, we highlighted what we saw as several weaknesses in the literature that, taken together, called for a more systemic investigation on Media Boards. We believe we have addressed those shortcomings in this paper. Using a representative national sample, we offer a systematic look at board functions, administrative influence, and sanctions to replace the often scattered findings in earlier work. We offer inferential results, rather than just descriptive results, in several areas to help look at multiple variables in a holistic manner. Finally, we offer judgments (albeit from a single perspective, that of the college media adviser) as to whether the boards have functioned effectively. In meeting these needs, we have generated strong baseline data that can serve as the basis for continuing work in this area.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

We are struck that the Media Advisory Boards generally live up to the promise, stated in the second word in the three-word title. They advise, rather than mandate or take a heavy handed approach to managing the campus media. Obviously the most common function is to play a role in selecting the Editor-in-Chief or station manager of the student organization. But beyond that, they seem more satisfied in serving as a third party, a buffer, and a neutral place where complaints can be heard and discussed. Previewing content before release was seen as the least important function of the 11 mentioned. In adopting this approach, the boards are consistent with the CMA Code of Ethics:

> Student media must be free from all forms of external interference designed to regulate its content, including confiscation of its products or broadcasts; suspension of publication or transmission; academic personal or budgetary sanctions; arbitrary removal of staff members or faculty; or threats to the existence of student publications or broadcast outlets. (College Media Advisers, n.d.)

Contrary to what literature has suggested, we were surprised that there were not more complaints by the respondents, the college media advisers, about administrative interference with the board or with student media operations. The boards have the ability to dismiss (60 per cent) or recommend dismissal (another 22.1 per cent) of a student media leader for malfeasance. Yet only 8 per cent of respondents reported the administration was influential or very influential on board operations; in contrast, 61 per cent said the administration was not influential at all. Greater administration influence was not significantly correlated with such variables as public vs. private school status,

two-year vs. four-year programs, or adviser characteristics such as age, education, media experience or adviser experience. Only the size of the administrative presence on the board and whether the adviser was a male seemed to play a role.

These results do not minimize the highly publicized cases of individual college and university administrators imposing their will on campus media boards and student operations. But these appear to be exceptions, however unfortunate, rather than the norm. Instead, there was widespread satisfaction among advisers with many of the board functions and norms, such as understanding student errors are a part of the process and the student media's potential role as a watchdog.

In designing the survey instrument in Spring 2011, we included some questions on assessment because of pressures on campuses, including our own, for college leaders to do a better job of trying to measuring what students actually learn. The results here suggest the media boards, like many other components of colleges and universities, have a long way to go in fully understanding what is meant by assessment and using it effectively. We were generous in even highlighting four of 95 schools that had some semblance of an assessment protocol in place. We imagine that percentage will grow in the coming years, as it will at all parts of academe.

The experience of the two authors with a new Media Advisory Board at their own school is consistent with many of these findings. One author sought to block creation of a board for 15 years, fearing it would be used by administrators in a heavy handed manner. After an off-color opinion column offended some newspaper readers and sparked a campus protest, a board was formed (Student Press Law Center, 2009). The other author succeeded the first as campus newspaper adviser and a member of the board, and no examples of administrative overreach have been seen in the first two years.

LIMITATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The results are limited by the single perspective captured by our survey: that of advisers to campus media. Additional work needs to be done to capture the views of the many other stakeholders: student media leaders, administrators, and perhaps the student media audience. Researcher may also be interested in adding other comparative dimensions to better understand how and why various stakeholders react to administrative interference and media boards in different ways. For example, do reporters and advisers in schools with media boards and those without perceive administrative influence differently? Would a content analysis reveal apparent administration influence, despite adviser disclaimers?

CONCLUSION

College Media Advisory Boards can play a prominent role on campuses, especially when a media organization finds itself engaged in a controversy over its handling of news, its ethics, organization or budget. We believe the baseline results can be useful to schools considering creation of such a board, to various constituencies – student editors, journalism faculty, and administrators – involved with the student press, and to schools assessing the operations of their current board.

We also believe that this study has opened the door to many other follow-up inquiries that invite future research. If media boards work well in many schools, why are not other schools adopting the practice? Are schools without boards seen as Utopias that need no neutral sounding board? Has a less-than-happy administration-media relationship complicated efforts to form such a board? Given this study stemmed from the perspective of media advisers, how are the boards viewed by other stake holders? We hope see concerted efforts to investigate the issue in years to come.

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