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MDST 3680
Paper #1

The original prompt for this assignment is included on pages 13-18 of this document.

United States democracy has atrophied in tandem with local journalism because a

loss of robust community newspapers leaves the American citizenry ill-informed

to support self governance. Local newspapers now struggle to compete with

digital giants like Facebook and Google to garner online advertising revenue[1].

Funding for investigative journalism dries up as revenue does, and substantive

reporting is neglected in favor of filler content. Many citizens are turning to

partisan outlets as local newsrooms die out. A lack of verified reporting combines

with this onslaught of misinformation to cause hikes in party-line voting[2].

American citizens are left not only uninformed, but misinformed, without

[1] Barthel, Michael. "5 Key Takeaways about the State of the News Media in 2018." *Pew Research Center*, 23 July 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/23/key-takeaways-state-of-the-news-media-2018.

[2] Hitt, Matthew P. "When Newspapers Close, Voters Become More Partisan." *SOURCE*, ColoradoState University, 11 Feb. 2019, source.colostate.edu/when-newspapers-close-voters-become-more-partisan/.

local reporting to depend on. An informed public is at the crux of American government — the marked downturn in reliable local newspapers thus creates an out-of-the-loop public that endangers democracy.

The Internet era's emphasis on digital advertising has made newspapers disguise advertisements as news stories to sustain revenue. Website homepages are adjusted according to tracking software like Chartbeat to "promote and de-promote homepage content on a minute-by-minute basis, based on what is performing and underperforming"[3]. The shaping of stories around online advertising income does not mean that local newspapers are successfully navigating the digital landscape, though. Most people do not want to pay for news they consume online[4]. This can be attributed in part to the growing popularity of news aggregation on apps like Facebook, from which 43% of Americans receive news for free[5]. Reader unwillingness to pay necessitates that local newspapers allocate more homepage space to native advertisements. For instance, the March 4th, 2020 homepage of *The*

[3] Clarkson, Andrew. "Collapse of Legacy Newspapers, 2.0." The News Media, 15 Feb. 2021, University of Virginia. Lecture.

[4] Faulconbridge, Guy. "The Media Has a Big Problem, Reuters Institute Says: Who Will Pay for the News?" *U.S.*, 12 June 2019, www.reuters.com/article/us-global-media/the-media-has-a-big-problem-reuters-institute-says-who-will-pay-for-the-news-idUSKCN1TC2WV.

[5] Geiger, A. "Key Findings about the Online News Landscape in America." *Pew Research Center*, 11 Sept. 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/11/key-findings-about-the-online-news-landscape-in-america.

Chicago Tribune displayed "How much caffeine is in 10 types of drinks"[6]. The

article is formatted like a *Chicago Tribune* piece on the homepage, but links to a

slideshow sponsored by the company Zest Tea. This native advertising is neither

integral to the public's democratic practice nor of practical interest to community

members.

Newspapers that have survived are being forced by owners to feature "fluff"[7] or

unoriginal content on their homepages at the expense of civically important news.

On March 25th, 2021, *The Culpeper Star-Exponent* published, "Fate of Niko the

dog unclear following latest setback for owners"[8]. This "fluff" story has no impact

on the greater Culpeper community. Instead, it details one dog owner's lawsuit

around the euthanization of their pet, dubbed an "imprisoned pooch". First

published by Charlottesville's *The Daily Progress*, the article is also unoriginal to

The Star-Exponent. The same *Star-Exponent* homepage touts the story, "Police

[6] Karen Johanson, Stacker.com. "How Much Caffeine Is in 10 Types of Drinks." *Chicagotribune.Com*, 2 Mar. 2021, www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/health/health-fitness/sns-stacker-caffeine-levels -health-effects-20210302-ewp3ur73xbf2pooemxdknvzk4a-photogallery.html. [7] Wyatt, Andrew. "Lessons from Coverage in Texas." The News Media, 22 Feb. 2021, University of Virginia. Lecture.
[8] Hammel, Tyler. "Fate of Niko the Dog Unclear Following Latest Setback for Owners." *The Culpeper Star-Exponent*, 25 Mar. 2021, starexponent.com/news/fate-of-niko-the-dog-unclear-following-latest-setback-for-o wners/article_f5b1bdef-9b73-5faf-96c2-13bb2b5e7c34.html#tracking-source=hom

e-top-story-1.

investigating fatal shooting in Dahlgren"[9] which is co-opted from the Fredericksburg *Free Lance Star*. This focus on crime and lifestyle neglects more important reporting on municipal concerns in Culpeper.

Even award-winning newspapers face newsroom layoffs that cause a loss of investigative journalism. In 2017, reporter Eric Eyre of *The Charleston Gazette-Mail* won a Pulitzer Prize for investigative coverage of the West Virginia opioid epidemic[10]. Eyre revealed that the "Big Three" drug wholesalers gained billions of dollars from the influx of opioids into at-risk West Virginian communities. This is critical information to West Virginians, who face opioid overdoses at the highest rate of any U.S. citizens: "41.5 deaths per 100,000 people"[11]. Despite uncovering life-or-death corruption, *The Charleston Gazette-Mail* filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and was acquired by HD Media the

[9] Epps, Keith. "Police Investigating Fatal Shooting in Dahlgren." *The Culpeper Star-Exponent*, 25 Mar. 2021, starexponent.com/news/police-investigating-fatal-shooting-in-dahlgren/article_065 506d6-a303-57f0-acd8-012a81d68043.html#tracking-source=home-the-latest.

[10] "West Virginia Pulitzer-Winning Paper Warns of Layoffs, Sale." *AP NEWS*, Associated Press, 30 Jan. 2018, apnews.com/article/00c1b7057d7a41c1b26ad0d0cd8f3170.

[11] Merino, Rachel. "The Opioid Epidemic in West Virginia." *PubMed*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, June 2019, pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30920991/.

next year[12]. On its March 25th, 2021 homepage, the *Gazette-Mail* lists an article

about West Virginia University football as a "top story" of the day[13]. Local

newsroom layoffs like this — necessitated by declining paper revenue — lead

"fluff" to replace substantive reporting.

A decreasing number of statehouse reporters leaves citizens unaware of

crooked public officials. South Dakota has faced especially high government

corruption in light of statehouse reporting loss. One investor in the state's EB-5

Immigrant Investor Program was accused of mishandling millions of dollars in

exchange for granting Green Cards to foreign parties[14]. Pierre's local *Capital*

Journal did not conduct a watchdog report on the scandal until 2013, after

[12] Marks, Rusty. "Gazette Layoffs Include Newsroom Staff." *WV News*, 27 Mar. 2018, www.wvnews.com/news/wvnews/gazette-layoffs-include-newsroom-staff/article_ecb1d1fd-d5ed-5850-b98d-2283d5e2a6b0.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=user-share&fbclid=IwAR0ARB6t5PvHFGlryIKL73x_E4V6ngn0SmZFsqFnh2s6Z9gCGwW0iqnfma0.

[13] Pritt, Ryan. "WVU Football: Brown Stressing Positional Diversity in Spring Drills." *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, 25 Mar. 2021, www.wvgazettemail.com/sports/wvu/wvu-football-brown-stressing-positional-diversity-in-spring-drills/article_456a29a3-648c-54a9-b207-4148787a86d6.html.

[14] Ellis, Jonathan Argus Leader. "EB-5: Bollen Accused of Improperly Disposing of $1.2M." *Argus Leader*, 1 Apr. 2016, www.argusleader.com/story/news/2016/03/31/ag-files-charges-eb-5-scandal/82477290.

interviews by the FBI began in 2012[15]. South Dakota has received a grade of "F" in

the category of "public access to information" and in eight other categories of

oversight from the Center for Public Integrity (CPI)[16]. Only two journalists in the

state identified as full-time statehouse reporters; one of these works for a

newspaper chain and the other works for the nationally-focused Associated Press[17].

Between 2003 and 2014, the number of full-time statehouse reporters across the

U.S. plummeted 35%[18]. The South Dakotan EB-5 scandal correlates the national

decline of statehouse press with American politicians' misbehavior.

Political stories funded by ideological groups — particularly Republicans —

increasingly populate the Internet and deceive readers. *The New York Times*

revealed that networks of political groups pay writers to publish stories in partisan

newspapers that support their viewpoints. "The sites appear as ordinary local-news

[15] Mercer, Bob. "Funds from Other EB-5 Projects Transferred to Northern Beef." *Capital Journal*, 18 Nov. 2013, www.capjournal.com/news/funds-from-other-eb-5-projects-transferred-to-northern-beef/article_a4310698-501a-11e3-ab01-0019bb2963f4.html.

[16] Tupper, Seth. "South Dakota Gets F Grade in 2015 State Integrity Investigation." *Center for Public Integrity*, 3 July 2019, publicintegrity.org/politics/state-politics/state-integrity-investigation/south-dakota gets-f-grade-in-2015-state-integrity-investigation.

[17] Vock, Daniel. "The New Reality of Statehouse Reporting." *Governing.Com*, 11

July 2014,
www.governing.com/archive/gov-the-new-realities-of-statehouse-press-corps.html.
[18] Jurkowitz, Mark. "5 Key Takeaways from Our Census of Statehouse Reporters."
Pew Research Center, 10 July 2014,
www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/10/5-key-takeaways-from-our-census-of-statehouse-reporters.

outlets" with "simple layouts… much like any local newspaper," but are inundated

with severely skewed political coverage[19]. The *Illinois Valley Times*[20] is one highly

partisan newspaper that presents itself as a trustworthy local news source. *The New

York Times'* analysis found that in September of 2020, The *Illinois Valley Times*

populated its website homepage almost entirely with articles about Republican

Senator Sue Rezin. This repetitive coverage demonstrates a strong Conservative

lean that is barely hinted at in *The Illinois Valley Times's* "About Us" page[21]. This

strategy of deception is tremendously dangerous to a democracy that relies on a

news-literate citizenry.

A growing number of partisan newspapers in America publish content that is more

editorialized than flat-out false, but similarly dampen readers' ability to discern

between the two. Michigan's *Lansing State Journal* identified an influx in 2019 of

almost 40 Michigan news websites that hold a "political bent"[22]. One of these

newspapers, *The Lansing Sun*, asserted its partisan beliefs through a story that

claimed Michigan officials planned to increase road infrastructure spending by

[19] Alba, Davey, and Jack Nicas. "As Local News Dies, a Pay-for-Play Network
Rises in Its Place." *The New York Times*, 20 Oct. 2020,

www.nytimes.com/2020/10/18/technology/timpone-local-news-metric-media.html
. [20] *The Illinois Valley Times*, https://illinoisvalleytimes.com/.
[21] "About Us." *The Illinois Valley Times,* https://illinoisvalleytimes.com/about-us. [22] Thompson, Carol Lansing State Journal. "Dozens of New Websites Appear to Be Michigan Local News Outlets, but with Political Bent." *Lansing State Journal*, 22 Oct. 2019,
eu.lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/local/2019/10/21/lansing-sun-new-sites-michigan-local-news-outlets/3984689002.

$350 million in 2021[23]. Michigan's "crumbling infrastructure" has actually been frequently criticized by residents and is far from "padded" like the article implies. The road repair story by *The Lansing Sun* was disguised as straight-forward local news when, in reality, the issue is surrounded with controversy needing to be addressed. Other stories on the website are derived from the conservative think tank, Mackinac Center for Public Policy. *The Lansing Sun* is also owned by Metric Media, whose CEO self-identifies connections to "national conservative leaders." The issue of partisan news sources like these is not that they shouldn't be allowed. It's utopian to assume that every local news report be entirely unbiased. But disguising bias as fact is irresponsible and threatening to a properly informed public.

The dwindling revenue of local newspapers causes a prioritization of "cheap hit" content like "fluff" and native advertising over watchdog reports on government proceedings. Americans increasingly rely on biased ideological outlets, often without realizing the severe partisanship of these papers. The less Americans

consume trustworthy, on-the-ground local reporting, the less prepared they are to

take on the responsibilities of a democracy.

[23] Hadley, Robert. "State Spending on Roads to Increase by $350 Million by 2021." *Lansing Sun*, 14 Sept. 2019, lansingsun.com/stories/513675102-state-spending-on-roads-to-increase-by-350-million-by-2021.

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es-michigan-local-news-outlets/3984689002.

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    www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/10/5-key-takeaways-from-our-cens
    us-of-statehouse-reporters.

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    July 2014,
    www.governing.com/archive/gov-the-new-realities-of-statehouse-press-corp
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    Center for Public Integrity, 3 July 2019,
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    source.colostate.edu/when-newspapers-close-voters-become-more-partisan/.

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13

PAPER ONE PROMPT. *THE NEWS MEDIA*, MDST 3680
THE DECLINE OF LOCAL AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS
DUE TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22 5 PM

Please Note

This document is the prompt. When the paper opens for submission, there will be some reminders of what's expected, but that won't be the full prompt. This is the prompt.

News Media Class.

Please write a persuasive essay, supported by examples taken from the news, from articles about the news or from academic research, all of which should be documented with footnotes. Again, this is a *persuasive essay,* the goal of which is to persuade the reader of your opinion with extremely clear arguments, supported with footnoted research.

**This is a 1000-1250 word paper, with those limits enforced. 1000 words Minimum. 1250 Words Max.

Choose one of the two options below, take a clear, unambiguous stand and then defend it.

Has the Decline of the Local American Newspaper Harmed Our Democracy?
Or.
Has the Emergent Digital News Media Served Democracy Well?

Hint of the Year Department. This course has argued that the primary goal of our free press is to monitor power. THE ABILITY TO MONITOR POWER is the context of the prompt questions and should be top of mind when you make your choice. Not focusing at all on the monitor of power role will be a course content failure.

PROMPTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

THE KEY PROMPT

Declare and defend your choice with blunt force clarity. Tips on this writing style are below.

The first sentence of this paper is worth 25 points. Please process this! In the first sentence state your main argument and briefly explain the main reason you feel this way. As clearly as possible, BRIEFLY STATE AND EXPLAIN.

NOT GOOD: "Democracy is on the brink because of newspaper layoffs." This sentence is a prompt fail. The main argument is clearly stated, but the "explain"

part is not.

GOOD: "Democracy is on the brink because most US newspapers can't afford the number of reporters needed to confront the powerful." This earns the full 25 points, but now that I've written this, please don't mimic my wording!!

Within your lead paragraph, summarize the points the paper will make **without duplicating the language you will use later.**

Following your lead paragraph, aim for roughly three or four paragraphs, each of which starts with a clear distinct argument that supports the main one.

To emphasize. Every paragraph should start with a clear declarative argument, not a statement, and not a transition from the previous paragraph.

You may include one CONTRAST PARAGRAPH that supports the other side. This is optional. I include this because so many of you have told me you have mixed feelings. Got it. We will call this the Contrast Paragraph. Limit this part of the paper to one paragraph.

A conclusion paragraph is also important for a persuasive essay but take care not to make this graph a cut and paste repeat of previous arguments or even the language used to make the previous arguments.

FOOTNOTES AND THE RESEARCH REQUIREMENT

Within this essay, support every argument and factual claim with a footnote I can find, or a footnote to a link that works when clicked. **I do not care what format you use for the footnotes. But you need to include enough information for me to find it with a click or a copy and paste. **I often read footnotes and citations, so you face a points deduction if I can't find your citation or your link fails.**

Citing the books or the lectures is encouraged, but with lectures, footnote the date.

 Put footnotes at the bottom of each page.

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 If you do not know how to use or format footnotes, go to the Alderman Library website and ask for help. It's easier than you think. There are several different formats. I do not care which one.

**Most important. The best research in this essay gives me a concrete example—taken from the news—that supports the lead argument in that paragraph. Those concrete examples will often be in the research you find. For example, if you are saying digital is fantastic because nonprofit papers are focused on accountability reporting, I'm expecting a footnote leading me to a news article proving how that paper did great accountability reporting.

LET'S KEEP GOING.

EXAMPLES TAKEN FROM THE NEWS. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? Too many previous student papers have argued, for example that layoffs are connected to a loss of watchdog reporters, and the student will then list a footnote from some academic paper or Pew Research that cites the loss of watchdog reporters. That's perfectly fine, but not A-level. A-level work digs into that very research and finds out that one year after the Charleston Gazette-Mail won a Pulitzer, it went bankrupt, and laid off dozens, including the executive editor, Rob Byers. Same thing happened to the East Bay Times in Oakland. The difference is: it's not an academic *talking about* the loss of watchdogs, it's an example of *actual* lost watchdogs.

THE WORKS CITED REQUIREMENT

In addition to using footnotes, please provide a Works Cited list at the end of the paper. If you miss this, there's a 3 point paper deduction.

HONOR CODE REQUIREMENT

Write out the full honor code and write your name under it. Several random papers with be checked with phrase comparison software. If you forget to include a signed Honor Code statement, there's a 5 point paper deduction.

A NOTE ON OWNING YOUR OPINION

You do not have to agree with my concern that losing so many reporters is harming our ability to be informed citizens. You are encouraged to formulate your own viewpoint. The goal here is for you to prove course content knowledge, while adapting to a blunt style of writing.

GRADE WEIGHTS

Does your first sentence state *and explain* your main argument with hard edged clarity? 25 %

Does every paragraph start with a clear supportive argument, not a statement, that helps persuade us to your point of view? 25%

Have you footnoted all factual assertions with articles, research or links to an actual news article or video? How strong are you with original examples? 25% Are your arguments throughout the paper clearly stated and defended? Is every word precise? Or do you use filler words, phrases or sentences no would miss if removed? 25%

DUE DATE AND FORMAT REQUIREMENTS

Due Tuesday Sept. 22, 2020. 5 pm. Submit as WordDoc attachment in Collab Assignments, Paper One. Do not submit in Pages, or Google Docs.

Do not submit a late paper. Late papers earn a zero and won't be accepted by Collab after 5.

Please Write This Paper in Microsoft Word, Times New Roman font, 14 pt. type.

LABELING REQUIREMENT **Important**
Label Your Document File in This Format: First Name, Last Name, Choice
Your one word choices are: Harmed or Served.
 Examples: WyattAndrewsHarmed.doc or WyattAndrewsServed.doc

There will be point deductions for lapses in formatting, labeling and failure to include the Honor Code and/or a Works Cited list.

RE-WRITE POLICY FOR PAPER ONE ONLY

One re-write of this first paper will be allowed, to help you understand the style and content required. If the re-write is better, it will improve your grade: **you will not risk a lower grade**. I will help you with your re-write on request to identify ways to improve. With or without an office visit, you must finish the rewrite within ten days of your initial grade.**

This concludes the prompt. Below are some tips on blunt force clarity.

THE WRITING STYLE…. BLUNT. FORCE. CLARITY. WHY???f Out in the

real world of business, policy, politics, consulting, science, you name it, this is how the most effective leaders and players write. To employers, the style is powerful, and distinguishing; they will notice.

First the bullet points.

IN EVERY PARAGRAPH

--START WITH A LEAVE NO DOUBT ARGUMENT.
--DO NOT START WITH A DEPENDENT CLAUSE
--FOLLOW THAT TOP OF PARAGRAPH ARGUMENT WITH EXAMPLES (which in this class are supported with footnotes)
--CLOSE THE PARAGRAPH STRONG WITH A POWERFUL INTERPRETATION LINE THAT SUPPORTS THE TOP LINE. **TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY—THE CLOSING OF EVERY PARAGRAPH NEEDS TO MATCH THE THEME LAID OUT AT THE START OF THE PARAGRAPH ** --USE ZERO FLUFF, OR NEEDLESS WORDS. IF YOU CAN REMOVE A WORD WITHOUT LOSING CONTENT OR CONTEXT, REMOVE IT. --USE WORD PRECISION. DIG DEEP AND FIGHT TO FIND EXACTLY THE RIGHT WORD/PHRASE IN A SENTENCE. DO NOT SETTLE FOR "GOOD ENOUGH." THIS SINGLE TIP ALONE WILL IMPROVE YOUR WRITING. --NEVER ANNOUNCE AN ARGUMENT--JUST MAKE THE ARGUMENT.

If you are still with me, think about a mindset that will help.

This is a *persuasive essay* and everything begins there. Concise and precise writers understand that in persuasion, short is power. Be complete in your content, but after that, shorter is power. Here's one way to judge. Ask yourself, just before you hit "send" —if this is an essay you would click and read yourself online? If not, then the is essay is probably not as clear or as pointed as you worked for. Think: Would you read your *own work*, if you stumbled across it online?

Tip 1. **Start every paragraph, not just the first one, every paragraph with a clear declarative argument**. The point of every graph comes first; it's not revealed in the middle nor saved for the end. Make your point first, then bring in your analysis and backup. If your first sentence is some bland statement, that's a grade deduction. <mark>Do not start paragraphs with transitions, or statements</mark>.

Tip 2. Proofread with a vengeance. We all let bad writing remain in our work because of sloppy proofreading. I include myself in this--guilty! This typically

happens late at night, when we are most inclined to forgive our own lapses. You know sentence X is not your best, but you let it sit unimproved anyway. The most effective way to improve your writing is to become a tougher proofreader—on yourself

Tip 3. Force yourself into the practice of word precision. Make every word count and convey your exact meaning. This is work, but it's worth it. Tip 4. Lose all filler sentences and fluff. **You know when you are fluffing up an essay, so in this class, stop!** Here's the test. If I can spot a word, a cliché, an unhelpful filler sentence, or anything that could be removed from the essay without losing context or content, that's a grade deduction.

Final Tip. ***Do not make announcements*** of the paper's structure. The following is an actual example. The subject was the good and bad of TV news.

NO!!!! "My paper's last argument now turns to the advantages of cable's 24 hours…" --This is an announcement, and a grade deduction.

YES! "Cable's main strength is the time it has to report." --This is a clear argument. Repeating: do not announce the coming point, just make the point.