PROFESSIONAL ROLE CONCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC RADIO JOURNALISTS: A CLOSER CONNECTION TO THE AUDIENCE

Camille Phillips

Lynda Kraxberger, Chair

ABSTRACT

Using the theoretical framework of professional role conceptions and the methodology of semi-structured interviews, 10 journalists at two Midwest public radio stations were interviewed in a qualitative study designed to answer the following overarching research questions:

RQ1a: What are the professional role conceptions of public radio journalists at KCUR, KBIA and Harvest Public Media? RQ1b: Why do they see themselves in these roles?

RQ2: How does being a non-profit public media outlet impact the content produced at KBIA, KCUR, and Harvest Public Media?

As this was a qualitative study, individual responses were unique and not intended to be generalized. Key findings, however, included a strong desire to provide balanced information uninfluenced by bias and an equally strong feeling of being closely connected to their audience. By offering a glimpse at what a few public media journalists see as the purpose of their job and how their stations’ revenue models influence the news content they produce, this research can help provide insight into how public media may differ from commercial media, both in content and motivation.