DESIGN STUDIOS’ EFFECTS ON THE QUALITY OF DESIGN AND COMMUNICATION AT GANNETT DAILY NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

Editors at Gannett daily newspapers have seen improvements in the visual quality of their publications since the company began producing pages in regional studios. One thing holding those newspapers back, however, is that many editors think designers at Gannett’s regional studios lack an understanding of their local communities. These conclusions were drawn from the results of an online survey distributed to nightly news editors across all of Gannett’s dailies. While a disparity of local knowledge might always be present when news designers are far removed from the newsrooms, participants still seem to think design studios have helped improve their publication’s visual appeal.
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Justin Brisson

Keywords: Design Studios, News Design, Dailies, Newsrooms, News Editors, Instant Messaging
Introduction

Three years ago, I hardly had an inkling of what news design was. When I decided to attend the University of Missouri, I did so with the intention of receiving my Bachelor’s of Journalism and becoming a sports reporter. As an 18 year old, I knew I liked sports, and I knew I liked writing. It seemed a matter of common sense to pursue a career as a sports writer. However, after actually gaining reporting experience at the Columbia Missourian newspaper, I realized reporting just wasn’t for me. The next fall semester I decided to give the newspaper design class a try because that was the next step after copy editing at the Missourian. That semester at the Missourian print desk probably changed my life’s trajectory.

It was Nov. 3, 2012, when I came to a realization: News design is something I’m good at, and it’s a career I could become invested in. In the previous week, I had designed the news front the day after Hurricane Sandy hit the East Coast, designed a concept for a tease to election coverage in print, and designed the front page the night of the presidential election. Right then I knew news design was a career path I wanted to follow and see what opportunities would open up for me. Since then, I have designed many pages for the Missourian, been an
art director for both Vox and Tiger Kickoff, and been a teaching assistant for the Beginning Magazine Design class. My experience in all these different roles, as well as what I’ve learned in my classes at the journalism school, has more than prepared me for a career as a news designer.

In the past two years of coursework and professional work I’ve completed, I have crammed a great deal of learning into a short period of time. On a functional skills level, my continual practice with Adobe InDesign, Photoshop and Illustrator has greatly enhanced my practical abilities in designing. From a broader perspective, my coursework at MU has helped me understand how to tell stories with my designs. Anyone at MU will tell you that journalism, at its core, is storytelling — and news design is no different. My time here has taught me the importance of conceptualizing an approach to designing a package of stories, highlighting key elements, and unifying everything into one complete narrative design.

No one has been more instrumental in acclimating me to the finer points of design than Erica Mendez Babcock. She taught me from day one, and she’s never stopped being a patient, gracious, amazing professor since my first steps in the design sequence. The night before I designed the front page during the presidential election, I had been in the emergency room twice in 12 hours for a little scare. I’ll never
forget the help she gave me on that grueling, stressful night of work as I walked around with a heart monitor on and tried not to stress myself or anyone else out more than we already had to be. Without her, I almost certainly would not be pursuing a career in news design and working on this professional project to complete my master’s degree. I also would not be where I am today without the teaching and advice of Maggie Walter, Frank Russell and Laura Johnston, each of whom helped me grow into a level-headed, intelligent journalist.

My experience with design has been fantastic, but I still have so much to learn. It’s always funny to me how I become semi-good at something, and then I have that feeling like I am the absolute greatest at what I’m doing. It’s never too long afterward that I realize I actually have a long way to go still to be that good. I have a passion for news design, and my work at the Gannett design studio and for this professional project has only increased my passion for and knowledge about the newspaper design industry. Newspaper publishing companies’ decisions to move design staffs out of newsrooms and into regional hubs are part of an industry-changing process with implications that we still don’t fully understand. Hopefully this project will shed a little more light onto that process.
Week 1

Wow, what a first week of work. I knew ahead of time that the Des Moines Design Studio doesn’t use InDesign much. But I didn’t know until two days before starting that they also use Windows, so I’ve had to make a really fast transition in two huge ways.

My first two days at Gannett I spent learning about CCI and NewsGate, the design studio’s layout program and content management system. I watched another employee design pages, and on the second day, was given a couple fairly easy pages to design. CCI is clearly a program built to layout pages quickly, but the controls and functions were completely foreign to me.

My next two days were equally as difficult as I was tasked with designing probably more than I could handle. I was designing full sections for Sheboygan and Manitowoc right away. After some early struggles with CCI, including missing deadline on my second day, I rebounded quickly. By the end of this first week, I felt like I made significant progress and was actually proud of a couple pages I designed already. My early impression of the design studio is that I will
get significantly better around a bunch of talented designers, and that’s pretty exciting.

Addendum: I wanted to make a note on communication between designers and editors. The one constant between all Gannett newspaper sites and the design studio is that we use Link – an instant messaging application – to talk throughout the day. Designers and editors IM constantly about minor and some major details of the design, layout and article assigning process. Other communication varies from site to site. Some editors prefer to send story budgets through email — some still like talking through the budget over the phone.

**Research component update.**

There’s not too much new here yet, seeing as how quickly I was thrown into the fire and asked to design an average of 9-12 pages per shift. I did talk to my team leader and creative director and found out I’ll be able to email all the Gannett editors and staff I need to for my questionnaire. Editors’ contact information is available to anyone with a Gannett email address, similar to how a Missouri student or employee can look up anyone else with a Missouri email address. My plan for this next week is to complete a draft of my questionnaire for my committee members. I’m starting to get a much better idea of
what questions I need to ask, and of course I now have a good grasp of how newsrooms and designers communicate with each other.

**Week 2**

My second week of work started to become much smoother for me. After picking the brains of co-workers and my supervisor, Sean McKeown-Young, I’ve learned most everything I need to about designing in CCI. I definitely started breaking outside traditional layouts and have been using more white space, more unique headline styles and experimenting with different ways of using cutouts. The program was really difficult to get the hang of at first, but now I can tell it can really speed up the design process.

A couple of the other problems that hampered me the first week are still hanging around, but I’m starting to overcome them. Style quirks specific to each newspaper — or site, as Gannett calls them — are tricky to remember unless I do them repeatedly. Thankfully, since I have been designing for just three newspapers, I’m starting to remember and plan ahead for things so the editors do not have to keep asking or reminding me. Communication with the sites’ editors is also becoming smoother as well as we become more familiar with each other. When I first started, a bunch of co-workers told me, “Oh, you’ll figure out which editors you get along with and which ones you want to try to minimize communication with pretty quickly.” I’m definitely
realizing which people are easy to work with, which are more amiable, and which are more frustrating and controlling.

It’s hard to try to gauge what the editors think of the designers’ work. They seem resigned to the fact that the design studio does their work, and the newsroom does theirs. Recently I asked an editor at the Sheboygan Press what his thoughts were about my overall design on a sports front page. He did everything short of outright refusing to give me his opinion. I asked multiple times and clarified what I meant when I was asking his opinion. I imagine so few people ask the editors for their opinions on design, they’re just incredibly unused to the notion. I really feel like the conversation between designers and editors is important to creating the best possible news package, but I haven’t yet found much of that type of communication here in this culture. I definitely think my bosses encourage it, but it doesn’t seem like a common practice.

**Research component update.**

Now that I’m adapting to the work atmosphere at Gannett, and I have gone through the communication processes between designers and newsroom editors fairly often, I have a better idea of what I need to ask for my research. I’ve submitted some sample questions to my committee members for their review. The questions deal mostly with how newsroom editors feel about the accuracy and quality of pages
designers produce, as well as how they think readers perceive those same qualities.

**Week 3**

As far as my work goes, I'm definitely getting faster at laying out pages, and I'm anticipating certain things now that I have a good grasp of certain newspapers' style. So working with CCI is definitely becoming easier and I feel comfortable designing things fairly quickly now. It's obvious that I'm nowhere near as fast as regular employees at designing a nice feature package, but I suppose that's to be expected.

My workload certainly hasn't decreased despite being an intern. I'm guessing I'm kind of in a "thrown into the fire" situation. Some of the older designers who have earned their place here have the opportunity to focus on one newspaper each night, whereas I'm often putting together two newspapers simultaneously. It's understandable – they have much higher ability with designing great pages, illustrations and graphics. I've been told that in the past, designers here have been able to all focus on one newspaper per night, but there's been a good amount of turnover lately that has prevented scheduling from working out that way. I know the Gannett design studios are places where news designers improve their skills and then often move on to newsroom positions, so it's understandable.
One issue I keep encountering is how much, as a designer, it's "OK" to fit copy. A small ethical issue, to be certain, but I still think twice about it. The newsroom editors are really good about trimming headlines and copy and what not, and I can tell that's just how it works at Gannett. But sometimes I just want to decrease or increase the tracking or kerning – and sometimes it's necessary, too – to fit things, but I have to be careful to keep copy still readable.

Some newspapers are definitely OK with getting away with more little details like that, and I've already learned which editors care about the visual quality of the newspaper and who doesn't. Sometimes it's really frustrating working with certain sites, because I know the editor expects me to just throw content into a template, and I have no creative freedom. I wish all newspaper editors were on the same page with how much freedom they give us designers, but I suppose that's life, right?

Week 4

I had my first abrasive interaction with a news editor this week. Without going into too much detail, there was an obvious communication barrier: Editors simply don’t think about layout the same way I would. I was asked to design a page in a way that I didn’t think would work or be effective. As a compromise, I suggested another way to achieve a middle ground between the editor’s views
and my own. The editor didn’t think that worked, so in the end we went back to the original way I had designed the page -- which the editor did not like.

In addition to that, I was having a difficult time understanding some of the smaller design changes the editor was asking of me. We either just weren’t on the same wave length or weren’t using the right words. On top of everything, I needed the help of a couple co-workers to fix a technical issue that was messing up the formatting of a particular article. All these things were combining to frustrate the editor – at least from my perspective – and his attitude was then frustrating me.

This interaction made me include a couple questions in my survey about the use of instant messaging as Gannett’s primary method of communication. Now, my supervisors warned me of this exact kind of communication problem on my first day of work – and it’s only fair to expect those type of rubs to happen. Voiceless communication has obvious drawbacks. However, instant messaging is also seemingly the quickest way for editors and designers to talk throughout each work shift. These kinds of situations are probably unavoidable.

My bosses suggested from the start that I try my best to not miscommunicate – one can often seem more annoyed than he or she
is in reality when instant messaging. It’s definitely something that both
designers and editors should keep in mind, though, because
maintaining amiable relationships with each other is critical to a
positive work environment. With all that in mind, I think it’s fair to
consider editors’ opinions about instant messaging as the best method
of communication here at Gannett. If there are glaring concerns about
it, or good suggestions on other methods, I hope my research will
bring those to the forefront.

**Week 5**

As I continue to try pushing my limits and trying more adventurous
designs, I’m finding myself in a familiar position. I feel like I’ve hit a
wall where I’m now designing pages and centerpieces in almost the
same way every time. I’m sure many news designers feel that way at
some point with how many pages we all end up designing over a
career. And that feeling is certainly aided by the reality of the
newspaper industry: We tend to stick to what we know works, whether
that’s story format, types of photographs or layouts. But I’m not
interning at Gannett because I want to do what I know works. I want
to push my personal limits and drastically improve my skills and
decision-making abilities.

With what I know now compared to what I knew a year ago, I
can see my work is clearly better. However, I cannot help but admire
the creativity of my co-workers. I’m trying to look for any opportunity to break out and do something I’ve never done before. I definitely feel limited a lot of times by art or time constraints, but I also know everyone deals with that. Hopefully, observing what other people around me are doing well will help me to get more creative, too. Our creative director does a really good job of posting and recognizing the work our studio designers do. He posts new pages every day that people in our studio have designed, and I definitely enjoy looking at them for inspiration.

Also, the turnover rate on the Wisconsin team continues to rise as we’ve lost another designer. This time, yes, a Missouri son has left us for another job. To replace some of the talent we’ve lost recently, the studio hired another intern and a full-time employee should be starting on our team next week. The positive spin to our turnover is that this might be opening up opportunities for me to design for larger newspapers. And in the long term, maybe there’s a brighter future for me at Gannett, if not just because they need more bodies for designing newspapers.

**Week 6**

It’s not as if I haven’t been thinking of journalism throughout the course of my time here so far, but I definitely have been considering it more consciously lately. I think I started out wanting to just meet
deadlines and finish my assigned work on time. Then, I focused on improving my designs and becoming more creative so I could impress people and earn my keep that way. After that, I started thinking more clearly about the journalistic ethics. It also took some time to realize newspaper editors would actually hear me out and be open to my suggestions. I certainly cede the final judgment to the editors, but I really feel like I have an important viewpoint on some matters, such as headline wording, photo selection and use, and infographics. It’s not a coincidence that those things show up in my research project.

All of us know those things are key decisions that news designers are a part of, but it’s nice to know that some news editors are receptive to my input as well. Sometimes editors dismiss your opinion and say it’s fine or they prefer to do it this way, or “this is how we always do it.” That’s okay, because they probably understand their readers and their community better than a designer from a state away. But I do feel like I understand when a headline is tacky or forced, and do I feel like I know what photos best complement a headline or story. It’s nice to know other journalists and I can work those things out. None of us are always right, so that conversation is important, and that’s why I want to hear what news editors have to say about that interaction.
My survey is ready to go out, I think, so it’ll be interesting to start receiving responses about those questions. That way I’ll have more insight into how to approach those types of conversations when communicating with the newsroom sites. To segue a bit, I’d like to point out a really recent example where I made a mistake and ran into an old friend (Read: Challenge) with newspapers. We were doing a centerpiece on a house that burned down, and how friends came together and helped each other following their house fire. I looked at the photos given to me and spent a good while putting together what I thought was a really clean centerpiece design. It wasn’t until I was finished with all my other responsibilities and we were ready to typeset pages when I realized the dominant photo and the headline did not work together really at all. The headline read, “A helping hand,” and the image was of the burned down house. The deck did flesh out what the headline meant, but it just didn’t feel right. Unfortunately, deadline was coming up, and all the photos were of the building, so there wasn’t anything we could really do. But I was surprised and seriously mad at myself for not realizing it earlier. I’m not sure I could have even done anything since the photos had already been taken, but maybe we could have re-written the headline. It was just a frustrating situation I hope I’ll be avoiding from now on.
**Week 7**

This week I was kind of moved to designing different sections. For the foreseeable future, I’ll be designing sports for Central Wisconsin papers. We have four different dailies grouped into “Central Wisconsin,” and I’m assigned to design those four sports sections every night. Naturally, there are good and bad things about designing only these four sports sections. I’ll try to elaborate briefly. The thinking behind combining the sections is, of course, to save time. Using mostly the same news stories saves time, and we actually use almost the same design for each paper. Our system has a way of transferring, or sourcing, full article designs from page to page.

As you can imagine, that type of shift is less stressful than a typical news shift, so I appreciate that. However, it’s also much less fulfilling to only design one centerpiece per night. Also, these newspapers just don’t think about the layout and look of their sports sections, so the content is all game stories and game previews. There’s no real opportunity for unique or conceptual designs. Honestly, overall I’ve enjoyed the work I’ve been doing. I’ve been taught and always felt that sports design gives you the most opportunities to be creative, and obviously, use stats and infoboxes. I’ve been able to use photos and headlines very large in these sports sections, and I’ve been able to be more creative in general with my packages.
Week 8

All our studio’s interns were assigned a mentor this week that will help advise us in some way on our skills and such. I was assigned to meet with someone from the features team who will apparently be helping me with my typography and color usage. I would have to agree that I could use extra tutoring in those areas. One thing I’m really interested in, however, is creating conceptual designs for these newspapers. I’m supposed to speak with her about how to approach those types of projects at the studio. It’s actually really been frustrating me recently, because I feel like I haven’t been given the opportunity to do some of those really nice, conceptual designs. I feel like my work has pretty much hit a plateau recently, because one can only do so much with typography, color, white space, etc. The people whose pages are consistently recognized at the studio are people doing conceptual designs for their centerpieces. Some are illustrations, yes, but others are just well-thought-out approaches to presenting a story.

I sound like a sour grape, but I just don’t feel like I’ve been able to do that yet. I won’t whine about it too much, but it’s frustrating when I know I can do that work and I don’t have the opportunity to do it while others get acclaim for it. I plan on bringing it up when I meet with my boss here soon. Jealousy is certainly a part of it for me — I want to do as well as some of the people with more experience. But I
also understand I need to put in my time maybe before I’m given better opportunities to plan out my designs. Anyway, I hope my coming discussions with my boss and my new mentor will be fruitful, and I’ll be able to take my designs to that next level and start integrating more layers of complexity into my pages.

**Week 9**

As far as my work goes, I’ve really felt great about some of my most recent designs. Designing sports pages, for whatever reason, just seems to amp me up more than news pages do. One part of that is probably the fact that it’s hard for me to be interested in or gain much value from reading Wisconsin news. On top of that, obviously I have no ties to communities such as Manitowoc or Sheboygan, so their local news just does not resonate with me. This seems like one of the fundamental issues with news designers creating pages for communities they’re not a part of. I know I’ve touched on this a bit before – and I think my survey will help illuminate some of that as well – but designing for sports really made me think more about it.

This probably has to be taken with a grain of salt, because I get more passionate about sports than I do actual news anyway. However, I do think it’s worth noting how designers at these studios are detached from the news they’re helping to present. I just have to do the eye test to know how some designers approach their pages. People
seem disinterested while they’re working, and then you look at their final product and you realize there wasn’t that much thought put into presenting the news. Now, you can still be distracted over the course of an 8- or 9-hour work shift and do great journalistic work. But my observations bring to my Rachel Schallom’s study where employees at design studios did not all identify as journalists. I think that’s probably evident everywhere: Not all designers consider themselves journalists.

So with those things in my head, I want more and more to know how to approach designing conceptual centerpieces for my pages. I don’t remember if I mentioned this previously, but I’m part of a mentorship program now at Gannett that my boss is implementing. I’m supposed to meet with my mentor soon, and the idea is that it’s up to me to seek out all the help I desire. So you already I’ll be mining my mentor for everything I can! Part of creating a deeper sense of meaning while maintaining accuracy with conceptual designs is selling the newspaper editors that your idea works. I hope my mentor will be able to talk to me not just about improving my typography skills and such, but also on the communicative process of convincing editors my ideas will work.

**Week 10**

I met with my mentor this week and got a chance to learn a bit about how to put myself in a position to do better work. As I mentioned
previously, one of the things I’ve been itching to do is try out some conceptual design work. I haven’t felt capable of producing that work much for two reasons. First, to do some of the illustrative work, one really requires Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. CCI is a platform incredibly suited for speed in designing, but lacks a ton of the creative freedom allowed by Adobe products. However, my computer does not have those programs, and they’re available only to a limited number of desktops.

The other inhibitor for me has been, in recent weeks, a lack of opportunities from the stories I’m given to work with. I’m not in a position to say why that is the case, but perhaps it’s just the nature of the constraints placed on the Central Wisconsin Sports team that all their stories are either game stories, game previews or stories also running in the Green Bay Press-Gazette. The stories and the photography just aren’t particularly predisposed to the conceptual treatment in design. However, I did learn from my mentor that I am free to borrow other computers with Adobe products installed as long as that person is not working that night, of course. So I’m looking for those opportunities and always thinking of how best to present a story. If a really great preview or profile comes up, I’ll be jumping at the chance to try and elevate the visual quality of that story with some atypical presentation. I know conceptual designs are encouraged by
the studio – a lot of our best and most praised pages are designed as concept pieces with some mix of illustration and news design techniques. In my mind, there’s no doubt that those visuals are easily the most effective and most attention grabbing.

What the studio calls “sourcing” is, to me, a new method of uniform design. On a regular shift, I design four sports sections that the company has grouped together as Central Wisconsin Sports. To my knowledge, the editors of Central Wisconsin Sports all or mostly work in Wausau, which is home to one of the four dailies in that group. Individual writers are assigned to each publication to cover stories separately, but the actual newspapers are all produced in Wausau. However, the content of these publications is in large part very similar because local sports stories to my estimation make up only half or less than half of the newspaper’s space. Wire stories from the Associated Press and other Wisconsin Media outlets constitute a significant portion of the paper. It makes plenty of sense when you consider that the professional teams and major college programs in Wisconsin are covered extensively by larger media outlets and national news syndicates.

But because the budgets for each sports section contain some of the same material, the design studio uses sourcing to transfer content – and even entire article shapes – over to the other publications. The
same sourcing system is used for designing the papers’ news sections as well. To me, it makes sense for designers and editors from a short-term perspective: With four newspaper sections to take care of each night between a staff of 3-4 people, time saving is a considerable factor. It’s hard to think about the effects of this sourcing system from a more broad perspective, though. If I lived in Wausau, I would probably read the Wausau Daily Herald, but very rarely see the Wisconsin Rapids Tribune. So sharing news doesn’t necessarily hurt the reader as an individual. But there’s no doubt in my mind that the lack of a consistent, strong local reporting voice for these publications hurts the newspapers’ standing in the community. At least at the Columbia Missourian, I learned the merits of a newspaper that openly seeks to interact with the community it serves. If I recognized my local newspaper contained reporting primarily from AP writers who don’t live in my state, I’m not likely to respect their viewpoints and intuition as much as I would a local reporter. Then again, sports news is a slightly different world – people pick known columnists who they feel are smart or hold opinions similar to their own, and they stick by those reporters.

It’s difficult for designers to really gain much from reading Central Wisconsin newspapers, at least. I digest the sports news, but because I haven’t yet worked on their news pages, I haven’t invested
in reading their actual news. Personally, I read all the stories with which I am working – or all the ones I have time to during a shift. I’ve always been taught and felt like understanding the material you’re given is crucial to being able to compile a news page. Beyond that, it’s hard to consume all the news of the publications you work on. Sometimes working on that newspaper becomes so exhausting mentally that you want to distance yourself from it when the shift is over. That’s a feeling probably a lot of people understand. When you work your butt off at the office all day, you don’t want to come home and answer more emails or deal with work problems – you want to get away from it. Then again, that’s a young adult’s perspective. I haven’t yet learned the responsibility that comes with working for a long period of time. But many designers at the studio are young adults, so perhaps that’s an inherent problem. I also am part of the group of people who primarily consumes news online. I have my own silo of national news sources that I prefer, so I’m not particularly eager to seek out that same news at a newspaper in a different state, especially since a fair amount of the pertinent news for that publication isn’t local anyway.

**Research update.**

I’ve got back only a small amount of responses on my survey so far – all from editors who work at newspapers produced by the
Gannett design studio. The process of sending it to the other studios’ associated editors has taken exceedingly longer than I wanted and hoped, but I’ve been being as pushy as I dare with trying to distribute my study quickly. I hopefully have an update of my survey being sent to the other design studios by the studio director, Ted Power, later today. The responses I have received so far are interesting, though. Unsurprisingly, the reception of communication practices we must go through at Gannett is mixed. I’m thankful that some of the people I work with personally have responded to my research, at least.

**Week 11**

This week I met with my mentor again so we could critique some of my pages. One of the issues that has plagued me this summer – which I think I’ve only mentioned before – is headline sizing. Sometimes the headlines on my pages just do not have a clearly defined hierarchy. An explanation for this problem feels weird, because you would think that if I can recognize these mistakes, I would fix them. But it brings up a slightly larger issue. The conversational back-and-forth between editors and designers is clearly essential to creating pages at Gannett. It’s a give-and-take relationship. Sometimes, one person has to give in to the other’s demands, knowledge, preferences or whatever the case may be. I definitely fight for design issues I want to avoid, including headline sizing in some cases. But I also don’t want to get on my
editors’ nerves or push them into doing too many things. I understand we both want to make the best news pages possible – or in a perfect world we both do. But I also know how relationships work, and how instant messaging communication can affect those interactions. You don’t want to work with someone who’s always telling you what to do. It’s a partnership.

So it works both ways: Sometimes I request that an editor write a headline to fit, and other times I’m OK with sacrificing a few point sizes in order to fit the headline given to me. I think those instances further illustrate the interesting dynamic at Gannett that exists between designers and editors. My mentor urged me to gradually increase the amount of pushing I give to the editors I work with. Like I said, in the end we all want to produce the best product that we can, and we should trust designers’ instincts on certain things just like we put faith in the editors to do their job to the best of their ability.

**Research component.**

The number of responses I’ve received is paltry, so far. The design studio director talked to someone about sending out my survey through Gannett channels of communication and decided we cannot do that. So I’ve had to continue on by myself with distributing this survey from my school email address. As I would expect, since all these employees are receiving research project emails from an unknown
address, they write it off as spam without even reading it, probably. I’ve tried to make sure the editors I’ve worked with recently know those messages are from me and that I need their help taking this survey, but I can’t instant message everyone from the other studios around the country. I need to talk to the director again, and maybe Nathan and Sean, too, to push them to help me in some way. There must be some kind of help the company can give me with my survey. I told everyone about it right from the beginning of my internship, and hopefully they understand this is information that is potentially beneficial to everyone’s understanding of design studios and newspaper design.

Week 12

It’s not really that big of a deal, but Gannett has now fully implemented a new cutline style on all of its newspapers. The Wisconsin team was the last set of newspapers to be updated with the change. I’d be interested to hear what my committee thinks of the change. Now the photo credit is on top of the cutline, and there’s an extra gridline of space between the end of the caption and the other text. Like with all things, I was initially skeptical because it wasn’t what I was used to. But, first, it’s not that big of a deal, of course. Secondly...it’s actually grown on me very quickly! I haven’t even been able to pin it down yet, but it kind of makes photos look cleaner, in
general. The only problem I’ve seen is when you have a photo credit that is simply, “AP.” That’s when you have all that ugly white space in between the photo and the cutline. Gross.

I’ve honestly been really pleased with my work recently. My centerpiece designs have clearly been taken up a notch, and I’m finding ways to make headlines bigger – which has been a consistent problem – and photos more interesting. Also on my centerpieces, I’ve found ways to include what my team leader would call more illustration-esque elements such as textures and the way in which I utilize photography. In addition to that, I’ve gotten faster. Speed has been my Achilles heel here probably, but as I’ve gotten more comfortable with these sports pages and my relationships have progressed with my editors, I’ve gotten better at working quickly, ordering pages cleanly and organizing all the various elements. I hope I can continue to get better here and start gaining more respect as a sports designer.

**Research update.**

I have received more responses on my survey recently, and I’m starting to feel more comfortable with my participation. I created a new email account for myself with my name in it, and that undoubtedly played a factor in making people feel more comfortable with reading an email from a person they’ve never heard of before. I
should have just done that sooner. Some of the data is a little intriguing, and a little contradictory. The majority of editors who participated in this research rated designers’ understanding of their community’s news pretty unfavorably. On the other hand, the same editors were more confident than not that the finished pages accurately portray the news in that community. Perhaps when they consider themselves in the equation, they automatically think better of the news pages because they have imparted their local expertise onto the product. Or perhaps journalists are just inherently wary of admitting that their work is ever less than accurate.

Another interesting finding is that editors responded that, generally, there hasn’t been much of a change in some of the slightly more specific design elements we asked about, including photo selection/placement and typography. However, a fair majority of those editors also rated the overall design quality as having changed positively since the introduction of design studios. Perhaps this is a case where the language of news designers is somewhat separate from editors, despite working together daily. Or maybe that’s an overstatement, and it’s just an innate human reaction to rate the parts less favorably than the sum. I’ll have to do further research on that – perhaps there’s a theory I can relate it to.
Week 13

The role of copy editors at Gannett daily newspapers varies at each individual publication. For instance, while designing pages for newspapers such as The Sheboygan Press and the Manitowoc Herald Times Reporter, I know that copy editors perform specific duties usually separate from news editors. First, copy editors at those publications read through and edit stories before they are even uploaded into the design studio’s sharing program, CCI NewsGate. So before I ever see most local content, it’s already been edited at least once. I know each site pays much more specific attention to their own local content, and the editing and review process for those articles is what I would consider standard. In addition to that, I would converse with the news editors about fitting or trimming copy for our news pages, and that news editor would then enlist the help of a copy editor to take care of fitting the stories. Again, that local content and stories that are finished well before deadline are given that kind of attention. However, when it gets closer to deadline, news editors are sometimes forced to take over some of the copy editors’ duties in order to speed up the process.

Of course, the Central Wisconsin newspapers are somewhat different. I only work on sports sections for these four publications, so I cannot speak for the news side of things, but I would imagine it’s the...
same or similar. I apologize if I’m repeating some of what I’ve written before. The news editors for the four CW newspapers are actually based in Wausau where one of those four papers, the Wausau Daily Herald, is published. The other three sites have individual sports reporters, but they all send their content to Wausau. You would think that the Wausau sports department might be staffed more heavily, but during the course of an average night, only two or three editors work on sports content. These editors, I suppose, double as news editors and copy editors. They make decisions on what stories will run, write page budgets, enter stories onto the websites, copy edit articles, pull some wire stories and work in conjunction with the studios’ designers. The sections at these publications are generally fairly small, but weekend sections can often get large and the CW sports editors have a lot to do. The job titles for the editors I work with vary from “copy editor” to “assistant sports editor,” but their nightly duties are often the same or similar.

I don’t think the implications of this kind of dual role for copy editors are too significant. The same jobs are performed and, at least from my perspective, are done adequately. Time is always of the essence when newspapers are trying to meet deadlines, so I believe the ability of a news editor to sometimes perform copy editing tasks is common and often necessary. I think it’s pretty clear that some of
these responsibilities are being placed on editors because the newspapers would rather require its employees to do more than take on more financial risk by hiring more editors. It’s no secret that many daily newspapers have downsized their staffs in the last 5 or 6 years. The current situation is probably a direct result of the smaller staffs U.S. newspapers are carrying now compared to even a decade ago.

**Week 14**

I’d like to finalize a couple thoughts for my final field report installment. First, I found out very recently that I’m going to be moved to the sports team in a couple weeks. There I will be able to focus more on one or two sports sections per night. I’d like to use this transition as an opportunity to elaborate a bit more on the merits of designing for multiple newspapers on any given night. From a young journalist’s perspective, it can be very beneficial to work on a few publications in one night because, if you do a good job, you obviously have more opportunities to create portfolio pieces. It’s also great experience to improve a designer’s speed and organizational skills – both of which are vital to becoming a better news designer. On a broader scale, designing up to six newspaper sections per night has odd consequences. For instance, I’ve written about how central Wisconsin sports papers share all of their non-local content. This can create an apathetic atmosphere where editors get in the habit of
budgeting the exact same news for four newspapers, and designers get in the habit of making the same page four times.

Before I delve deeper, let me preface this by saying central Wisconsin papers definitely prioritize local sports news. We highlight all the local prep and high school teams and athletes as much as possible. That content is obviously not shared; it is tailored to the specific papers’ communities. The concern here is how we share and source national or regional sports news. Newspapers will continue to thrive because of local news. Ok, maybe not thrive. But keeping the public informed about what’s happening locally is one of the services we provide better than anyone else. I believe that if newspapers can continue to fill that niche, we can sustain our print product even into a future where perhaps people do rely on other sources for most news.

Now, newspapers sharing content can definitely have positive effects. For instance, on Green Bay Packers game days, the Green Bay Press-Gazette has a large sports section to accommodate enlarged Packers coverage. They produce a number of special pages that can be shared with other Wisconsin newspapers. It’s a great strategy because the Wisconsin sports community cares a great deal about the Packers, and the more analysis, infographics, artwork and Packers news we can give that community, the better. The onus, of course, is on the other publications’ news editors to want to include that content. From the
design studio’s perspective, the more we can filter better content throughout our publications, the better. In fact, as I prepare to move to the sports team, my bosses are hoping that I can plan and share more with the Wisconsin sports sections. It won’t be local or state news, but if I’m able to put together a nice package on national sports news that we feel other papers could benefit from running, it would be beneficial to share. Sports team designers do that now when they create certain centerpiece graphics on national sports topics.

So sometimes it is necessary to share – the top sports news in Wisconsin is almost always going to revolve around the same state teams. But the question we should think of more is, “Should we share so often?” Without asking ourselves that, it’s too easy to get into a lazy rhythm of making one product four times. Sometimes it just feels lazy, and it can also seem like poor community service to carbon copy news for various cities and regions. Newspapers aren’t plastic toys sold at a department store; we’re supposed to inform the public and bring them the news they need, as well as the news they want. It’s definitely a cost-minded decision to group newspapers together like this, so you know why this is our business plan. The USA Today is shared by almost every Gannett publication – another strategy of the company to cut expenditures. And in the end, newspapers are a product and the company needs to find a way to turn profits. That
doesn’t mean we cannot debate the merits of those strategies in theory and practice.
EVALUATION

My internship at the Des Moines Design Studio has been a formative step in my news design career. Over the course of the last two years, I have studied and worked on newspaper and magazine design vigorously. With each new opportunity, my work has taken a leap forward. My internship with the Gannett design studio taught me many things about design, as well as about the newspaper industry with which I am growing up into now. I am supremely confident that my continued work with Gannett newspapers will help me keep growing and evolving with the newspaper industry.

This summer, my work can probably be categorized into three separate phases. First, there was the learning curve phase where I had to learn new software on deadline in order to finish pages for the newspapers I worked on. Early on, I designed for the Sheboygan News Press and the Herald Times Reporter. I would also eventually design pages for the Fond du Lac Reporter, the Oshkosh Northwestern and four central Wisconsin area newspapers. At first, however, I had to contend with learning CCI as a designing platform. I struggled to keep pace with my workload while figuring the ins and outs of CCI. It was about two weeks before I really had a firm grasp of the different
functions and uses of the program. Of course, on top of that, any new designer has to learn the different styles of each particular newspaper. In actuality, my first month of work at Gannett was a feeling-out process where I tried to get my feet under myself and finish my work satisfactorily.

The second phase was one of struggle for me. I felt a lot of frustration because I really could not do all of the grandiose ideas I had in my head for different illustrations and artwork I wanted to bring to the newspapers. I really got caught up in what I was not capable of, instead of focusing on doing the best that I could. I have always wanted to be a better drawer, a better illustrator, a better artist. But those things just are not my forte. I also probably began to focus too much on completing pages quickly instead of pushing the editors I worked with to do bigger and better things visually. Utilizing color and headlines effectively were things I wish I had put more time into. Eventually, designing sports pages really opened up possibilities for my somewhat creative ideas, and it became an avenue for my progression. The newspapers Gannett groups together as central Wisconsin papers – The Wisconsin Rapids Tribune, the Wausau Daily Herald, the Stevens Point Journal and the Marshfield News Herald – offered me some creative freedom I found hard to obtain at the other publications. Of course, sports design in general encourages some
bigger and bolder design possibilities. In any case, my work on those newspapers brought out the best in me and ushered in what I would consider the third phase in my news design internship.

That last phase also came after a couple months of carefully observing what other news designers in the studio were doing. A big part of learning a visual art is being able to recognize what others are doing well, and what they’re doing wrong. My own schooling and training really kicked in during this time period. Once I saw how other people were implementing design principles, I took my own knowledge of visual communication and subconsciously created a visual style of my own. My team leader, Sean McKeown-Young, made me realize there’s an overall theme in my design work, and each individual designer has his or her own theme. When I approach laying out a news or sports page, I don’t think about forcing my own style onto a page. But it’s something that naturally shows through in my finished work, and just like with any designer, it’s because it is a visual style that appeals to me. There’s no doubt in my mind that as the weeks progressed in my internship, the style I created for myself improved my work. I think I was able to really help sophisticate the sports sections of the central Wisconsin newspapers and bring them some focused, interesting visuals. That might be too much touting of my
own work, but I definitely feel like those newspapers and I improved this summer.
Goats galore
From fair to farm: One family’s project expands to 100 goats

School lunch prices increasing in MPSD

New book details infamous Avery case

KNEE-HIGH BY THE FOURTH OF JULY?
Shoows affecting farm soils

This was one of my first pages at the design studio. I had a good sense of dominance and balance, but you can see a lack of headline hierarchy. Also, the centerpiece deck being centered causes some awkward white space. I was still trying to figure out how to arrange multiple pieces into a clean package.

After studying how some other designers used art bigger, I tried giving it a shot. I think the decision to put type on top of this photo was a good one, but I still constrained myself with a small headline and deck. Also, I didn’t do a good enough job of differentiating headline sizes and weights.
This sports page is just a headline mess. I did an awful job of differentiating headline sizes and weights, and there is no white space to help emphasize the centerpiece. There’s good balance to the centerpiece, but the art isn’t even interesting. I think I needed to assert my opinion more when designing pages like this.

Back on news (on the same day as the sports page), I started trying to mix up the style of my centerpiece headlines. The art is good, and there’s definitely good symmetry to the page. However, I could have easily given that CP more room. I still hadn’t learned how to truly make a CP standout and dominate the page visually.
At this point, I had moved over to designing sports pages only. It was a helpful transition because, in general, sports design allows for bigger art and bolder visuals. I tried to break out of the usual look I created, and I worked my centerpiece package around a big cutout. Another good aspect of sports design is the consistent availability of statistics. I designed a helpful breakout of this Packers player’s new contract information. Coupled with a pop-out on my CP photo, I think there are a lot of visual entry points to this package. I started thinking about creating those elements more and more.
Here, I finally went out and found my own art for a centerpiece. The story was a season preview, and the photos they gave me weren’t particularly spectacular. So I chose a general photo with space enough for a big headline, but one that could also be big and dynamic. I also was able to create a unique package on the top story with a cutout, a couple mugshots and some quotes.

Now I started to find ways to use bigger headlines and bigger photos. I can tell I started to understand how to break up heavy blocks of text. There’s a lot of information on the page, but I was able to separate elements enough to not make the text feel overwhelming.
Toward the end of my internship, I think I really started to understand how to make centerpieces standout. Seeing what my peers could do was a big part of that. Here, I was able to take so-so art and make it visually appealing. My understanding of headline hierarchy and dominance finally reached respectability, too.

On one of my last pages designed as an intern, I worked really hard to design a unique, helpful package. Tying together the big cutouts with a background was key, and the infobox at the bottom is another visual key for readers. There’s really good balance to the page, and the verticality of the CP really draws eyes in.
ANALYSIS

HOW EDITORS VIEW THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DESIGN STUDIOS

A survey distributed to nightly news editors at Gannett dailies shows they see studio designers as outsiders, but have noticed an improvement in the visual quality of their publications.

Editors at Gannett publications are pleased with the visual quality of their newspapers since the company began designing pages at regional studios. But that’s only part of the equation when assessing the effectiveness of Gannett’s design studios. Those same editors expressed concern about designers’ understanding of local news. If a designer works and lives in Des Moines, for example, can he or she truly design the best presentation of news for readers in Monroe, Louisiana?

In a survey distributed online to nightly news editors and copy editors at Gannett newspapers, participants were asked about how design quality, communication effectiveness and representation of local communities has changed since the introduction of regional design hubs in 2011. The survey was emailed to 210 editors across all of Gannett’s 82 daily newspapers and received a return rate of 31%. On the survey, participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of
certain qualities based on a Likert scale of 1 to 7. In addition, there was a space for editors to leave comments they wished to make.

Three research questions were tested in this study:

Do editors at Gannett daily newspapers rate the design quality of their daily print edition as being higher or lower since the introduction of regional design studios? How effective are the communication practices between editors and designers now compared to when pages were designed in-house? Do those editors think design studios are accurately portraying the communities of the newspapers they produce, considering factors such as the accuracy of headline wording, photo selection and story placement or hierarchy?

The intent of the study was to measure what kind of impact regional design studios are having on the newspaper industry. To help gain insight into that effect, the focus of the research was narrowed to look solely at Gannett newspapers because the researcher interned at a Gannett design studio. There are a handful of newspaper companies currently using design studios to produce their publications, but Gannett was the first business to implement this new type of resource on a large scale. The Society for News Design brought up some of the problems that naturally came up during Gannett’s preparation to outsource page designing duties to its regional studios. In interviewing Gannett’s vice president, Kate Marymont, SND asked about the
individuality of newspapers and the **possible effectiveness of communication** between newsrooms and designers.

Another issue that this study wanted to analyze was how the delocalization of production of newspapers’ print product might affect the strength of the local coverage. More specifically, the researcher wondered if designers in Gannett’s regional hubs might not use photographs and headlines the same way a local designer would because they might have little knowledge of the community for which they’d be helping create a newspaper. On top of that, this research thought it important to obtain editors’ opinions of the studios’ effectiveness. Similar research surrounding news design has tended to **focus on a designer’s perspective**. This study sought to understand how editors inside Gannett’s local newsrooms interpret changes they’ve witnessed with the implementation of design studios.

**Design quality**

When considering how much they personally value the overall design quality of their newspapers, editors rated themselves extremely favorably – a 6.46 average was the highest rating on the survey by a substantial margin. On the other hand, those same people rated how much their coworkers value design quite a bit lower (5.62).
When assessing how the actual design or visual quality of their newspaper has changed since regional studios began being utilized, Gannett editors responded favorably. A 5.08 rating means that, on average, editors think designers have improved the design quality of Gannett newspapers. Along the same line, editors rated the change in the overall look of their newspaper as having improved as well (5.46).

It would be one matter for a news designer or design editor to look at a Gannett publication before and after the use of regional studios and determine whether there has been a noticeable improvement in visual quality. It is a different matter altogether for nightly news editors and copy editors to rate an improvement in design quality. In the comments section, one participant noted that some newsroom employees have been designers in the past, but they “have been told in so many words that they have no say in how the presentation will
be.” It is true that a portion of Gannett editors have worked as page designers before. The company is not taking advantage of the strengths and skills of its employees if it ignores those editors’ concerns. However, the sites do maintain a lot of creative control over their papers, and editors are empowered to make judgment calls on whether a designer’s layout can work. According to Nathan Groepper, former creative director at the Des Moines studio, the amount of control varied from newsroom to newsroom.

Groepper was heavily involved in the process of getting Gannett’s studio up and running in Des Moines. He said the studio always communicated to the sites that newsrooms should have final say on their newspaper’s look and presentation, but that they should take advantage of designers’ skills:

“In Des Moines, we always preach ‘it’s your paper,’ which means the site should know what’s best for their readers and have final say. The studio encourages frequent and constant collaboration between the designers and newsrooms. The smart sites take advantage of the studio’s expertise in visual presentation and give designers the time and freedom to do good work. But some sites wanted tighter control and the studio allows for that, too.”
At Des Moines, there really is regular communication between the studio supervisors and the newsrooms, which they refer to as “sites.” The studio director, creative director and the team leaders at the Des Moines Design Studio speak with the newsrooms regularly, so there is an open line of communication. When newsroom employees notice wording, spelling or style mistakes, the studio designers hear about it. Even while designing on a nightly basis, the communication systems at Gannett encourage newsroom editors to voice concerns to the designers. That back-and-forth process happens every day with every newspaper. Perhaps the failure the survey commenter refers to is a failure on an individual level; a failure of one-on-one communication between designer and editor.

**Communication practices at Gannett**

Another important aspect of this research was judging the effectiveness of Gannett’s communication practices. Several issues were discussed as hurdles for the company: Advanced planning for pages; regular discussion before nightly news designing; the influence newsroom editors would cede or maintain on design matters; the frequency of nightly communication. The range of topics was narrowed slightly for the purpose of a shorter questionnaire. However, the final question on the survey asked for other comments. Going back to the same commenter as before, part of the response particularly pertained
to the topic of communication practices. Here is a slightly longer excerpt:

“Communication is poor, and people in the newsrooms who have been designers and have strong backgrounds in design have been told in so many words that they have no say in how the presentation will be. The studio we deal with is tone deaf to the newsroom and does not perceive it as anything other than a faceless client than an opportunity to work together on a product.”

The survey was anonymous, so it’s not clear which design studio this editor collaborates with. Maybe the perception of studios seeing newsrooms as faceless clients occurs because the two workplaces set out to achieve different goals. The Gannett design studios — which do not have websites — list their mission statement on the studios’ Facebook page:

“To produce bold and innovative newspaper and magazine design, and improve visual story telling throughout our properties.”
The Des Moines Register, which shares a building with the Des Moines Design Studio, lists a mission statement of its own online in an archived page from Nov. 2005:

“The Register strives to report the news objectively and to present our opinions clearly and vigorously. We are dedicated to progress and to Iowa.”

Those two Gannett properties coexist and thrive within the same building, but have two totally different missions. But those missions are not mutually exclusive. Just because the Register “strives to report the news objectively” does not mean they don’t care about newspaper design — and vice versa.

(Figure B.)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY QUESTION TOPIC</th>
<th>AVERAGE RATING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of discussion b/w editor and designer</td>
<td>5.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much influence editors have on design</td>
<td>5.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much influence editors should have on design</td>
<td>5.92</td>
</tr>
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<td>Gannett’s encouragement of discussions b/w editor and designer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality of communication at Gannett</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of Lync in daily discussions</td>
<td>4.58</td>
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One question on the survey asked participants how much Gannett encourages a conversation on design. While the response was generally favorable (4.67), it was not as high of a rating as other averages on communication topics. Editors were also asked how important they think it is to discuss a news story or package with designers before it is put together. On average, participants responded that it is important to have that discussion (5.46). However, there was also a clear disparity between how much influence editors feel they do have on design (5.08) versus how much influence they should have (5.92). If there’s any evidence of the communication failure the previously mentioned commenter talks about, this could be the strongest indicator. Based on their responses, you can see a pattern of how newsroom employees might feel out of the loop on the presentation of their newspaper.

Finally with communication practices, subjects were asked to rate the effectiveness of Microsoft Lync as a day-to-day messaging program, as well as the overarching quality of communication at Gannett. Editors rated both factors as being close to average, in their minds. The overall communication quality’s 3.92 rating is just below average on a scale of 1 to 7. The effectiveness of instant messaging communication using Microsoft Lync was slightly higher at 4.58. It’s hard to determine whether some editors rated Lync’s effectiveness
negatively based on technical problems or because instant messaging, in general, makes it hard to communicate properly with each other.

One thing studio supervisors at Des Moines talk about is how important phone conversations are between designers and editors. Often, misunderstandings occur when someone “reads into” the tone of a message of email. But messages inherently have no tone — the hurt feelings happen only because a designer or editor “reads into” it. That’s why Des Moines studio supervisors stress phone communication because it can eliminate those issues. However, it is ultimately up to the designer and editor he or she works with to talk on the phone before a nightly shift. It is not required of anyone, and many employees would rather just use Lync.

That being said, Groepper said Gannett outlined the three levels of best communication practices between designers and editors when the company was planning its regional studios. Lync would be used “for the daily back-and-forth on any questions or things that needed to be changed on the page.” Phone or Skype calls would be used for planning and urgent issues. Emailing would be needed “only for things like budgets or long lists of corrections.” Three years after Gannett opened the Des Moines studio, those practices are still encouraged.
**Representation of newspapers’ local communities**

This study’s third central question revolved around whether designers in regional studios could represent a newspaper’s community well enough despite having little or no knowledge of that community. In a few questions, editors were asked to judge how the quality of some design aspects has or has not changed since the introduction of regional studios. Interestingly, respondents have not found much of any change in these qualities over the past four years. Their ratings for headline wording, photo selection/placement and layout organization all hover around average.

One participant noted in the comments section that editors write the headlines, and designers have control only over the size and positioning of those headlines. This is certainly true in many cases. However, many designers at the Des Moines Design Studio offer suggestions for headlines, and sometimes even write their own – mostly for centerpieces or features pages. In addition, there are often situations where a designer wishes a headline to fit into a larger or smaller space, and then he or she can work with the newsroom editor to adjust the wording.
When asked if they think designers understand the importance of particular news for a newspaper’s community, editors rated the designers’ knowledge poorly – the 3.08 average was the lowest of any question asked. Two other questions about how much trust and confidence editors have in designers’ knowledge of their communities showed similar results. The fact that those particular ratings were amongst the lowest on the survey could be cause for concern. For designers, a common obstacle is learning about what is important to a specific newsroom site’s readership. For example, a sports designer must learn which professional sports teams the readership are most interested in, as well as which local colleges are important to them. That knowledge is pivotal in knowing which stories should be higher on the page, what wire stories to use from The Associated Press, and so on. Most, if not all, designers face that feeling out process in learning about the newspaper’s community.

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<th>SURVEY QUESTION TOPIC</th>
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<tr>
<td>Designers’ understanding of local news</td>
<td>3.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Editors’ trust in designers ability to represent community accurately</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in how effectively pages are designed for local community</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in quality of headline wording</td>
<td>3.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change in quality of photo selection/placement</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change in quality of organization of news packages</td>
<td>4.42</td>
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From the editors’ standpoint, their responses indicate designers need to spend more time focusing on these things. One problem for designers is that many of them work on multiple newspapers at once on a given night, and some are also designing advance work for more than one publication. Also, when design work is done in advance, it is possible for a news designer to illustrate a story in a manner which newsroom employees feel misconstrues a situation or issue. When close communication does not take place, designers and editors can form significantly different viewpoints on how best to visually represent a story. And forming a bond of trust with editors is one of a design studio employee’s most important tasks. The low survey results show not all designers are accomplishing that goal.

Groepper said the receptiveness to forming that bond of trust also varied from site to site. He noted that some newsrooms were enthusiastic about collaborating with the Des Moines studio while others were resistant to the change. To Groepper, the quality of relationships was dependent on the personalities of designers and editors. Part of his and other Gannett supervisors’ jobs was pairing designers with editors who got along with each other. The type personalities involved was a key aspect in cultivating newsroom-studio relations. Even still, the variation in sites’ receptiveness to what the studios try to do plays a huge role in the studios’ effectiveness.
Groepper says the sites generally trust designers to meet deadlines, “But they don’t completely trust the studio when it comes to news judgment and how that relates to presentation.”

Conclusions

It’s not easy to draw definitive conclusions from a short survey on this topic. Future research should perhaps consider interviewing as a method to gain more in-depth insight into editors’ views of design studios’ effects. The purpose of a survey was to make the findings generalizable to a larger group of newspaper editors, but being able to read editors’ explanations or personal experiences would add to our understanding of the current situation. With design studios having been a part of the newspaper industry for less than four years, we’re still learning about their impact on daily newspapers. It would also be enlightening for future research to ask some more questions. What kind of ownership do Gannett newsroom employees feel toward the paper they work for? Do editors, copy editors, reporters and photographers feel less in tune with their workplace now that regional studios hold much of the production power? Employees who feel less ownership or lesser involvement are probably less personally invested in the success or profit of their newspaper.

Another point of interest for future research would be to find out how Gannett dailies’ visual quality stacked up against other newspaper
competition prior to the implementation of studios. This could be done through interviewing or content analysis, and would provide a more solid base for understanding how design studios have or have not changed the company’s position within the industry in terms of visual quality. A study on Gannett’s current culture comes at an interesting time of tumult as well. With the company’s “restructuring” and “repositioning,” more newsroom staffs are being slimmed down, and more positions are opening up within the regional studios. Future research on design studios must keep track of a free-flowing situation within the newspaper industry.

In terms of measuring success, this study’s findings reveal varying results. On one hand, news editors rated a change in design and overall visual quality positively. With respect to a change in design quality since the introduction of regional studios, editors rated that change an average of 5.08 on a scale of 1 to 7. They rated the change in overall visual quality a 5.50. On the other hand, designers not being present in local newsrooms do seem to create a problem. Overall communication at Gannett was rated below average at 3.92, while Lync was viewed a little more positively at an average rating of 4.58. More notable is how highly newspaper editors rated the importance of a conversation about the design and layout of pages. A 5.46 rating indicates that newsroom employees think collaboration and discussion
is important, and their other responses about involvement in the design of their paper reflects that.

Equally concerning is the potential for a lack of trust and understanding to exist between editors and designers while working together. Kate Marymont noted in 2011 that it would be important for those two kinds of workers to establish trust. This study’s results suggest that editors think that trust may be lacking. Perhaps Gannett should provide some kind of training at the studios on how to effectively communicate with co-workers in newsrooms. If a huge part of designers’ and editors’ jobs is to establish trust and good partnerships with each other, why does the company not do more formal advising on how to approach that type of relationship? Another good idea might be to — before a designer’s first shift working on a certain publication — have the designer meet either face to face or over the phone with that newsroom’s editors. A short session where co-workers can get to know each other’s backgrounds and goals could help set employees on the right track.

Something else Marymont stated in her discussion with SND is that newsroom editors have the ability to view pages’ design throughout the process each night. That is true, and editors voice their concerns to studio designers when they notice an issue, whether that concern is about positioning, style or anything else. That’s why
Gannett relies so heavily on Lync, because instant messaging facilitates that conversation between designers and editors.

Lastly, the effectiveness of communication techniques at Gannett’s design studios, according to newsroom editors, is average. The drawbacks are clear: impersonal relationships, potential misunderstandings, and inconvenient or inconsistent modes of contacting people. That being said, editors responded favorably to the importance of discussing and working closely with studio employees on designing pages. While those news and copy editors expressed a desire to be even more involved, they do maintain a fair amount of influence on the creation of their pages. Impersonal interactions are unavoidable when cooperatively working with someone many miles away. However, positive and frequent communication between editors and designers might be essential in producing a newspaper that adheres to both visual and journalistic standards.
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APPENDIX

A. Original proposal

Introduction.

Two years ago — from the time I’m writing this proposal — I hardly had an inkling of what news design was. When I decided to attend the University of Missouri, I did so with the intention of receiving my Bachelor’s of Journalism and becoming a sports reporter. As an 18 year old, I knew I liked sports, and I knew I liked writing. It seemed a matter of common sense to pursue a career as a sports writer. However, after actually gaining reporting experience at the Columbia Missourian newspaper, I realized reporting just wasn’t for me. The next fall semester I decided to give the newspaper design class a try because that was the next step after copy editing at the Missourian. That semester at the Missourian print desk probably changed my life’s trajectory.

It was Nov. 3, 2012, when I came to a realization: News design is something I’m good at, and it’s a career I could become invested in. In the previous week, I had designed the news front the day after Hurricane Sandy hit the East Coast, designed a concept for a tease to election coverage in print, and designed the front page the night of the
presidential election. Right then I knew news design was a career path I wanted to follow and see what opportunities would open up for me. Since then, I have designed many pages for the Missourian, been an art director for both Vox and Tiger Kickoff, and been a teaching assistant for the Beginning Magazine Design class. My experience in all these different roles, as well as what I’ve learned in my classes at the journalism school, has more than prepared me for a career as a news designer.

In the past year and a half of coursework and professional work I’ve completed, I have crammed a great deal of learning into a short period of time. On a functional skills level, my continual practice with Adobe InDesign, Photoshop and Illustrator has greatly enhanced my practical abilities in designing. From a broader perspective, my coursework at MU has helped me understand how to tell stories with my designs. Anyone at MU will tell you that journalism, at its core, is storytelling — and news design is no different. My time here has taught me the importance of conceptualizing an approach to designing a package of stories, highlighting key elements, and unifying everything into one complete narrative design.

No one has been more instrumental in acclimating me to the finer points of design than Erica Mendez Babcock. She taught me from day one, and she’s never stopped being a patient, gracious, amazing
professor since my first steps in the design sequence. The night before I designed the front page during the presidential election, I had been in the emergency room twice in 12 hours for a little scare. I’ll never forget the help she gave me on that grueling, stressful night of work as I walked around with a heart monitor on and tried not to stress myself or anyone else out more than we already had to be. Without her, I almost certainly would not be pursuing a career in news design and working on this professional project to complete my master’s degree. I also would not be where I am today without the teaching and advice of Maggie Walter, Frank Russell and Laura Johnston, each of whom helped me grow into a level-headed, intelligent journalist.

This professional project will help me, and hopefully others, understand the field in which I am about to enter. My experience with design has been fantastic, but I still have so much to learn. It’s always funny to me how I become semi-good at something, and then I have that feeling like I am the absolute greatest at what I’m doing. It’s never too long afterward that I realize I actually have a long way to go still to be that good. I have a passion for news design, and my work this summer at the Gannett design studio and for this professional project will only increase my passion for and knowledge about the newspaper design industry. Newspaper publishing companies’ decisions to move design staffs out of newsrooms and into regional
hubs are part of an industry-changing process with implications that we still don’t fully understand. Hopefully this project will shed a little more light onto that process.

**Professional component.**

This summer, I will be interning at the Gannett design studio in Des Moines, Iowa as a page designer. At the studio, designers are most often assigned to a specific Gannett daily newspaper, and then he or she works solely on either features or sports front pages for the publication. After speaking with the design studio creative director, I’ll be working on the Wisconsin design team. I will be supervised directly by Sean McKeown-Young, the team leader for the Wisconsin team. I’m not yet sure which specific publication I’ll be designing for, however. The internship starts June 2 and goes through August 31. I’ll be working five days per week from either 12:30 PM–8:30 PM, or 2:30 PM–10:30 PM.

My direct supervisor will be Nathan Groepper, creative director at the Des Moines studio. He will be both my work supervisor and the person I’ll report to for this professional project. I will be starting the internship on June 2, and it will run through August 31. I am still unsure about the amount of hours I’ll be expected to work, but generally designers work eight-hour shifts at the Gannett design studio for five days per week.
My work designing pages for the Columbia Missourian, Tiger Kickoff and Vox will ensure that I can perform well at the design studio, and hopefully I will improve vastly over the summer as well. I know the creative director, Mr. Groepper, values strong storytelling in his designers, and that’s something I think I’ve been taught extraordinarily well how to do. Included in my final project report will be the news pages I design during my time at Gannett this summer. Those pages, as well my weekly field reports, will be the physical evidence needed for this project. In my field reports, I will detail what and how I designed pages that week, any new skills or information I learned, and how communication went with the newsroom staff at the newspaper I’ll be coordinating with.

**Analysis component.**

Research on design studios is sparse because the implementation of these central design hubs only happened about three years ago. At least one study has looked at job satisfaction for designers at design studios compared to those who work in traditional newsroom settings. Financially, the studios have been a success because of the decrease in production costs for companies such as Media General and the Tribune Co. Chicago Tribune editor Gerry Kern reported the Tribune Co.’s design and editing consolidation saved $8 million to $9 million. Media General reported a savings of around $1
million (Channick 2011). In 2011, Gannett Co. opened five regional newspaper design studios and received a mix of excitement and skepticism to the idea of centralizing design and editing (Berlin). Schallom pointed out that year that communication and relations between designers and other newsroom professionals such as reporters and editors has suffered, however (Schallom 4).

To date, no research has gone in depth at Gannett to determine whether the centralization of design and editing has been judged a success in terms of design quality. For instance, how do Gannett employees see the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the changes? Are editors satisfied or frustrated by communications with designers? Do they think design studios have had a positive or negative effect on their newspapers? This study will attempt to judge the success of the company’s design centers from the vantage point of editors at Gannett newspapers. The research will use survey responses from these editors to 1) Assess the effectiveness of Gannett’s new, central design hubs, 2) Look for trends in how editors assess effectiveness in terms of design quality, and 3) Define and assess the organizational effectiveness of Gannett after moving design teams out of newsrooms.

Despite no prior research on this particular topic, the researcher will offer hypotheses based on a couple factors. In July 2010, when Gannett was preparing to open their design studios, vice president for
news at the Gannett Company, Kate Marymont, spoke with the Society for News Design about the company’s design plans (Berlin Q&A). Marymont told SND that editors would still be heavily involved in the planning process with designers or “site specialists,” and that a point of focus for the company would be establishing effective communication channels between distant co-workers (Berlin Q&A). In a follow-up interview in December 2010, she described reaction to the company’s coming design centralization as “reserved optimism” (Berlin Following). Marymont also responded in July 2010 that Gannett hoped to preserve the individuality of each newspaper by assessing whether the company needed standardized fonts or cutline styles (Berlin Q&A). In the follow-up interview that same year, Marymont briefly stated that a team of designers “selected versatile fonts” to use for Gannett newspapers, and that individuality for each publication would be achieved by other means (Berlin Following).

Based on those words from Marymont, as well as the reported financial savings at other companies with newly implemented design studios, the researcher will test these hypotheses:

H1) Editors at Gannett newspapers will, on average, rate positively the attractiveness of the print publication after being designed at a design studio.
H2) Editors at Gannett newspapers will, on average, rate negatively the communication effectiveness between the newsroom and the design studio.

H3) Editors at Gannett newspapers will, on average, rate negatively the uniqueness of the print publication after being designed at a design studio.

The hypotheses will be tested based on the following research questions:

**RQ1**) Do editors at Gannett daily newspapers rate the functional design quality of their daily print edition as being higher or lower since the introduction of regional design studios?

**RQ2**) Do those editors think design studios are accurately portraying the communities of the newspapers they produce, considering factors such as the accuracy of headline wording, photo selection and story placement or hierarchy?

**RQ3**) How effective are the communication practices now compared to when pages were designed in traditional newsrooms between designers and the rest of newsroom staffs?

**Theoretical framework.**

Organizational effectiveness can be a difficult outcome to analyze. In 1983, Quinn and Rohrbaugh developed a competing values model to ascertaining the effectiveness of an organization’s structure.
The theoretical model they proposed contains four “quadrants” by which organizations can be differentiated and compared in terms of their approaches to success or effectiveness (Quinn 363). In brief, the four quadrants are the human relations model, the open system model, the internal process model and the rational goal model. The models are divided by three value dimensions: organizational focus, or whether the organization’s primary concerns are internal factors such as employee satisfaction or external factors such as the organization’s market position; organizational structure, or whether emphasis is placed on stability or flexibility; and finally, “organizational means and ends,” whether the organization more highly values planning processes or outcomes such as productivity (Quinn 369).

In looking at Gannett’s change in organizational structure resulting from the centralization of design and editing work, it is possible to use the Competing Values Framework to analyze the new structure of the organization. At the employee level, how do editors at Gannett newspapers perceive effectiveness, and how does design contribute to that measure? On a macro scale, do editors at Gannett publications stress the achievement of goals such as meeting deadlines and establishing effective communication channels, or do they value ends such as an increase in readership or winning awards? And in terms of design, do editors view effectiveness as an increase in the
quality or level of interest in news pages, or do they relate design effectiveness back to the communication processes in the organization?

In 2003, researcher Angel Barrio used the competing values framework to analyze the culture of the Ohio State University Extension. A questionnaire was distributed to over 800 university employees. Barrio found that the university “concentrates on internal maintenance with flexibility, concern for people, and sensitivity for customers” (Barrio). The organization’s focus on internal processes, Barrio determined, leads to a friendly workplace, high performance from employees and high morale (Barrio). In a previous study, a pair of researchers tested Quinn and Rohrbaugh’s competing values framework on two-year colleges. They found the organizational effectiveness was heavily affected by the missions of the colleges. Colleges with a singular mission were not as effective as those with multiple defined purposes (Smart 497).

News design is, in part, a communicative process where messages are sent from newspaper to reader (Ihlstrom 68). The competing values model, Quinn et al. wrote in a 1991 follow-up study, can also be used to assess presentational communication. Presentational communication, as described by Quinn et al. is the creation and distribution of messages that other members of a culture
have no direct interaction with the distributor. The meaning of the message is up for interpretation by the reader (Quinn et al. 224). This notion is not unlike journalistic messages, which are mediated and sometimes created by news designers (de Vries 19).

**Review of the literature.**

First and foremost, what is a design desk and what are they like in traditional newsrooms? In a 1994 study on how the popular establishment of design desks was affecting the newspaper industry, Auman defined the desks as consisting “of one or more people who design pages exclusively as a small department separate from other desks that gather the news or edit copy” (130). In Auman’s survey, newspaper editors responded that designers spent 50 percent of their time laying out the news pages, 15 percent paginating, and five to 10 percent performing other duties such as headline writing, photo editing or planning the page layouts (131). According to the study, most newsroom design desks were created between 1985 and 1992, with 54 percent being established in 1991 and 1992 (Auman 136). Auman asked editors at newspapers to assess the success of the design desks, and were grouped by their newspaper’s circulation size. As the circulation of the publication increased, so did the perceived success of the design desk (Auman 137).
In the newspaper industry at large, reporters and writers still predominantly garner the majority of recognition and respect. In a profession that has always and will always greatly value the printed word, those who produce the words gain the most accolades (de Vries 6). As a result, successful writers and editors are often given positions of power within newsrooms. With these types of journalists as editors-in-chief and publishers, the visual aspect of the newspaper isn’t always placed at a premium. Historically, designers in newsrooms have often been graphic artists with no particular journalistic background (Auman 130). However, as news design became more important in the late 1980s, trained news designers started having a profound effect on newspapers because they were learning how to make editorial decisions and use design communicate specific messages (de Vries 8).

Perhaps as a response to the continued increase of design importance in newsrooms, news designers are starting to play a larger role in the decision-making process of putting together a page. Consequently, leadership roles for print designers are leading to an increased focus on design at the country’s larger newspapers (de Vries 22).

News design has two main goals: To present the news in an appealing manner to readers, and to help the reader clearly interpret and understand the material (Click ). The key to studying news design
is to understand what the reader wants (Pasternack 30). Therefore, extensive research in the news design field has been done on reader preferences and behaviors. In 1986, Pasternack and Utt gauged readers’ opinion of three proposed newspaper layout styles: traditional, modular and modern. In the study, participants viewed 15 U.S. newspapers with a circulation of at least 100,000 and responded to questions of design appeal by rating the papers on a Likert semantic-differential scale. Pasternack and Utt found newspapers with “modern” design styles were rated higher than traditional and modular papers, specifically in terms of color (32). Subjects also preferred “modern” newspapers over traditional front pages overall. By contrast, readers also responded by rating the *Los Angeles Times* as the most favorable newspaper in general — a paper with a “traditional” design style (Pasternack 32). This led Pasternack and Utt to conclude that hard news must also be given importance on news fronts, and design should not trump what journalists do best: give the public the hard news (33).

The Society of Newspaper Design performed a study in 1989 that found daily newspapers use of infographics increased from 40 percent to 90 percent of issues between 1984 and 1988 (Pipps). The coal that stoked the fire in the 1980s for this upward trend in infographic use was *USA Today*. The newspaper became a hotbed for
discussion in the 80s by increasing the amount of visual content in print. USA Today’s influence on the newspaper industry was multi-faceted, but design-centric. Cooke attributes USA Today as creating three main design trends that still exist today: More entry points on news fronts, headline hierarchy and an increase in color and infographics (Cooke 159). With more entry points on news front pages, and more stories that jump to inside pages, the newspaper was able to tease to more content and provide greater accessibility to find news that pertained to individual readers.

With an organized headline hierarchy, USA Today was able to establish an order of importance for readers to understand what to read first and why. Changes in headline size and weight also keyed readers onto whether the story was hard news, soft news, or of greater or lesser importance (Bain). This is not unlike what online mass media research has found pertaining to newspapers’ website design. In 2004, Ihlstrom and Lundberg interviewed staffs of nine online Swedish publications and performed a content analysis of web design features (58). Their findings led Ihlstrom and Lundberg to recommend newspaper websites include navigation banners to allow easier access to stories for readers. The study also concluded readers desire the news organization to make value judgments on where to place stories in order of importance (Ihlstrom 70).
In a redux of their 1986 study, Utt and Pasternack’s research concurred with Cooke’s findings that there had been an increase in the number of stories featured on front pages. More stories and story teases on news fronts means greater accessibility for readers to navigate the print product and find the news they want to consume (Cooke 159). Utt and Pasternack also found that by 2003, 100 percent of newspapers were running all photographs in color — a marked increase from their 1986 study. “The mechanics of page layout have been replaced by the art of news design,” Utt and Pasternack wrote (49).

Siskind was on the forefront of research on reader preference in design. In 1979, he asked 84 study participants to rate newspaper front pages in terms of how appealing the paper’s design was. Siskind hoped to move the discourse surrounding news design past whether a page was designed “well” to whether readers actually found the page appealing. He thought that established design principles weren’t necessarily as important as attracting readers (Siskind 54). Siskind’s research actually concluded that readers rated contemporary news pages as “more informative and interesting” than traditionally designed pages. Interestingly, participants also rated well-designed pages better than poorly designed news pages based on those pre-
existing design principles (Siskind 61). Readers and designers seemed to be on the same page.

Of course, no conversation about the history of news design is complete without mentioning the effects computers and technology have had on the industry. When Adobe Illustrator and MacPaint arrived on the scene in the mid 1980s, the way newspapers approached design changed significantly (Drum 42). The computer programs soon decreased the amount of time news staffs spent laying out and designing the pages drastically. The emerging technology also eventually allowed a new generation of talented graphic artists to push the news design industry forward with higher skill in design techniques and presentation (Drum 44).

In a 1990 study, Craig went beyond the functional analysis of news design techniques and strategies. He hypothesized that design elements have certain meaning with them that readers subconsciously perceive (Craig 19). Infographics, for instance, not only add color to a news page and present an alternative story format to regular news content, but also communicate credible, scientific information. A graphic format conveys those messages of factual information and organization to readers (Craig 19). To Craig, all design elements have significant meaning. That is why news designers must be educated on
the subtext of news and design decisions so that messages can be communicated clearly and effectively.

As recently as 2013, research has been done on established design principles such as balance, contrast and unity. In a review of 47 research studies between 1904 and 2011, Kimball identified those three design concepts as being the most common (Kimball). Kimball also interviewed design professionals and students about the practical use of design principles outlined in mass media research. Subjects responded that they mostly use standardized design principles as guidelines rather than regulations (Kimball).

**Methodology.**

**Population.**

The subjects chosen for this study will be from an overall population of all editors at Gannett-owned daily newspaper publications in the United States. The Gannett Company owns 82 daily newspapers in the U.S., and five regional design hubs design pages for those publications. For the purpose of this study, a news design studio is defined as a single office, specifically staffed by print news designers, that produces pages for multiple daily newspapers.

**Sampling.**

This study will utilize purposive sampling, or convenience sampling. Nightly news editors will primarily be contacted for this
study because they are the individuals in charge of newsroom staff who typically work directly with news designers. The editors will be contacted by the researcher after obtaining a directory list of contact information from Gannett. Any news editor or managing editor at a Gannett daily newspaper who has held his or her current position since before the design studios were implemented will be eligible to be contacted for this research. According to Sinkowitz-Cochran, a 60 percent response rate to a survey sample is considered acceptable (Sinkowitz-Cochran 1160). Survey responses from editors whose tenure is short enough that he or she was hired after the relocation of news designers will not be included in the results of the study. A question on the survey will prompt editors to state the date on which they filled their current position. Convenience sampling methods will be used to ensure that subjects are only editors with direct control over or involvement with communication processes with design studio staff members. Because of this research method, the results of the study will not be generalizeable to the population (Sinkowitz-Cochran 1160).

*Survey design.*

The questionnaire for this study will be designed using SurveyMonkey.com, and editors who choose to participate will be administered the questionnaire online. After being presented with
some background information and purpose behind this research, editors will answer questions about the design attractiveness of their newspaper and the communication effectiveness between the newsroom and the design studio. Using a 7-point Likert scale, participants will rate their level of agreement with statements such as, “Has designing pages at a regional design studio increased the attractiveness of the newspaper at which you work?” with 1 being “Strongly Disagree” and 7 being “Strongly Agree.” Subjects will also be asked the circulation size of their newspaper, when they were hired at their current position, and to briefly describe their journalism background.

**Sample questions.**

1. On average, how attractive was your newspaper when the pages were designed in the publication’s newsroom?

2. On average, how attractive is your newspaper now that it is designed at a regional design studio?

3-4. (**Repeat question format for ratings of the quality of the newspaper, level of interest, satisfaction, readability, organization, boldness, modernity, etc.**)

5. How satisfied were you with communication between designers and the rest of newsroom staff when the pages were design in the newsroom?
6. How satisfied are you with communication between designers and the rest of newsroom staff now that pages are designed at a regional design studio?

**Publication Possibilities.**

The results of this research will be given to the University of Missouri School of Journalism for possible publication on the school’s website. The university includes all professional projects in its libraries that are performed by Missouri graduate students. Aside from that, this study could be published by the Society for News Design or in numerous journals, including but not limited to: American Journalism Review, Editor & Publisher, or New Media and Society.
B. Survey

For this research, 210 nightly news and copy editors from across Gannett’s 82 daily newspapers were contacted with this survey. Out of that pool of editors, 65 participated in the research by filling out the questionnaire for a response rate of about 31 percent.

Q1) How well do you think designers at Gannett regional design studios understand your community’s news? 3.08

Q2) How much do you trust the designers to best represent your newspaper’s community? 3.92

Q3) How confident are you that the pages designed for your newspaper accurately portray the news for your publication’s community? 4.38

Q4) Since the news pages have started being designed at regional studios, how has the quality of headline wording changed? 3.67

Q5) Since the news pages have started being designed at regional studios, how has the quality of photo selection and placement changed? 4.50

Q6) Since the news pages have started being designed at regional studios, how has the quality of organization of stories and news packages changed? For instance: Have you noticed a change in how much prominence soft news stories are given on the page in comparison to hard news stories? 4.42

Q7) How much do you value the overall design quality of your newspaper? 6.46
Q8) In general, how much do other newsroom editors value the overall design quality of your newspaper?
5.62

Q9) How has the design quality of your newspaper changed since the pages began being designed in regional studios?
5.08

Q10) Since the news pages have started being designed in regional studios, how would you rate the overall look of your newspaper?
5.50

Q11) How important do you think it is for you and the designer to discuss a story or news package before it is designed?
5.46

Q12) How much influence does the newsroom site have on how a story or news package is designed?
5.08

Q13) How much influence should the newsroom site have on how a story or news package is designed?
5.92

Q14) How much does Gannett encourage a conversation between editors and designers to decide how best to approach a story or news package?
4.67

Q15) How would you rate the quality of communication practices at Gannett?
3.92

Q16) How effective is instant messaging using Lync in encouraging good communication between editors and designers?
4.58

Q17) Please share any additional comments or concerns you have below. I would appreciate any and all thoughts you would be willing to share.

1. The design studio has resulted in increased inefficiency, and required as much work to be done on the desk as before with a
lower quality product. The studio that our three papers work with has been held in low regard, and often requests to work on things in advance are ignored. Communication is poor, and people in the newsrooms who have been designers and have strong backgrounds in design have been told in so many words that they have no say in how the presentation will be. The studio we deal with is tone deaf to the newsroom and does not perceive it as anything other than a faceless client than an opportunity to work together on a product.

2. Headline writing question needs to consider that designers don't write headlines or edit copy. Their impact is on how the heads are size, which can affect the content

3. I think the design studio has greatly improved the look of the daily newspaper and has infused much more creativity into the process. Sometime, though, the designers may be "off" in what we're trying to present. In most cases, talking it over between the editors and designers fixes the problem. In some cases, the designers are reluctant to change which can cause friction. There is also some disparity in the skill level of designers. Some are better than others.
C. Letter from supervisor

I will be fulfilling the role of Evaluator for Justin Brisson’s professional analysis project.

Justin will be a Design intern with the Gannett Des Moines Design Studio through the Summer, ending his Internship in late August and commencing on June 2, 2014. While he is here, he will be a directly designing live pages for Gannett’s Wisconsin properties, which includes ten daily newspapers (Appleton, Green Bay, Oshkosh, Sheboygan, Manitowoc, Fond du Lac, Wausau, Wisconsin Rapids, Marshfield and Stevens Point.) He will be responsible for working closely with editors to conceptualize and implement effective design solutions for News, Sports, Features and Business stories. Adherence to deadlines, communication and consistent design application on multiple pages are also key considerations. I will work with Justin on News design and layout as well as illustration and graphic design. Justin’s primary goal will be to create exciting designs that demand reader attention by producing engaging page layouts.

I am a 1995 Graduate of the University of Cincinnati with a B.S. in Graphic Design. I’ve been in the field of graphic and print design for over fourteen years. I currently direct the design and presentation of all of Gannett’s Wisconsin newspapers at the Gannett Design Studio in Des Moines, Iowa. Professionally, I’ve racked up an impressive series of wins with ‘Best of Gannett’ awards. I just won both First and Third place in the category of Page Design for 2013. In the I won four first place quarterly Best of Gannett Awards for 2013. I also won 2012 Best of Gannett Award for page design and the 2012 Wisconsin Newspaper Association Best Graphic Designer Award. I won the Ohio Society of Professional Journalists first place Award for Best Graphic Designer in 2008 and 2009, and won second place in 2010. I also won the Excellence in Journalism best page design award in 2009 and again in 2011. The Presidential coverage I art directed for the group was recognized favorably by the Poynter Institute and Charles Apple. Prior to my current position, I was Features Team Leader at the Gannett Design Studio in Louisville, Kentucky, Layout Editor at The Blade in Toledo, Ohio and Design Editor of the Toledo Free Press.

Please see my portfolio online at www.coroflot.com/sjmckeownyoung.

Thank you,

Sean McKeown-Young