

# AMPLIFYING EVERY VOICE

A student journalist's guide to  
diversity, equity, and inclusion in reporting

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# eq·ui·ty /ekwdē/

the quality of being fair and impartial, *noun*

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**E**quity, diversity, and inclusion have been buzzwords in academia, politics, community action, and media in recent years. Schools across the country, University of the Pacific included, have adjusted administration roles to include champions with the intention of introducing more fair practices to campus culture and teachings.

What does that mean for journalism students? A lot.

The premise of newspaper coverage has always been to cover “all the news that’s fit to print,” at least according to *The New York Times*, which still publishes the tagline on top of the newspaper daily. But who’s making the decisions about what should print? Are we truly covering the reading audience? Are we demanding strict objectivity from reporters when lived-experience is helpful to the narrative experience?

The field of journalism has two major problems as it looks to incorporate equity-based practices into business and coverage conversations:

- **Longstanding and often-noted lack of diversity in newsrooms:**

In Fall 2018, *Columbia Journalism Review* published a report outlining “Decades of Failure” on the part of newsrooms across the United States. It cited that despite a 1979 promise that by 2000 “the percentage of racial and ethnic minorities in the newsrooms would match that of the population at large” the charge had “failed spectacularly.” Instead, “racial and ethnic minorities” made up 40 percent of the United States population, yet accounted for “less than 17 percent of newsroom staff at print and online publications, and only 13 percent of newspaper leadership” (Arana, 2018).

- **‘Pandering’ to white readers based on narrowly-focused objectivity:**

In Summer 2020, the death of George Floyd was the central focus for many news organizations, particularly as the country reacted to Floyd’s death at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer. *The Los Angeles Times*, which “covered the protest movement aggressively and from a variety of angles” had concerns raised by reporters specifically about how the number of stories didn’t translate coverage equity. Instead, a Black reporter said the “newspaper had focused too squarely and too often on the question of looting.” Sonaiya Kelly, the reporter, said *The Times* “can’t constantly pander to our primarily white audiences with stories like this that affirm their biases” (Folkenflik, 2020).

# BUILDING AN EQUITY TOOLKIT

While the industry works to shift the tide, journalists of the future will no doubt be involved in conversations and actions to define equity in organizations where they will be employed. That can begin at San Joaquin Delta College. This guide acts as a conversation-starting document for student journalists to build a mental toolkit for introducing equity, diversity, and inclusion into their reporting, writing, and editing practices.

This guide will touch on five areas, all examining these concepts in our newsrooms and student-run media products.



## NEWSROOM DIVERSITY

Who we are, how we recruit, and why it's necessary to have a variety of voices in the newsroom are as important to the staff as they are to what we cover as news organizations.



## DYNAMICS OF POWER

Student media is student run. Student leadership in positions of power, including producers and editors, impact the flow of ideas and coverage.



## OBJECTIVITY

Long heralded as a cornerstone of journalism, the idea that reporters should be completely impartial is being challenged as lived-experience becomes part of reporting.



## DATA-INFORMED REPORTING

Knowing where we stand helps lead conversations. Equity data has become critical with how we look at populations, including Delta College students.



## AMPLIFYING EVERY VOICE

Principles of equity go beyond culture and skin color. We must include voices of women and LGBTQ+ individuals are part of our conversations and coverage.

At the end of this guide, you will given five questions — one from each area — to reflect on as you work to move from student-media content producer to a professional environment. These questions are meant to serve as reference points to continue to develop and refine your practices as a journalist.

## NEWSROOM DIVERSITY

It's easy to say we can't impact the diversity of the newsroom because it depends on open enrollment. The newspaper and radio station are active recruiting tools. If a student reads or hears their voice in publication or transmission, they're more likely to enroll in the course.

Gallup/Knight and Pew Center research indicates “Black and white news consumers’ often [have] divergent views of the news media and the kind of workforce diversity that the industry should pursue.”

While “Americans agree that newsrooms need to be diverse” they are split about what that looks like as “Blacks would like to see more racial diversity, while whites prefer more political diversity” (Gray, 2020).

The makeup of newsroom staff makes a difference in the coverage presented. Student journalists pitch their own stories, which are usually led by their own interests, life experiences, and cultural backgrounds.

A straight, Black male journalist will have differing views from a Latinx trans journalist. Both bring diversity to the table considering stories and coverage. The discussion to have with the staff is one about who is here, so we also know who is missing, to know who we need to work harder to cover.

For recruiting, this speaks to classroom experience as well. Some will excel in a journalism course, but struggle in English. Others will be highly scientific, but need help with explaining concepts in simple terms.

Differences allow us a broader scope of possibility for coverage.



### GUIDING QUESTION

How are we continuously working for inclusion and diversity on our staff and in our recruiting?

## DYNAMICS OF POWER

Leadership dictates coverage too. Editors and executive producers are often tracked out in sequenced-based classes. These leaders, though, need to be cognizant of who they are in the broader scope of equity.

While “racial and ethnic minorities are projected to overtake whites in America by 2045” the “lack of diversity is a matter of social fairness and of relevance.” The “value of diversity to journalism is not about skin color, gender, sexual orientation, or social class” it's instead “about the stories that people can tell” (Arana, 2018). Diversity helps shape content decisions.



### GUIDING QUESTION

How are the editors or producers within the classroom leading or changing the director of content conversations?

# OBJECTIVITY

Objectivity wasn't always a fundamental trait of journalism. In mass media history, newspapers started with a slant based on ownership or reporter opinion. Removing oneself and bias from a story only truly took hold as a practice in the 1920s "a wave of newspapers mergers and closings (which would continue for the rest of the century) meant each city had fewer papers, and the surviving papers had to appeal to a broader swath of the public." A newspaper displaying "overt partisanship in the news pages would alienate large parts of the target audience" (Pressman, 2018).

These tried-and-true methods, which originated when journalism was a white-male dominated field, may not be relevant to modern newswriting because "striving for objectivity has actually hindered us from adequately covering truth, giving context and achieving equity" (Baleria, 2020).

As journalists we need to consider:

- **Reporter's role:** We bring different lived experiences to our coverage. Who does a story can change how the story that is told. When considering who gets assigned what during pitching, attention should be on who will be the most effective reporter in the news-gathering process. Care should also be taken to not assign based on tokenism, i.e. assigning a reporter to cover a Chinese New Year Parade because the person is the Asian American.
- **Coverage diversity:** The newspaper staff makeup dictates coverage. If enrollment doesn't reflect the larger student body, story variety will be incomplete. That's why it's important to consider newsroom diversity, specifically who is left out of the room.
- **Conflicting interests:** Let's not be so quick to remove reporters with established interest or connection to a story. Additional or specialized knowledge may make a person "uniquely qualified to explore and contextualize" (Baleria, 2020).
- **Lifting the 'veil':** Philosopher John Rawls "Veil of Ignorance" recommends starting all stories from a position removing one's personal views. Rawls believed this was a way to help people "decide more fairly how rules of society should be structured" since "fairness is the essence of justice" ("Veil," n.d.). We have to lift the veil to truly tell the stories of marginalized populations.



## GUIDING QUESTION

Are we leaning too heavy on objectivity when we should be considering more the role of context in reporting?

# DATA-INFORMED REPORTING

We don't have to make decisions blind when it comes to equitable campus coverage. Delta and the California Community College system have data available that looks at campus populations, both broadly in terms of diversity and more specifically at classroom outcomes.

This data can help us pitch and report stories that truly cover the student body.

These information sources are valuable at helping us understand the college population we serve through student media:

- **Student Success Scorecard:** The California Community College system regularly updates Delta College's information here. While not a throughout view of the student population, it does provide easily-accessible breakdowns of gender, age, and ethnicity/race of the student population. The numbers may be a few years behind, but the information also looks at remedial population, transfer-level achievement for core math and English areas, completion metrics, and numbers pertaining to career-education enrollments. [bit.ly/deltascorecard](http://bit.ly/deltascorecard)
- **Delta College Data Dashboards:** A wealth of knowledge can be glommed through Delta College's public data site. While these areas may look as if only faculty and staff can use or understand them, anyone is privy to the information. The data available includes course enrollment numbers drilled down by race/ethnicity, examinations of student retainment, and transfer to four-year institutions. Not every story will have a need for this data, but a dive into it will give greater insight into Delta College. [bit.ly/deltadatadashboards](http://bit.ly/deltadatadashboards)
- **California Community Colleges Student Success Metrics:** This data collection allows for analysis of district and college-specific attributes, as well as micro, macro, and statewide information. While similar information is presented within Delta's Data Dashboards, the advantage of this website is that student reporters can compare Delta's student population with schools in the area and across the state. Drill down options also include gender, age, LGBT, First Generation, Foster Youth, Disabled, Veterans, Credit ESL classes, and differentiation by financial aid types. This data can aid in story-idea generation for under-served campus populations. [bit.ly/ccstudentsuccess](http://bit.ly/ccstudentsuccess)



## GUIDING QUESTION

How can data-inform reporting help us cover our campus through an equitable lens?

# AMPLIFYING EVERY VOICE

If the charge of student media is to cover the campus, how can we ensure we are doing so? It starts with knowing who we are and knowing who we aren't. While the staff may never represent the campus community fully, understanding the voices we lack is essential to inclusive storytelling.

Let's consider the following as we work toward reflective coverage:

- **Knowing ourselves:** The identity of newsroom staff informs the stories we choose and how we report. None of us are the same, so we won't come to stories with the same ideas or questions. Let's acknowledge that and work to understand how the way we report changes the narrative. This includes acknowledging how students in leadership roles can influence coverage.
- **Understanding biases:** Objectivity remains important, but so does lived experience. Having a background or connections to a story topic may not be a bad thing. Experiences may better inform content.
- **Writing the margins:** Equity of voices goes beyond fairness in race/ethnicity reporting. We need to consider other marginalized communities, including our LGBT student population, women in certain fields, men in female-dominated programs, and disabled students.
- **Going beyond theme:** Black students shouldn't get the bulk of coverage during Black History Month. Hispanic students, which is the largest student population at Delta, should not be highlighted only in DREAM Act stories. Tokenism is not an equitable solution.
- **Evaluating our coverage:** Equity, diversity, and inclusion aren't one-issue considerations. We should be constantly thinking about our coverage. Since 2018, *The Daily Northwestern* at Northwestern University has published a diversity report created from an internal staff survey. It includes a breakdown of staff ethnicities, languages spoken, gender and sexuality reports. It found that the newspaper's "predominantly white, cis, straight, abled staff [could] hurt" the paper's coverage. The report also acknowledged "hesitation" to "cover communities" reporters "did not belong to" for "fear of not doing those communities justice." That led to asking how staff members could build "relationships within those communities" ("The Daily," 2020). Our newsrooms could do something similar each year.



## GUIDING QUESTIONS

Who are we covering well? Why? Who do we need to work to cover better? And how can we do so?



# GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT JOURNALISTS

Now it's time to put your toolkit to work. As you navigate through your media assignments this semester, consider the questions at the end of each area and how staff makeup, leadership, subjective objectivity, data-driven reporting, and constant evaluation of coverage can help shape Delta College's student media to truly reflect the campus population and the issues that relate to students the most.



Keep asking these questions as you continue to build your equity toolkit:

- How are we continuously working for inclusion and diversity on our staff and in our recruiting?
- How are the editors or producers within the classroom leading or changing the director of content conversations?
- Are we leaning too heavy on objectivity when we should be considering more the role of context in reporting?
- How can data-inform reporting help us cover our campus through an equitable lens?
- Who are we covering well? Why? Who do we need to work to cover better? And how can we do so?

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