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# Journalists talk to Bucks County Community College students about state of the profession

By Chris English, staff writer 16 hrs ago



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Anthony DiMattia, production desk editor for Calkins Media, speaks about his experience as both a reporter and a production desk editor during a journalism forum at Bucks County Community College in Newtown Township on Tuesday, April 18, 2017.

There will always be a value for well-crafted newspaper stories and the people who write them, several area journalists told students at Bucks County Community College in Newtown Township Tuesday.

"Absolutely not," said Intelligencer staff writer Freda Savana when asked by a student whether newspapers are a dying field.

"No doubt it's taken a hit," she continued. "But I think the election of Donald Trump has given a breath of fresh air to the need for in-depth, quality and reliable journalism. I'm talking about print. I think television pulls much of what they do from print journalism."

As a print journalist for 30 years, 18 of them with The Intelligencer, Savana said she, like others in the industry, has had to adapt to getting content out to readers and viewers online and through other digital means.

Still, the six journalists who participated in two forums Tuesday organized by BCCC journalism professor Tony Rogers all said they couldn't see actual printed newspapers disappearing anytime soon.

"You always hear people say it's going away but I feel it's going to be here another 50 years," said Richard Conte, an editor at Dow Jones & Co. Inc., the firm that publishes the Wall Street Journal.

"There's something about a printed piece of paper," he continued. "To me, and I think lots of others, it's a good feeling to hold that paper in my hands."

Others participating in Tuesday's forums were [LevittownNow.com](#) editor, publisher and reporter Tom Sofield, WBCB 1490 AM (Bristol Township) news director Charlotte Reese, Bucks County Courier Times production desk editor and former staff writer Anthony DiMattia and Intelligencer staff writer Michele Haddon.

Sofield, Reese, DiMattia and Haddon are all former BCCC journalism students.

"I thought it brought a real fresh and immediate perspective to the students to bring in people who not long ago were sitting where they are sitting," said Rogers. "These are journalists who came through this program and are now out there working in the field. I think that gives the students a real sense that this is doable, that it's not just some pie in the sky thing."

The journalists talked about their careers, situations they've faced and answered many questions from the students, most of whom are journalism or communications majors.

While students attending said they were encouraged by talking to working journalists, signs in the industry seem to be rather mixed but better since the recession of 2008 and 2009.

According to Pew Research Center, 65 percent of those who held bachelor's degrees in journalism or mass communications in 2013 found full-time work six to eight months after graduation — a slight decrease from the 65.6 percent who did the same the year before and the first decline since 2009 when the recession was at its peak.

The number of journalism majors at BCCC has fallen by 37 in the last 10 years, from 72 in 2007 to 35 this year. Students majoring in communication studies has dropped by 13, from 129 in 2007 to 116 this year.

Journalists told the students not to expect to get rich in the profession, and to be willing to accept things like internships for no pay as a way to break into the field.

"Just write as much as you can and work as hard as you can," said DiMattia.

No two days are ever exactly the same for a journalist, said Haddon.

"On one day, I might be talking to people very much in the public eye and the next I'm talking to people who are nearly invisible, and bringing their stories to light," she said. "You can kind of make the job what you want. You get assigned stories by editors, but you can also go after your own stories."

Added Sofield: "I've covered a school board meeting one night and a triple homicide the next day. I've been up in a hot air balloon, which is something I'd never do if it weren't for the job because I'm afraid of heights."

Writing is a laborious and taxing but ultimately rewarding process, Haddon added.

"We all hate writing," she said. "It's having written, seeing that end result, that we enjoy."

Sofield said he's always interested in seeing what viewers of his website like to read.

"Everyone in surveys say they like good news, but you can write that kind of story from a school board meeting and it won't get nearly as many views as when you drive by an accident and snap a picture," he said. "Everyone wants to know why their road was closed, or why the police or fire trucks were going by their house. So we use that kind of thing to draw people in so they will also read the school board story."

Some students asked how the journalists retain their composure and objectivity when covering something tragic.

"I just tell myself that I can feel this later, right now I have a job to do," said Haddon. "On the other hand, if you show up super business-y and matter of fact, you're going to look like a jerk. You have to be human."

Students who attended Tuesday's sessions said they got a lot out of the journalists.

"It gave me a sense of the things I would be doing, what the workplace and hours are like," said Jocelyn Pappas of Warrington. "So much original news content comes from newspapers. It gets recycled online, but it still all goes back to reporters and investigators and all those print journalism jobs. I still think there is a huge place for that."

Rowan Haldeman of Perkasio said she is interested in pursuing a career in sports broadcasting and talking with the journalists encouraged her to seek an internship with Reese at WBCB.

"Their advice was very motivating, which I need because sometimes I give up too easily," said Haldeman.

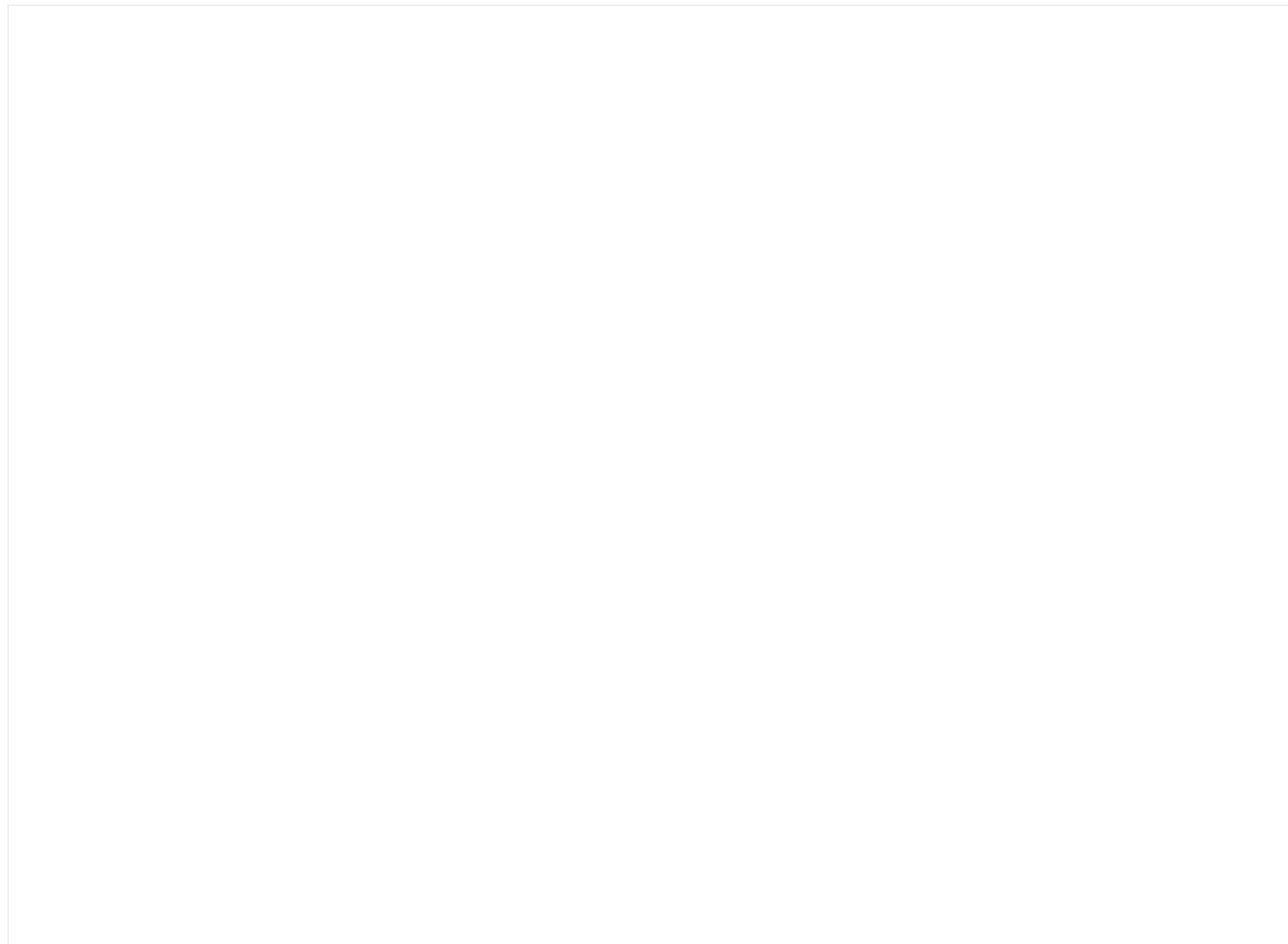
Rogers said he and other journalism instructors at BCCC have added video and other digital components to their classes but there still is no ignoring the basics of journalism.

"A lot of these kids can take a video editing class and pick it up fairly quickly but learning how to write a good lead or get a good quote is much more challenging for them," he said. "I'm old school in that I believe you learn the fundamentals first and when that's done, we can add these other things."

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