“The Hoof” Satire Column:
Humorous Critiques for Student News Engagement

A Senior Project

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By

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ABSTRACT

The following study investigates how to develop and maintain a satire column within a university newspaper in order to increase news-related engagement within a student body. The changes within the media are growing exponentially and the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly) student who developed “The Hoof” saw the need for satirical content created by students, for students. The column’s focus was to create and publish entertaining and informative articles concerning Cal Poly-related issues. With scholarly research, the intent of the column aims to mimic the style of well-known satirists and follow the principles of public journalism, in an effort to captivate college students. This paper addresses the need for public journalism’s values to be administered through current satirical mediums in order to support the general public. The importance of localizing humor within a satire column is addressed, and explained are the issues that may arise with a lack of public understanding of satire’s form and the generational divide of news. There is a focus on properly educating the student body on the column’s mission to effectively entertain its readers.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Chapter 1

- Introduction .......................................................................................6
- Statement of the Problem .................................................................6
- Background of the Problem ..............................................................7
- Purpose of the Study .........................................................................8
- Setting for the Study .........................................................................9
- Research Questions ...........................................................................9
- Definition of Terms ..........................................................................10
- Organization of Terms .....................................................................11

## Chapter 2

- Literature Review ...........................................................................12
  - Journalism and its Evolving Role .................................................12
  - Satire and the News Media ............................................................14
  - Younger Demographics’ Consumption of News and Satirical News ....16

## Chapter 3

- Methodology ....................................................................................19
- Data Sources ....................................................................................19
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. “The Hoof” workshop email………………………………..36

Figure 2. “The Hoof” workshop Facebook event………………………36

Figure 3. “The Hoof” workshop presentation slides……………………37

Figure 4. “The Hoof” webpage on Mustang News’ website……………38

Figure 5. “The Hoof” article: Seven Way to Interpret Cal Poly’s New Logo…..38
Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Today’s college students grew up in a world where the names of the comedians such as “Jon Stewart” and “Stephen Colbert” are synonymous with news anchors. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (1999 - 2015) and *The Colbert Report* (2005 - 2014) were satirical programs focused on the politics of the day, mimicking broadcast news shows, such as Colbert’s show, which specifically parodied those from FOX News (Jones, 2010, p. 278). The growing association between satire and journalism is a phenomenon noticed by many, regardless of political party affiliation. During an interview Jon Stewart spoke of this shift, stating, “I have not moved out of the comedian’s box into the news box. The news box is moving towards me,” (Jones, 2010, p. 278). Meanwhile, news is constantly fed to citizens through network television, newspapers’ online and print editions, and social media sites including Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. These varying forms have permitted the form of news to broaden, thus satirical versions have flourished. Due to the ease of accessibility in the digital age, young people can focus on what they want to consume from the news media more than ever before, especially those who are college-educated. Studies have shown the “…audiences for political satire programs like *The Daily Show* (which are dominated by young viewers) to retain high levels of knowledge and political sophistication,” (Holbert, 2013, p. 175). Meanwhile, university students studying journalism are taught an ever-changing curriculum as technology progresses, ex: social media etiquette, visual communication techniques, etc. Therefore, students should be exposed to satire to ensure a comprehensive knowledge of the news media landscape.

“The Hoof”, the first satirical column in Mustang News, Cal Poly’s student-run online and print newspaper, introduces and familiarizes the university’s students with satirical
journalism and the unique way it informs its readership. The content of the column centers around the Cal Poly climate and the current issues of the day that the students are discussing. This niche subject matter is intended to create a mutual understanding between the writer/informer of the topic with the readers/consumers of the topic, solidifying the joke and intent of the piece. The consistent publication of the column by students studying the more recent forms of journalism will ensure the satirical articles circulate around the campus, gain attention and foster conversations about the campus climate.

Background of the Problem

Today’s journalism suffers greatly from the bad reputation due to the rise of “fake news”, network television prioritizing profit and political party affiliation creating a theme of bias in an industry that was originally intended to be a neutral voice. This has created an immense level of distrust between the general public and the world of journalists. In response to this trend, a 2013 study showed that, “…the largest issue facing democracy today, and the one that Stewart and Colbert most effectively stress, is the news media themselves...Stewart and Colbert’s ironic and humorous antagonism with the press, and their position within the same system, serves a democratic function we are only now beginning to understand,” (Faina, 2013, p. 553). Satire provides its writers with the tools to critique through a humorous lens, one that can be more easily received when reporting on more formidable topics.

Student journalism is the training ground for the next generation of journalists and a practical approach to educate them on new modes of news reporting. Therefore, to enhance the future of journalism they need to be educated on this method of auditing bias in their field. Familiarizing student readers and those in the newsroom with satire will make them comfortable with its use and how it can be utilized to strengthen a point. A satirical column focusing on the students’ specific life generates a stronger level of trust as well. It offers
information surrounding a topic that the student body is familiar with and ‘lets them in on the joke’ to bring comfort while reading a different style of writing and increases their media efficacy.

**Purpose of the Study**

Satire is evident in more and more areas of the media as technology expands. Although *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* have ended their runs on television, they have continued to inspire similar content, with the current host of *The Daily Show* transitioning to the comedian, Trevor Noah. Meanwhile, more satire has become popularized online and in print editions with: *The Onion* and *The New Yorker’s* “Shouts and Murmurs” pieces. It has also extended to universities and continued reinventions of the historical satirical magazine, *The Harvard Lampoon*. This questions how these publications are holding those in power accountable, just as public journalism intends to do. The main objective should be reaching a large audience, keeping up with mainstream conversations and continuously creating content to familiarize new consumers.

The purpose of studying a satire column’s effect on a college campus is to educate readers and satirists alike on satire’s influence within the news-reporting world. One can use the information gathered to indicate any generational differences of humor, the ways to reach student readers and content choices to raise awareness of injustice on campus. In conducting research in readership statistics for a student newspaper, it is vital to discover a tactic that models an accurate approach in effective satirizing and promotes readership. Therefore, studying tactics and strategies to create a successful satire column and method of journalism will raise awareness to college students, parents of college students, university alumni members, and journalism professors.

**Setting for the Study**
This study will be completed with the use of data collection, implementation of satirical workshops and the creation of a weekly satirical column at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo as a senior project. The weekly satirical column, entitled, “The Hoof” is published through the university’s newspaper, Mustang News, under the “Opinion” section. The columns are accessible through the online and print editions of Mustang News. The Cal Poly student body is targeted as the main audience for readship and will be recruited to write for the column as well. Cal Poly alumni and the community of San Luis Obispo will also be a portion of “The Hoof’s” audience due to the Mustang News’ print circulation, online following and social media presence. The Mustang News photography and graphics team will be contributing visual components to the column, at the request of each individual writer.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to develop a description of requirements for a successful, long-lasting satire column on Cal Poly’s campus that benefits the students’ consumption of news. The research questions were devised to obtain the best methods in satirical writing, workshop activities, and marketing in order for the audience to read and participate in a satirical column geared toward the Cal Poly community.

1. How do you increase awareness of the impact of satire on a college campus?
2. How do you attract new contributors to a satire column on a college campus?
3. What are specific topics and styles that resonate with readers?
4. How effective is a student-run satire column in raising awareness of more controversial topics related to the students’ specific college campus?
5. How does one formulate an effective workshop curriculum to ensure the same quality of content for the satire column?

Definition of Terms

The terms given below are presented to the reader to clarify recurring topics of the study and aid in the understanding of satirical journalism.

**Punching Up:** A tactic utilized in comedy to target a person who is privileged or entitled, rather than a person who is in a minority group and/or holds no power (Schwartz, 2016).

**Satire:** A poem or (in later use) a novel, film, or other work of art which uses humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary (Satire).

**Mustang Media Group:** The integrated student-run media organization at Cal Poly, including Mustang News newspaper and KCPR radio station. When formed in 2013, it became the first program of its kind in the California State University system, bringing the student newspaper, TV studio, radio station, public relations agency, and business operations under one umbrella and providing students with the type of environment that has become standard in today’s media industry (About).

“The Hoof”: Founded in May 2019, the weekly satirical column of Mustang News, run under its “Opinion” section. The column focuses on student life at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.
Organization of Study

Chapter 1 includes a background of the study, a purpose of the study, and a definition of terms related to the academic study. Chapter 2 will determine the effectiveness and tactics in developing and maintaining a satire column that engages a college student readership toward topical stories. This will be done by reviewing scholarly literature, reputable news sources and world-renown reference works, regarding the topic. Chapter 3 will focus on the methodology of how the study is carried out. Chapter 4 will measure the impact of the satire column by presenting student feedback, overall readship, and the correlation of the satire pieces and other Mustang News’ stories. This data will be analyzed and interpreted with the findings in the review literature of Chapter 2. Chapter 5 will summarize the end of the study and include recommendations for future journalists, on the development of a student-led satire column to keep the university student body informed on news-related topics that pertain to them.

Chapter 2

Literature Review
The review of the literature outlines the use of satire to effectively educate college students on the role it plays in modern journalism to heighten the community's awareness of the university's social climate.

**Journalism and its Evolving Role**

Just as journalism has significantly adjusted itself with its use of technology, its tolerance of bias has altered as well. From its inception, the idea of civic or public journalism, as it is sometimes referred, was to acknowledge the role journalists play to “…emphasize the citizen’s ability to act and to encourage self-government, thereby connecting the journalists and the audiences they report for” (Faina, 2013, p. 542). By properly applying certain principles, journalists can assume they have the ability to captivate more readers on the issues they are reporting on, due to a higher level of trust within a more engaged public life. It is this cycle that public journalism aims to achieve. The first principle of public journalists is ensuring their values are not tied specifically to political party affiliations and ideologies (Faina, 2013, p. 543). The second principle asks journalists to focus on targeting the real problem of any issue to ensure a focused story that does not confuse readers, while informing them on how the core problem can affect them. The third principle of public journalism concerns the framing of the story. “Conflict and political fallout is one way of framing a story, but journalists truly engaged in restarting public life should search for ways in which an issue can be framed to highlight issues for those whom it will affect most,” (Faina, 2013, p. 544). The combination of these three principles: the impartiality, the focus on injustice against the people and the framing of how it will affect the people, altogether ensure a well-informed public. Therefore, they become a more engaged group of citizens.
However, the past twenty years have seen a large shift in the public discourse due to technological advances and journalism’s methods of utilizing them. The 24-hour news cycle, the boom of the internet and social media’s rise have not only increased the ways in which the public gets its news, it has also increased the people’s demand for content. This increase in demand is not congruent with the general supply, without sacrificing the values of public journalism. “Now, the boundaries that once shaped television news—between fact and opinion, public service and private profit, information and entertainment—are deeply obscured. Most news has become a product packaged to sell, its interests resting far more with attracting audiences and protecting corporate priorities than in the older mission of informing the citizenry and holding power accountable,” (Jones, 2010, p. 280). Therefore, bias is more likely to permeate into the news outlets, pleasing the network executives and helping compete with other media outlets. Meanwhile, the news can become even more misconstrued when distributed to the public through social media. A 2010 study from Pew found that 37 percent of internet users have become more participatory in the dissemination of news via social media outlets, such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc (Faina, 2013, p. 546). These outlets allow for information at a faster pace, requiring news outlets to compete. This results in the sacrifice of the outlets’ integrity in their storytelling as they do not fact-check enough background information. Ultimately, public journalism in its past and present forms still aims to engage individuals in an enriching manner, despite its ever-changing content.

Satire and the News Media
Humor’s form often mimics journalism’s as both are often critical and analytical of society. Two forms of humor, parody and satire, contribute and compliment journalism as they are both strategies that tackle the status quo of society. However, while parody utilizes mimicry and imitation, the form it takes in the media often aims to educate the public on national and international politics, which overlaps into the realm of satire. Together, they can be powerful ‘media literacy educators. To satirize political discourse, “is to scrutinize and therefore to encourage one’s audience to scrutinize as well,” (Faina, 2013, p. 549). However, this is not intended to incite a large population of negative people within a society. Studies on satire have existed since Ancient Grecian times, in which philosophers argued then and to this day, that cynicism is not a notion of detachment, smugness, nor a lack of commitment. Rather, cynicism is a proactive protest against and objection to corruption, self-interest, luxury, hypocrisy, and insincerity that so easily infects and dominates those in power (Jones, 2010, p. 282). The word ‘satire’ even suggests a more complex form. The word comes from the Latin term ‘satura’, which translates to "a mixed dish". This reflects any number of different balances and combinations of rhetorical argumentation and narrative storytelling (Holbert, 2013, p.171).

Certain comedians/satirists have blurred the lines between satire and public journalism due to the topics they address in their various media forms. These individuals, such as Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, on their satirical political shows, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* respectively, have seen the connection between these two styles. A major reason for the popularity of their shows is their writers’ abilities and their performative presentation that frames important political and social issues in ways that are similar to how individual viewers discuss them in their own lives. Political satire, the focus of their shows, is a powerful format because making jokes and humorous remarks about politics is how individuals often engage politically with each other, through playful banter, judgemental remarks and aggressive comments, (Faina, 2013, p. 551). The dialogue between the
satirical host and audience member creates a deeper discussion about a debated political topic, while also establishing a relationship, a similar phenomenon that happens between stand-up comedians and their audiences.

Meanwhile, the broadcast news of today greatly differs from the public dialogue. A large issue facing democracy, one that Stewart and Colbert most effectively stress, is the news media itself, which operates from a top-down, consolidated model of network elites. Stewart and Colbert’s constant ironic and humorous antagonism with the press, and their position within the same system, serves a democratic function, one of public journalism. They do this through laughter, which also has the ability to engage citizens and may increase participation and allows them to make more informed decisions. If two comedians, who ultimately give us tools to become better consumers of news and foster a renewed sense of interest in the public life, influence those decisions then perhaps classifying them as ‘America’s Anchors’ is not so misguided (Faina, 2013, p. 553). Even the style of their satirical shows demonstrate their understanding of news’ transition to biased storytelling. Both hosts utilize “correspondents”, use visual aids and have sets with similar furniture pieces and color schemes as network television shows. Colbert’s persona on The Colbert Report specifically mimics FOX News anchors. This postmodern irony does not aim to get viewers to turn off the television and be ashamed of the other news they consume, but to entertain them. “It encourages audiences to stay tuned and be consumers of all cultural products, while reassuring us with a wink that we are in on and somehow superior to the giant joke that is being played on the nation,” (Colletta, 2009, p. 857).

Satirists’ informative methods are bipartisan and critique all those abusing power. Stephen Colbert “… submits both “liberal” and “conservative” guests to the same ironic treatment,” (Colletta, 2009, p. 860). Studies have shown viewers consistently found Colbert “funny” despite any ideological differences. From a public journalism standpoint, this is a
benefit to civic engagement. If one of the main goals of public journalism is to foster increased engagement with the press, then the use of humor provides such potential. There is also empirical support for the claim that greater complexity in the type of humor, with parody and satire being the most complex, leads to more persuasive messages (Faina, 2013, p. 554). The content provided by Stewart and Colbert is a discursive resource, a means by which many of us can share information and articulate our own political stances in a language more engaging and powerful than what we may otherwise be capable of ourselves (Jones, 2010, p. 284). It could be an understanding of news’ complex stories that impacts viewers, going beyond party lines and class differences.

Younger Demographics’ Consumption of News and Satirical News

The vast majority of satirical works offered on programs like The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, Saturday Night Live, and various late-night talk shows utilizing satire and parody, (e.g., Conan O'Brien, Samantha Bee, John Oliver, etc) are well-received by younger audiences. Just as younger members of society have grown up with the vast news circuit, they have also been exposed to its satirical cousin. They are much more familiar with the varying modes in which to access it as well with the Web, social media, and streaming services on the rise for the past couple of decades.

Satire plays both defense and offense; therefore, satire and irony has, in some ways, become a generational language. Whether it is the popularity of Stewart and Colbert, or the rash of satiric and ironic yet earnest and sincere online videos advocating political engagement during the 2008 presidential campaign, we see young people engaged with public affairs, earlier and earlier, just not through the same language and media of their parents. Baby Boomers were a generation whose language was idealistic, influenced by the
outlook of the 1950’s, and often evolved to the point of naïveté. Perhaps satire and irony has become a language through which young people are able to play both defense and offense, to attack the political world the Boomer generation has created—one dominated by lies and fakery offered up by political agents such as Donald Trump, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Karl Rove, and Roger Ailes—but doing so in a way that disguises their earnest and solemn desire for truth (Jones, 2010, p. 283). The truth the more recent generations desire is not as easily accessible through the’ news sources of their parents. Therefore, satirists speak to the future voters, politicians and journalists, who want to improve the nation currently run by the older generations.

A 2016 Pew Research Center survey reported, “The 18-29-year old demographic received their news on the presidential election more from late-night comedy than network nightly newscasts and local print newspapers combined,” (Gottfried). These numbers steer the money away from the news network and print elite, who are a part of conglomerates who exercise their influence over the news that gets published. However, it is clear that young voters do not believe political satire to be news. Indeed, consumers of political satire appear to have some clear perceptions regarding the purpose of the material. Audiences for political satire programs like *The Daily Show* and readers of *The New Yorker* column, “Shouts and Murmurs”, retain high levels of knowledge and political sophistication. Several scholars have noted that audiences for political entertainment are highly engaged *aficionados* of the material they are consuming; the addition of a college education increases those statistics. Political satire’s *modus operandi* is the presentation of human folly in order to shape people’s impressions of the objects being satirized (e.g., politicians, governments, political parties). As a result, the core consumers of political satire having a firm grasp of this material, young voters will register high levels of perceived persuasive intent in association with consuming
political satire (Holbert, 2013, p. 177). This is the exact same aim of public journalism with its core principles in use.

Chapter 3

Methodology
This chapter will cover the methods of data collection containing data sources, the collection and presentation of the information studied, and delimitations of determining the column’s reach and effectiveness.

**Data Sources**

For this study, participants contribute to the analytics numbers of readership taken by *Mustang News* throughout the school year. The topics of stories will be analyzed to discover which is most discussed and popular to attract Cal Poly students reading the column online and in print. Every article, writer’s workshop and related graphical piece will be evaluated using the original research questions of the study in order to find the most effective strategies to develop a permanent satirical column in *Mustang News*.

**Participants**

The participants for this study’s analytics come from various targeted audiences. The core of readers will be composed of a majority of Cal Poly students, which are labeled as “Generation Z”, from the ages of 18 to 25 years old. With the university’s faculty and staff, many recent Cal Poly alumni and Cal Poly family members also adding to the *Mustang News* readership, the column also reaches their demographic, defined as Generation Y through Baby Boomers, from ages 26 to about 75 years old. The greater community of San Luis Obispo will be another target audience for participants, which will provide a random addition of various ages.

**Survey Design**
The survey design will be based on a familiar Likert scale that is rated from 1 through 5. The participants circle the number they attribute most appropriate to the stated question. The numbers on the scale are labeled as follows: One indicates “strongly disagree”, Two applies to “disagree”, Three is “neutral”, Four is referred to as “agree”, and Five is labeled as “strongly agree”. The survey describes quantitative questions such as the readers’ age, major and the number of “The Hoof” articles read, followed by qualitative questions such as the readers’ feelings toward the column’s content. The selected five questions measured on the Likert scale will pertain to the research questions of the study.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study will be conducted by having the participants fill out an exit survey close to the end of the 2019 - 2020 academic school year that will be distributed through Mustang News’ social media: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. The survey first focuses on asking quantitative information regarding their sex, age and university association. The survey was developed on the Likert scale that measured qualitative research regarding personal opinions about the column’s content and rating the overall effect the column had on the likelihood of reading Mustang News in the future. The design of the survey’s aim was to receive positive feedback. This feedback will assist future satirical writers’ of Mustang News to identify the most accurate strategy in developing well-received satire for the Cal Poly community. To encourage participants to fill out a survey they will receive an incentive by getting their name placed in a Mustang News raffle to win a t-shirt.

Data Presentation
The collected data from the survey will be entered into a data table to evaluate the results of the column. Social media analytics can report quantitative information such as the age groups of who interacted with columns and the followers who clicked on the link of the survey. The social media channels can also generate the analytical research of a timeline to measure the level of the targeted public who favored the column.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study based on the amount of time available. The project timeline is assigned to follow the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo quarter system, which is ten weeks long for each quarter. Extensive research on the subject will be limited due to the time constraints. Another prevailing issue that could be encountered is the fact that some Mustang News’ social media followers do not always check their feeds. Meanwhile, Mustang News releases its paper once a week; therefore, the readers of the paper are only exposed to satire four times a month. This exposure is even more limited due to school breaks.

Delimitations

Due to time and student participation constraints, delimitations will also be present in this study. The column has only four satire writers contributing content to enable the editor’s assurance that the writers have a holistic understanding of how to write satire. With only an academic year to establish the column, the single editor running “The Hoof” could only host satire writing workshops once a quarter, rather than weekly, which could have attracted
more writers and recognition. If more time was provided, more efforts of collaboration with Mustang News' radio station affiliate, KCPR 91.3, could strengthen the awareness of this column and provide more readership.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This chapter will provide explanations to the methods and strategies that were implemented to create an effective satire column on Cal Poly’s campus. It will also showcase the exit survey given to readers (See Page). The data will summarize the outline of “The Hoof’s” instigation and connect it to the results to the readers’ exit survey. The data will also
measure the reach of the column within the student body by utilizing relatable messaging in its content. Those aforementioned results will be compared to the research findings from Chapter 2.

The Hoof’s Action Plan

The core aim of implementing the satirical column, “The Hoof” on Cal Poly’s campus is to familiarize and inform its students with the style of satire utilized as a form of journalism. Beginning in April of 2019 within the “Opinion” section of Mustang News, “The Hoof” began as a column solely written by founder and satire editor, Hannah Benson, in order to establish its voice. Once the column established itself for a month, other writers were recruited. Each column covers a topic related to the students of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, such as the new university rebranding, the school’s Week of Welcome (WOW) orientation program and the pressures of the university’s quarter system. The purpose of using content the students are aware of is to make them “feel in on the joke” and become more open to the additional points presented in each column. The articles exclusively use the punching-up method, which aims any critique toward the university’s administration, politicians and/or oppressive, socially-acceptable values. This follows the sentiment of the late political satirist, Molly Ivins, who once stated, “Satire is traditionally the weapon of the powerless against the powerful,” (Schwartz, 2016, p. 136). By creating a column based on humor and the solidarity of the student body, a larger readership following will be gained as well as the continuation of the column.

Tactics and Tools
To spread a greater awareness of “The Hoof”, the writers employed multiple strategic journalism and comedic tactics. The effective strategies utilized for this purpose are as follows: educating the audience on satire, using commonly used media outlets of the audience and implementing the values of public journalism to gain the audience’s trust.

“The Hoof” aims to be transparent in its use of satire, acknowledging that not all of its readers are aware of the concept nor column. Therefore, each column begins with this statement written by its founder:

“The Hoof is a satire column created to find humor in the daily life of Cal Poly students. If you’re looking for news, this is not it. If you’re looking for sports, this is kind of it, because we’re having a ball. Ha. Puns,” (Benson, 2020).

This informs readers that the column is satirical rather than an editorial piece. This is also connected to two of the three principles of public journalism discussed in Chapter 2’s literature review: the assurance of a focused story and a specific framing for that story. Both of those tactics are intended to inform and prepare the public for any injustices they are facing as shown through the story (Faina, 2013, p. 544).

The implementation of satire writing workshops are also aimed to familiarize the community with satire as well as gain new writers. Information regarding the workshop events will be administered through email by the Cal Poly Journalism Department Chair, Mary Glick, to target those interested in journalism (See Figure 1). Additional Liberal Arts majors (English, Theater, Communications) will receive the same email from their department chairs to ensure a wider reach with creative-minded writers. Meanwhile, a Facebook event will also be made by Mustang News (See Figure 2). The workshops will inform attendees on the foundations of satire, how to punch-up and intriguing headline generation. Educating workshop attendees on punching-up in comedy is how “The Hoof”
follows the principle of public journalism that encourages a lack of bias as writers are taught to critique those in power regardless of political party affiliation (Faina, 2013, p. 543). Additionally, punching-up focuses on injustice against the general public and a presentation on the column’s aims educates the potential writers on the framing of “The Hoof”, therefore, following the other two main principles of public journalism (Faina, 2013, p. 544). The workshop will be required in order to write for the column as it strictly outlines “The Hoof’s” mission (See Figure 3 for examples of the workshop’s presentation slides).

“The Hoof” will mainly utilize Facebook and Twitter for article postings. Those are the social media sites with the highest levels of social media audience engagement for Mustang News. Both sites are popular among the main targeted demographic of 18 - 25 year old Cal Poly students. The posting of the articles will link to Mustang News’ website and therefore, increase engagement for the media group as well (See Figure 4). This ensures the audience stays informed of the general news of Cal Poly and that the student body is more engaged on issues of the day, giving context to the information provided in future satirical pieces.

**Content for the University**

For this satire column, it becomes vital to effectively connect to the community to encourage a larger readership. The relationship between content and readers is strengthened through the writers’ base knowledge of the readers’ environment. Therefore, “The Hoof” focuses on life at Cal Poly to engage with Cal Poly readers. This audience is concerned with the content of Mustang News, which is how “The Hoof” benefits from the
association with the paper. A central theme of the column also allows new satirical writers to gain stronger traction with a less familiar style.

The references made in the articles are often specific to Cal Poly students, Generation Z and California residents. The latter two categories are also connected to the Cal Poly student demographic. An example of this content is the May 2019 article, “Seven Ways to Interpret the New Cal Poly Logo”. The article mentions Cal Poly-related items, such as the nearby mountain, Bishop’s Peak, the Baker Science building and the university mascot, Musty the Mustang. The article also features jokes concerning bangs, Marvel comics and drinking, which are popular among Generation Z college students (See Figure 5 for the entire article) (Benson, 2019).

Therefore, “The Hoof” represents Cal Poly students and makes its support clear, a theme reminiscent of public journalism. The exit survey given after a year of “The Hoof’s” initial publication will gauge the students’ impressions regarding the column. Respecting the feedback can ensure a successful satire column as well as encourage public journalism’s role in the future.

**Exit Survey Example:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Age          | 18-25  
|             | 26-34  
|             | 35-44  
|             | 45-54  
|             | 55+    
| Student or Other | If yes, answer the next two questions.  
| Major       | Write your major.  
| Year in School | Write your year.  
| Are you familiar with satire? | Strongly Agree  
|             | Agree  
|             | Neutral  
|             | Disagree  
|             | Strongly Disagree  
| How many “The Hoof” columns have you read? | Write the number.  
| Do you feel well-represented by the views presented in “The Hoof” | Strongly Agree  
|             | Agree  
|             | Neutral  
|             | Disagree  
|             | Strongly Disagree  
|             | Strongly Agree  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has your engagement with “The Hoof” increased your engagement with Mustang News and/or other news sources?</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you find “The Hoof entertaining?”</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After reading “The Hoof” did you want to read more of its articles?</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you hear about “The Hoof”</td>
<td>Write your answer.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would a student of a different university understand “The Hoof”?</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Summary

The satirical column, “The Hoof” was developed by a Cal Poly journalism senior, Hannah Benson, who saw a need for incorporating the use of satire to benefit the student body’s news consumption. Benson works with Mustang News, Cal Poly’s student-run news
source. “The Hoof” is placed under the “Opinion” section of the paper. Benson envisions the column as an opportunity for college students to broaden their methods of receiving campus-related news in a familiar, more-entertaining manner. The partnership of the student and the paper has led to a weekly edition of the satire column with both print and online editions. The purpose of the study and the column’s content, workshops and social media reach is to integrate a permanent satire column unique to Cal Poly and to create content within the column that represents and informs its young adult audience. The mission of “The Hoof” is to provide articles concerning controversial, ridiculous and/or unjust circumstances to Cal Poly students, while maintaining a humorous tone. As mentioned in the study, Benson holds workshops, and Mustang News utilizes social media to raise awareness for the column and establish a set mission. The social media analytics of Facebook and Twitter and the survey results will be the main methods to measure the impact of “The Hoof”. Participants’ response in the survey will assist members of “The Hoof” as they will collect feedback to improve the column for its future.

As the social media site with the most traffic for Mustang News, Facebook will be the survey’s main source for recording research and providing analytics of page activity to ensure accurate feedback for the survey. However, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter will be used as well to gain more participants. Based on the readership and type of content distributed by Mustang News, the main demographic of the survey are anticipated to be between the ages of 18-25. Those results will match the targeted demographic of who benefits most from the survey.

Projected Findings
The projected findings are demographics composed mainly of Liberal Arts majors as their interests lie in writing, entertainment and the impact of bias, therefore, interests in line with satire and journalism. “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” replies will lead to additional forms of satire within the Mustang Media Group, such as “The Hoof” radio segment within KCPR 91.3 and short satirical videos for the broadcast portion of Mustang News. The positive feedback will assure “The Hoof” writers maintain their style and mission. Those affirmations suggest the students have grasped an understanding of the form and there is an impression of mutual support from the writers. Alternatively, a large number of replies labeled “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” from the survey’s participants will indicate a need for change within the column. It would lead to a stronger focus on Cal Poly-related issues, beginning with lighter topics to ensure comprehension and then slowly reintegrating more contentious stories. The negative feedback would also instigate more workshops and more public relations campaigns to increase awareness.

Due to limitations of the study, the survey will not reach all Cal Poly students. This is because not every student has social media and many with social media do not check their feeds regularly. Therefore, there will not be as many representatives of the school taking part in the survey as would be preferred. The limitation of a weekly publication of Mustang News also decreases audience numbers needed for a constant exposure to satire.

Conclusion

The nature of journalism alters as technology advances and our methods of receiving news adapt and evolve. However, the basic need to laugh does not change. Satirical comedians such Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert and satirical websites such as The New Yorker and The Onion have paved the way for the merging of journalism and comedy as the world moves at a faster and faster pace. Today’s college students are exposed to those sources of merged humor and news more than any other generation.
For the Cal Poly community, it was necessary to incorporate a satire column within its local paper to mirror the larger news circuit. “The Hoof” serves the Cal Poly student body by satirizing content related to the university to ensure the readers feel educated on the background of the joke in order to feel supported (Colletta, 2009, p. 857). “The Hoof’s” creator, Cal Poly journalism senior Hannah Benson runs satire writing workshops to market the column’s mission and to make the form of satire more accessible to those who are less familiar. Social media, especially Facebook, plays a large part in “The Hoof’s” circulation to reach its younger demographic. The column is intended to attract various readers to Mustang News as “Humor is an openness to different interpretations of meaning and value,” (Colletta, 2009, p. 872). Therefore, the column is a form of public journalism. It encourages impartiality, focuses on the injustices against the student body and emphasizes its framing. This creates a more engaged public and a student body more likely to stay engaged once they graduate college (Faina, 2013, p. 543-544).

The column is published weekly to strengthen engagement and to stay up-to-date with campus news. The success of the column has continued its run throughout the 2019 - 2020 academic year and is expected to continue its circulation within Mustang News for the coming years.

REFERENCES


Satire Workshop

Mustang News is hosting a satire workshop that is open to all Cal Poly students.

**How To Write Satire Like A ... Satire Writer**

*Satire workshop hosted by your friends at The Hoof by Mustang News*

Join Mustang News columnist Hannah Benson as she teaches you how to drench your writing in irony and push you to the comedic precipice.

Mustang Newsroom (26-226) Thursday, October 3 at 8 p.m.

[View entire message]
Figure 1. “The Hoof” workshop email

Figure 2. “The Hoof” workshop Facebook event

A Manifesto, If You Will

★ Be Silly But Kind!
  o The way a person identifies is NOT humor
★ Own Your Work
★ Cal Poly-Related News
★ No Real Names
  o Especially with quotes
  o This can be broken when it comes to celebrities
  o Portal Search
★ Cannot Be Member of MN News Team
★ Follow Associated Press (AP) Style
★ Value Deadlines
  o Sunday pitch
  o Wednesday due for editing
  o Friday is final edits and submission

Let’s Play (with News)

★ Real headlines
  o “RIP Secure Mustang Wireless — eduroam WiFi here to stay”
    ■ Example: Obituary piece, remembering Secure Mustang or a detailed report of the break-up between Cal Poly and Secure Mustang
  o “Cal Poly now uses cameras to enforce parking. Here's how it works”
  o “Campus Dining starting to bring local businesses on campus with StoDoCo pop-up this week”
**Figure 3.** “The Hoof” workshop presentation slides

**Headline Exercise (So Cute of Us)**

⭐ **Real Headlines:**
- “Starting Fall 2020, students will see changes and more flexibility with electives in GE curriculum”
- “No. 1 ranked Spikeball duo heads to nationals this weekend”
- “Class allows liberal studies majors to teach with dogs”
- “Two San Luis Obispo natives opened a coffee shop downtown, but it’s not like the others”
- “What’s up, SLO? Here’s what’s happening this weekend”

**Figure 4.** “The Hoof” webpage on Mustang News’ website

**The Hoof: Seven Ways to interpret the new Cal Poly logo**
Figure 5. “The Hoof” article: Seven Way to Interpret Cal Poly’s New Logo