

JOURNALISM STUDENTS DO BETTER

Students who work on a newspaper or yearbook staff in high school do better in high school and college than students with no journalism experience, according to a 1994 study (Dvorak, Lain, & Dickson, 1994). The study found:

} High school students who were members of a journalism staff had higher grade-point-averages in English, social studies, math, and science than students who were not members of a journalism staff.

} High school students who were members of a journalism staff scored in the 81st percentile in the English portion of the ACT test. High school students who were not members of a journalism staff scored in the 69th percentile. Students with journalism staff experience also did better on the social studies and math portions of the test.

} High school students who were members of a journalism staff reported that high school journalism classes developed their English skills better than any other course including English courses.

} High school students who were members of a journalism staff were more involved in extracurricular activities such as clubs, student government and were elected captain of a team more often than students who were not members of a journalism staff. They were also more likely to take an advanced English placement course and to volunteer in the community.

} College students who were members of a high school journalism staff had higher grade-point averages in their first college English courses than students who were not members of a high school journalism staff.

} College students who were members of a high school journalism staff had higher overall grade-point averages than students who were not members of a high school journalism staff.

} College students who were members of a high school journalism staff wrote better on the ACT COMP (College Outcome Measures Test) than students who were not members of a high school journalism staff.

- for more information on this study, visit:

<http://www.publishingstudents.com/researchbenefits.html>

School newspapers sharpen other student skills: critical thinking, test scores higher among student journalists

Kevin Harter
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Forget football, marching band, chess club and debate. Beyond going to class and studying hard, the most important high school activity some experts believe is working on the student newspaper.

Local and national scholastic press experts said working on a student newspaper is beneficial not only for students, but also for the school and community. I think the opportunity to participate does so much for students and is the reason, I believe, if all other programs were cut, it would be the one to keep, said Linda Putney, director of the Journalism Education Association. In publishing a newspaper, students put social skills, time management, writing, design, and technology to use in a product that serves the community.

Students also practice critical thinking, learn responsibility, tend to be more involved and score higher on ACT and SAT college placement exams, Putney said.

Her view is supported in the 1994 book *Journalism Kids Do Better: What Research Tells Us About High School Journalism*, by Jack Dvorak, Larry Lain and Tom Dickson.

While the majority of student scribes will never become professional journalists, they not only will have done better in school, they are better prepared for life after, including interpreting the ever-increasing flow of information, Putney said.

A student newspaper is really a healthy and positive thing, said Julie Wikelius, Mounds View High School principal, a former high school journalist and the mother of a former high school journalist.

It is a chance to try out a real world experience, she said.

In these days of standards and proficiency testing, the student newspaper is the best learning lab possible for developing writing, communication and critical thinking skills, said Tom Rolinicki, director of the National Scholastic Press Association in Minneapolis.

An Introduction to the Research

What follows is a report by the Journalism Education Association (JEA) Commission on the Role of Journalism in Secondary Education.

Although I was not able to find available copies of the research from 1994, this report from 1987 reveals nearly the same results and nearly the same results as research conducted in 1974. These other reports were not conducted by JEA. The 1974 report, *Captive Voices*, was the result of a study by the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Board of Inquiry into high school journalism. The 1994 report, *Journalism Kids Do Better*, was compiled and co-authored by Jack Dvorak, Professor of Journalism at Indiana University School of Journalism.

A relatively new piece of research by Jack Dvorak also focuses on high school journalism. One set of recent findings, taken from the Indiana University, School of Journalism website (<http://www.journalism.indiana.edu>) includes

a comparison of high school journalism student performance on Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Examinations, 1989-1997. Journalism students were compared with honors students who took the same AP exam following an advanced English composition course. For the past seven years, a higher percentage of Journalism students than AP English students passed the examination, which is comprised of three writing passages and some language, usage, punctuation and syntax questions. Various aspects of the findings have been published in an article in *Communication: Journalism Education Today* (a publication for high school journalism teachers), and an article in the Fall 1998 *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*.

To gain the data for the report included here, the JEA Commission conducted hearings to identify the strengths and weaknesses of high school journalism programs, considered responses from professional journalists, solicited testimony from graduates of journalism programs and reviewed surveys of state accreditation practices (7). As with any balanced assessment of a program or institution, it reveals and exposes both the good and the bad.

This report does not address the problems of (to name a few) censorship, low minority student participation, and low certification rates for journalism advisers.

The data in this report is (to offer some background)

- gathered from two years of research.
- compiled, in one case, from nearly five thousand students.
- both statistical and anecdotal, examining ACT scores, comparing collegiate writing samples, surveying direct influences of journalism classes in relationship to other types of English classes, etc.