

CONNECTIONS

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University

Institutions,
Professions, and the Public:
Focus on the
Public-Academy
Relationship

An Update on Public Journalism

By Cole C. Campbell

Why should we care about press coverage of Iraq?

That simple question is the entry-way into an exploration of journalism's relationship to democracy by Kettering associate Peter Levine and his colleagues at the University of Maryland working on a research project for the foundation.

Two doctoral students, Matt King of philosophy and Nasim Moalem of journalism, constructed a special Web site on "The War, the Press, and Democracy" (<http://www.puaf.umd.edu/IPPP/iraq>). The students are working under the guidance of Professor Judith Lichtenberg of the Department of Philosophy and the

Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy, and Professor Christopher Hanson of the Merrill College of Journalism.

Much of the material posted on the site reflects traditional media critiques, with commentary by press critics, war correspondents, and others analyzing coverage of the war, weapons of mass destruction, and the history of wartime coverage and censorship. The site also links to philosophical treatises on war, the military, and the press. Levine is using this initial conversation as the threshold into a deeper engagement with the underlying suppositions about democracy that frame contributions to the conversation.



Cole C. Campbell



Courtesy of the University of Maryland



What kinds of information do citizens need in order to participate politically? What kinds of information are they obliged to obtain?

Thus far he has identified the following five frames:

- ◆ A citizen's main responsibility is to decide whether the Bush administration has done a good job so far and to vote accordingly this November.
- ◆ We are morally complicit in what our government does, so we should understand the results and feel appropriate emotions.
- ◆ Policymakers will respond to polls, so poll results should reflect good judgment.
- ◆ The press is a watchdog or whistleblower.
- ◆ Citizens can do more than vote. (This frame, of course, reflects the public politics/public work perspective that Levine shares with the foundation.)

Levine's report on this research includes a summary of a roundtable discussion held in early May on journalism and the Iraq war. The roundtable, which included political scientists, political philosophers, journalism school professors from the University of Maryland, and members of the University of Maryland community, explored a number of

topics: (1) What is the role of the press in a democracy at war? (2) By what standards should we judge coverage of the Iraq war and its aftermath? (3) What were the advantages and disadvantages of specific policies, such as "embedding" reporters with military units? (4) What kinds of information do citizens need in order to participate politically? What kinds of information are they obliged to obtain? (5) How differently do political scientists, philosophers, and journalists think about these issues? Could they learn more from one another?

Meanwhile, in other Kettering-related activities, Leland "Buck" Ryan, director of the First Amendment Center at the University of Kentucky, is organizing a conference of journalism practitioners and scholars to be held this November in Lexington, Kentucky. The foundation plans to tap such annual conferences for research insights into the current state of journalistic practice and scholarship as they relate to journalism and democracy in general and the state of public journalism in particular.

Cole C. Campbell is a senior associate of the Kettering Foundation. He can be reached by E-mail at cole@unr.edu.

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