

## The media isn't here to scratch backs

Jacob Stohler  
Layout Editor

*"Don't believe any of what you hear and only half of what you see."*

— old journalism saying

I imagine that if someone took a public opinion poll of various professions, journalists might rate about as high as used-car salesmen and tax collectors. Like the media as a whole, journalists are the proverbial bearers of ill tidings. How many times have we seen people blame the media for problems they only reported on? Mike Krzyzewski did, Ronald Reagan did, Richard Nixon did, the president of N.C. A&T University did, Gary Hart really did.

Lately, *The Guilfordian* has been caught in a crossfire of criticism and finger-pointing with the administration on one side and select students on the other. On the whole, these two sides have behaved just like any two factions on oppo-

site sides of a controversial issue in the real world, and both have inevitably become frustrated when they have realized that the media isn't supporting their position.

What they overlook in their criticisms is that it's the media's ultimate goal to favor no one. So when they criticize that, they are in effect saying, "We don't support the nature of the free press."

At its purest, journalism is information. The journalist gathers all available information and either uses it or excludes it based on three criteria: substantiability, relevance and, most importantly, bias. Journalists train themselves to avoid their own biases and to recognize those of the people involved in the story. Ultimately, the best news stories are those devoid of opinion, rumor, bias, hearsay and gossip.

This can be a confusing concept for those who aren't objective enough to separate their views from fact. To them, it makes no sense that their media doesn't report things as they see them, leading them to believe that the news has been intentionally distorted.

The truth is that no one person can know everything and understand it objectively. Therefore, journalists have developed an approach to reporting which relies on multiple sources to compile a complete and accurate view of events. They must assume that any statement or claim which cannot be substantiated is an opinion and its inclusion threatens the credibility of their entire story.

In short, cynicism is the reporter's greatest friend. By keeping in mind that everyone has an agenda or an end he or she wants to promote, journalists find it easier

to dig past the rhetoric and get to the facts. They usually have a hard time, and they always end up upsetting people who didn't get their backs scratched just right.

Maybe journalists aren't a well-liked lot, but the world depends on them more than it would ever acknowledge. Look where there is no independent media, and you'll find a society awash in rhetoric and finger-pointing with no solid base of facts to stand on. Consider the difference and then ask yourself: "Would I really want *The Guilfordian* to print just my side?"

## Recent editorial pieces emphasize conflict between license and principle

Laurel Nesbitt  
Editorials Editor

It is always difficult to determine what statements we — as individuals, *The Guilfordian*, Guilford College, etc. — should endorse and which go too far. A recent battle in the letters to the editor section has been over whether or not Student Union used good judgment in choosing to sponsor the showing of "9 1/2 Weeks" on campus. Controversy arose over the film's subject matter: the process of a woman's sexual exploitation.

The debate itself was a tedious and tiresome one, as letters battles tend to be sometimes. But the important thing about it was that it spotlighted the frequently inflamed tension that exists between the importance of preserving the liberties art thrives on (the avoidance of censorship) and the importance of being constantly aware of the statements we are making (and the possible damage being done). I tend to root for the pro-art side of this controversy, which seems to be saying that, when a reel of film begins to turn in a room, each member of the audience has at every moment the complete freedom to stand and exit.

Certainly there is a strong pull toward the other side of the argument as well, though. Censorship is not really involved in this issue. Union would not have been keeping things from the student body by not showing "9 1/2 Weeks." They would

not have been *refusing* to show the film. They would have been *choosing* to show another film, or no film at all. What hangs over all of this is the fact that, when an organization chooses to present something on this campus, it is in some way or another representative of that organization, of the college as an institution with certain value claims, and of the college as a body of individuals.

The "9 1/2 Weeks" issue emphasizes the complexity involved in determining which statements made in the name of freedom of expression are benign and which are destructive. In his editorial titled "In Loco Parentis — Redux" (*The Guilfordian*, Jan. 29), William Burris gives a description of liberalism that seems to deny that these distinctions need to be made:

*I suppose I must have missed some nuance along the way, but I thought it was fairly well established that liberalism, liberality and the liberal arts accepted, indeed, dictated tolerance and patience toward beliefs, ideas, points of view, yea, even expressions, overtones and jokes that embarrass, infuriate or cause pain.*

But can this really work? Can we say anything we want to say or do anything we want to do and still manage to preserve order and, probably more importantly, principle? It is crucial to our freedom that we keep in mind our right to use our voices, but there is also the unfortunate reality that some voices damage others' rights and impose a stance not only on *that* voice, but on all of those represented by it.

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