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Journalism in the United States and the Netherlands: A Comparative Analysis

Kathryn Prater

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Journalism in the United States and the Netherlands: A Comparative Analysis

Abstract
This thesis will attempt to comparatively analyze the newspaper industries in the United States and the Netherlands through discussions of journalistic concepts and evidential support of specific examples of newspapers from each country. Although the body of this thesis largely incorporates text from secondary sources such as books and articles, some of the information, as well as the inspiration for the project, come from personal experience.

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JOURNALISM IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE NETHERLANDS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

By

Kathryn Prater

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Eastern Michigan University

Honors College

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation

with Honors in Journalism

Approved at Ypsilanti, Michigan, on this date _______________________

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Supervising Instructor

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Honors Advisor

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Department Head

________________________________________________________
Honors Director
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Preface

This thesis will attempt to comparatively analyze the newspaper industries in the United States and the Netherlands through discussions of journalistic concepts and evidential support of specific examples of newspapers from each country. Although the body of this thesis largely incorporates text from secondary sources such as books and articles, some of the information, as well as the inspiration for the project, come from personal experience.

I recently worked at the Grand Rapids Press during a summer journalism internship from May through August of 2006. I reported and wrote for the metro, or local news, section of the paper, and I was stationed at a desk in the main newsroom alongside other full-time metro reporters, some of who had been employed by the paper for decades. I, like the other reporters, wrote multiple articles per week, had regular office hours, set up photos to accompany my articles, answered to an editor, and was responsible for finding all information necessary to write complete, accurate, and informative articles. To write the approximately 50 stories I did that summer, I made numerous telephone calls, searched Web sites, analyzed news releases, conducted in-person interviews, examined the newspaper’s archives, and drove to various locations both in the city of Grand Rapids – the newspaper’s headquarters and the site of my summer residence – and elsewhere on the west side of the state. During those three months, I not only observed the interactions of the newsroom and offices of a daily American newspaper, but I also learned first-hand how concepts and issues relating to journalism can affect an individual newspaper.
I took the initiative to visit the offices of a Dutch newspaper when I studied abroad at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands during the fall 2006 American academic semester. During the last month of my stay, which lasted September through December, I contacted and scheduled an appointment with an editor at the Dagblad van het Noorden, or “Daily Newspaper of the North,” which was based in Groningen, the capital of the province of Groningen. Since a bicycle was the most common form of travel and my only means of transportation, I bicycled first to the Dagblad van het Noorden bureau office that was closest to my residence in the historic town center, and there I received directions to the main headquarters, located in the more modern and busy downtown. After a bicycle ride of approximately 30 minutes, I met with the deputy editor in chief, Evert Van Dijk, and took a tour of the newsroom and other related offices. I interviewed Van Dijk about the inner workings of his newspaper and the local journalism industry. During the interview, I chose questions I thought could produce answers that would allow me to draw comparisons with American journalism based on what I had experienced at the Grand Rapids Press several months earlier. During this encounter, I personally observed the offices of a daily Dutch newspaper and, more importantly, spoke with a Dutch journalism professional about his experiences, his publication, and the general state of the industry in the Netherlands.

This primary research I have conducted allowed me to write this thesis confident that the books and articles about the journalism industry that I have studied and cited indeed reflect the truth. Through my experiences during a summer internship at an American newspaper and a semester abroad that included a visit to a Dutch newspaper, I have portrayed journalistic concepts and ideas as they apply to real life.
Facts and Figures

Before beginning this thesis, it is important to note some key differences and similarities between the two newspapers discussed as examples in the text: the Grand Rapids Press, a 139,000-circulation daily newspaper covering the greater area of Grand Rapids, Michigan; and the Dagblad van het Noorden, a 166,000-circulation Monday-through-Saturday newspaper covering the Netherlands provinces of Groningen and Drenthe. The following comparative facts will give the reader a better understanding of the structures and processes related to each individual publication:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grand Rapids Press</th>
<th>Dagblad van het Noorden</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>139,000</td>
<td>166,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>156,797</td>
<td>181,194</td>
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<td>10,147,096</td>
<td>609,768</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday-Sunday</td>
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<tr>
<td>$0.50</td>
<td>€1-1.50 ($1.34-2.01)*</td>
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<td>44-60</td>
<td>24-32</td>
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<td>$1.75</td>
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<tr>
<td>228-236</td>
<td>70-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$156</td>
<td>€230 ($308.82)*</td>
</tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Calculated using an April 12 exchange rate of 1 euro = 1.34 U.S. dollars.
Introduction

Newspapers in the United States, as well as American journalism at large, is an industry that has been praised and critiqued, valued by some but misunderstood by many. In the midst of criticism, readers too often lose sight of the ideals held by many journalists even in the face of pressures such as declining circulations and subsequent decreasing staff sizes. When American newspapers are compared and contrasted with print media in the European country of the Netherlands, it becomes clear that newspapers in the United States actually have deeper roots and a stronger determination than their Dutch counterparts when it comes to the observation of certain journalistic principles that many readers now take for granted.

Objectivity, a standard held by most American daily news sources, is the concept that a reporter will write an article as a neutral observer, letting neither bias nor partiality seep into print. The principle of objectivity arose in the United States in the early 19th century when newspapers known as “penny papers” became the first publications circulated that were not operated by political parties. Across the Atlantic Ocean, however, Dutch newspapers remained tied to specific political and societal pillars and were heavily influenced by those ideological sectors until only several decades ago. This difference of more than a century and the Netherlands’ newness to objectivity is apparent today, reflected in the types of articles published in some daily newspapers. Objectivity in the United States, on the other hand, is considered a hallowed journalistic institution and is strived for by nearly every newspaper reporter.

A more recent trend that has emerged in American print media is civic journalism, an effort by reporters and editors to involve readers in ways that include expressing the
reactions of everyday citizens in response to the news or to a topic being covered in an article. Although it is a slightly newer concept in the Netherlands, Dutch media also are starting to practice civic journalism in similar ways, such as surveying members of the public about upcoming events.

Circulations of newspapers both in the United States and in the Netherlands have been falling at comparable and consistent rates during recent years. This loss of readers and ultimately of revenue has led newspapers on each continent to reduce and limit the number of journalists they employ in an attempt to recoup some of the money lost. Some papers have begun offering reporters and editors early retirement incentives and, in some cases, have capped the number of new hires they will make in upcoming months.

American journalists as well as their publics value the watchdog role that U.S. media have adopted, believing that the media have a responsibility to guard society against wrongdoing by exposing deceit and corruption. This duty leads newspapers to revel in printing their discoveries of misdeeds committed by institutions such as the government, and rarely do they hesitate to do so. Conversely, Dutch newspapers tend to shy away from writing about corruption, partly due to the fact that newspapers do not publish the full names of criminals but rather identify them with initials. This custom makes it difficult for reporters to coherently sort out complicated crime stories, resulting in very infrequent coverage. The watchdog newspapers in the United States, while occasionally omitting the names of certain crime victims, always publish criminal names and go after dishonesty and corruption with no trepidation.

Although there are important similarities between newspapers in the United States and the Netherlands in terms of the goals and journalistic standards ultimately held by
each, there are also several striking differences. American media, it seems, have historically valued certain principles for a longer period of time, leading to greater and more obvious emphases on those principles. Although Dutch newspapers have recently begun to emulate these standards, it is clear from examples of specific publications in each country that these principles are not yet as institutionalized in the Netherlands as they are in the American industry.
Part 1: Objectivity

Having originated as vehicles of political persuasion, most modern newspaper outlets in both nations now purport to be completely objective and free from regulation, mandated bias, and propagandist tendencies. In the United States, newspapers were first run by political parties, and news was dictated by the political agendas of the papers’ respective parties. In the Netherlands, newspapers historically were specific to certain political and societal pillars of society, and news was strictly regulated by the pillars. Although print media in both countries have roots in political persuasion, American newspapers transitioned to neutrality in writing, reporting, and coverage more than a century before Dutch newspapers adopted such philosophies. Objectivity rose in the United States as early as the so-called “penny papers” in 1830s, while newspapers didn’t break away from the heavy societal and political bias of pillarization in the Netherlands until about 40 years ago.

Two examples of front-page newspaper articles published the day before major elections in each country demonstrate the newness of objectivity in the Netherlands. When compared, it can be noted that the American article was neutral and objective, providing an overall picture of the last leg of the political race, whereas the story in the Dutch newspaper was heavily influenced by the opinions of the newspaper staff and described the race from a subjective point of view. This shows that objectivity is not yet an institution in the Netherlands, but is something that is only observed on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, several other pre-election articles show instances of the Dutch newspaper striving for objectivity in ways similar to U.S. media. The American newspaper was objective when it published a lengthy feature story on each major candidate, giving each
one equal space and presentation in the publication. Likewise, the Dutch newspaper printed a series of features about each of its major candidates using the same theme and format for each, showing an attempt to be fair and impartial.

More Than a Century Apart: History of Objectivity in U.S. and Netherlands

By the time the American Revolution began in 1775, there were about two dozen newspapers in the American colonies, all of which outwardly encouraged independence from the colonizing country, England. They contained articles that were “conceived by revolutionary propagandists” and “were a major force that influenced public opinion in America from reconciliation with England to full political independence” (Barber). Even half a century later in the early 1830s, the only print media in New York City were published completely along political party lines. Journalist and professor David T.Z. Mindich described the media atmosphere in a column he wrote for the Wall Street Journal in 1999: “Attached to political parties and beholden to their partisan agenda, the six-cent papers reported on news that their party wanted them to print. These papers even staged demonstrations and mob violence against their political opponents, planned right in their editorial offices.” When penny papers, competing newspapers sold for one cent apiece, developed a short while later, they covered different types of stories and were not run or funded by particular parties. “The pennies relied not on party patronage but on sales and advertising for their revenue. They employed a lively style, reporting on police stories and other apolitical topics” (Mindich). The papers started out with a somewhat entertaining flair, containing an “emphasis on sensational stories of criminal activity and general human depravity [that] established a loyal readership” (“Penny”). Eventually they
moved away from sensationalism, “but they maintained their independence from the parties. One of the hallmarks of objectivity, nonpartisanship, was born,” Mindich said.

Although Dutch newspapers are not currently operated by specific religions or political parties, they have been free from such affiliations for only about four decades. In a paper written for the Vereniging van Onderzoeksjournalisten, or Association of Research Journalists, Dick Van Eijk stated that “until well into the sixties, the Dutch media were organised along so-called pillarized structures. The four pillars – Protestants, Catholics, socialists and ‘neutrals’ – each had their own national newspapers, weeklies and broadcast organisations” (121). Author William Z. Shetter described Dutch society during the period from the 1930s through the 1960s as “fragmented into blocs based on ideology – religious or otherwise – and strongly isolated from each other.” In his book, The Netherlands in Perspective: The Dutch Way of Organizing a Society and Its Setting, Shetter said each pillar was a very institutionalized “collection of often interlocking social organizations,” resulting in “almost exclusive association with one’s own kind.” Pillarized organizations, which were either partially or completely subsidized by central or local governments, included the media, as well as churches, schools, political parties, trade unions, professional societies, leisure organizations, and public facilities such as libraries and hospitals. Participation solely within one’s pillar, including media consumption, was an expectation very strictly adhered to: “For most people, relationships were formed and long family traditions shaped within a particular ‘column.’ Leaving one meant entering another, and since this often meant severing old associations, it was an emotional uprooting similar to emigration,” Shetter said. He also pointed out that the blocs, which were completely independent of each other, “tended to regard each other
with suspicion – rarely with hostility but usually mixed with a kind of guarded respect” (113).

Although some papers still have certain political leanings, Van Eijk said most Dutch newspapers “have either disappeared or cut the ties with the pillar they once belonged to. Although national newspapers and magazines still differ in their political orientation, none of them serves a particular party” (123). Likewise, almost all daily newspapers circulating in the United States are independent, but there is still a small handful of papers operated by specific organizations, such as the Christian Science Monitor, published by Boston’s First Church of Christ, Scientist. However, part of the paper’s mission is to remain free from the church’s influence, despite its affiliation. “The Christian Science church doesn't publish news to propagate denominational doctrine; it provides news purely as a public service,” according to the newspaper’s Web site. Its tie to the church is apparent perhaps only in one article each day: “Everything in the Monitor is international and U.S. news and features, except for one religious article that has appeared each day in The Home Forum section since 1908, at the request of the paper's founder” (“About”).

A New Institution: Objectivity More Apparent in American Newspapers

Examples of newspapers published the day before major elections in each country show that although both countries now strive for objectivity in their news coverage, Dutch newspapers have been slower to achieve it. The concept of objectivity is akin to the American Society of Newspaper Editors’ 1923 journalistic ethics principle of impartiality, which stated that “news reports should be free from opinion or bias of any
kind” (qtd. in Jamieson and Overholser 28). Objectivity has been present in American media since the 1830s, when newspapers finally became free from influence of political parties, and the fact that objectivity is a heavily institutionalized part of American journalism is apparent in the expectation that every news article should be written from an unbiased point of view. This was demonstrated in an article in the Grand Rapids Press, a daily American newspaper that circulates to 139,000 readers in the greater area of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The day before Michigan’s 2006 gubernatorial election, it presented an objective, third-person article detailing the end of the campaign trail on its front page. The story, “Candidates make final plea: They criss-cross state to mobilize supporters, sway undecideds,” discussed the last campaign stops made by each major governor candidate and described which audiences the candidates tried to reach (see Figure 1). It listed other destinations the politicians planned to visit and offered general election information, such as candidate names for other political offices. The article also included a quote from both a Republican and a Democrat, equally covering both ends of the political spectrum (Kolker).

A very different type of article was printed on a similar occasion in the Dagblad van het Noorden, a Monday-through-Saturday Dutch newspaper with a 166,000 circulation covering the provinces of Groningen and Drente. On the day before the Netherlands’ 2006 general election, the paper’s front page showcased an editorial-style piece about the election. Rather than publish an unbiased article that objectively described the end of the political race and discussed the upcoming election in neutral terms, the newspaper ran a piece called, “Balkenende moet wijs zijn, Bos vooral links,”
FIGURE 1
Grand Rapids Press; Monday, Nov. 6, 2006
or “Balkenende must be wise, Bos especially left,” which contained opinions of the newspaper staff concerning the major candidates (see Figure 2). There was to be a public debate among the candidates on the day of the editorial’s publication, and the piece offered advice to the four candidates involved. Editorial remarks included comments about candidates’ platforms and possible strategies they might use to win the largest number of votes (Polman). Even though Dutch media broke political ties and began moving toward objective news coverage once pillarization ended in the 1960s, the fact that the concept of objectivity is only a few decades old is evident in ways such as this.

**Striving for an Ideal: Objectivity Found in American, Dutch Newspapers**

Although it seems Dutch newspaper coverage is not always completely neutral and impartial, several pre-election feature articles from both the Grand Rapids Press and Dagblad van het Noorden do demonstrate objectivity. The two newspapers both showed they were not biased toward particular candidates or parties when they published articles featuring all major candidates, which gave all similar treatment and an equal amount of space, and showed no editorial opinion.

About one month before Michigan’s 2006 gubernatorial election, the Grand Rapids Press published two side-by-side, lengthy features about each major candidate: Democrat incumbent Governor Jennifer Granholm and Republican challenger Dick DeVos. These articles – “Talking turnaround: Granholm acknowledges economic woes, pitches her plan for recovery,” and “Practical matters: Under scrutiny for Amway, DeVos campaigns on business smarts” – discussed political challenges the candidates faced, such as Michigan’s sluggish economy and the public’s demands for change, as well as how
FIGURE 6
Dagblad van het Noorden; Tuesday, Nov. 21, 2006
Background: The Bell for the Last Round

Balkenende must be wise, Bos especially left

Tonight is the last round. The party leaders’ debate offers the many “floating voters” (still 30 percent of the total) the possibility to finally fix their vote. What must the “big four” do tomorrow to draw as many votes as possible? We give them some advice.

Jan Peter Balkenende (CDA): The Christian Democratic Party has led a quite clever campaign. With each day a press briefing by which the latest news was revealed. … Surveys – for what they are worth – have been favorably disposed to him. He must silver-plate this now. That is possible by playing the role of wise statesman especially. Do not deliver on others too much. Not too many pronounced viewpoints. Continue to stand above the parties.

(cont’d.)
they would handle them if elected (see Figure 3, Figure 3A). The articles also described each candidate’s critique of his or her opponent, as well as provided details about each person’s individual political plan. Each feature included a “bio box” detailing basic demographic information of each candidate, such as age, education, career, and family. Accompanying photos showed the candidates both casually and on the job (Luke; Golder).

During the weeks before the Netherlands’ 2006 general election, the Dagblad van het Noorden dedicated full-page spreads in 10 separate issues each to a question-and-answer session with one of the major political candidates for the election. One feature titled, “‘We willen meer welvaart in Nederland,’ ” or “‘We want more prosperity in the Netherlands,’ ” showed the paper’s Q-and-A with the incumbent prime minister, Jan Peter Balkenende of the Christian Democrat Party (see Figure 4). For the articles, the Dagblad van het Noorden invited each party’s top candidate to attend a round table discussion with newspaper staff and readers at the paper’s office. During the sessions, candidates answered reader-submitted questions about their platforms and parties. Balkenende answered questions pertaining to what his party would do for the country as a whole and how he would deal with environmental conservation issues, among other things. Similar to the articles in the Grand Rapids Press, the Q-and-A with Balkenende included an info box titled, “Wie is Jan Peter Balkenende?” or “Who is Jan Peter Balkenende?” It contained information about the prime minister’s education and political career (Polman).
FIGURE 3
Grand Rapids Press; Sunday, Oct. 15, 2006
FIGURE 3A
Grand Rapids Press; Sunday, Oct. 15, 2006
Although print media in both countries were heavily influenced by politics from the start, American newspapers were quicker to observe the journalistic principle of objectivity in writing and reporting. The United States’ penny papers of the 1830s slowly moved from sensational to objective news, and ever since, newspapers have strived for neutrality in coverage. Newspapers in the Netherlands shifted away from political slant with the breakdown of Dutch society’s pillarization in the 1960s, only then beginning to reach the objectivity that American newspapers embraced more than a century before. The fact that the Netherlands was slower in adopting objectivity as a journalistic ideal is apparent in pre-election articles in which a Dutch newspaper offered opinionated descriptions of and suggestions for the political race, while on the other hand, an American newspaper printed a completely objective story summarizing the progress of election events. However, at other times, both countries’ newspapers did demonstrate some degree of objectivity by portraying the major electoral candidates equally in individual feature articles and by giving them the same amount of coverage and attention.
FIGURE 4
Dagblad van het Noorden; Saturday, Nov. 18, 2006
Partial translation:

‘We want more prosperity in the Netherlands’

Christian Democratic Party wants to improve perspective on jobs

Prime minister: Also five percent for old Disablement Insurance Act’ers

Jan Peter Balkenende does his best. But doesn’t have an easy way with the present group of readers. That big trouble with the cabinet administration of past years. Because of the gas extractions from under the Wadden Sea. The food banks. The high premiums for the medical insurances. But the prime minister of the Netherlands and party leader of the Christian Democratic Party holds steadfast. “The difference between poor and rich in the Netherlands is not large.”

The prime minister of the Netherlands burns of self-confidence. “Fifty seats,” he answers on the question of how many seats the CDA will get when asked by conversations leader Dick van Bolhuis. “That is also the age of Maxime Verhagen, our floor leader in the Second Chamber. Recently was his birthday.”

And what does the Christian Democratic Party offer the North, Van Bolhuis continues.

“Our platform. We want to make the Netherlands more prosperous and offer more security. We want more respect.”

(cont’d.)

FIGURE 4A
Who is Jan Peter Balkenende?

In 2001, while few Dutchmen knew Jan Peter Balkenende, a year later he was prime minister. His political career has also gone swift. He came in 1998, in the Second Chamber for CDA. … Balkenende was born on 7 May 1956. He passed [high school] and studied law and history. He moved up in the jurisprudence and worked as a policy employee at the Academic Council and as a staff employee at the scientific institute of the CDA. He was a part-time professor at the free university in Amsterdam.
Part 2: Civic Journalism

Print media in the United States and the Netherlands attempt to involve readers in their publications through the idea of civic journalism, a practice that engages readers in news coverage through actions such as publishing opinions of ordinary citizens and compiling poll results from civilian surveys. Civic journalism can also aim to help find solutions to problems by encouraging people to discuss issues either amongst themselves or with community leaders who can effect change. Journalists in the United States have applied civic journalism to their reporting for more than a decade, and the concept’s influence can be seen in the way American newspapers print readers’ opinions concerning news events. An example of this is a piece in one daily paper detailing the reactions of randomly selected voters to a televised debate between electoral candidates. While media in the Netherlands have begun to utilize the methods of civic journalism only during the last 10 years, the idea is clearly present in some Dutch newspapers. This was demonstrated when, for instance, a Dutch reporter – in a way much like journalists in the United States – wrote about the views of undecided voters pertaining to their reasons for voting and their opinions of the major candidates.

For the People: American Newspapers Involve Readers

American newspapers at large have engaged in civic journalism since the mid-1990s (Jamieson and Overholser 119). Through this idea, also known as public journalism, media typically attempt to engage ordinary citizens by providing “coverage that consults their readers, viewers, or listeners in addressing public concerns and facilitating solutions,” said Timothy E. Cook in his essay, “The Functions of the Press in
a Democracy” (Jamieson and Overholser 119). The Poynter Institute, a renowned American journalism academy, defined civic journalism as having three goals: “giving ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs, motivating ordinary people to get involved in public discussions of important issues, and pointing people toward possible solutions to society’s problems.” To do so, Poynter suggested activities such as “convene meetings of citizens and leaders to discuss public issues,” “conduct polls to learn citizens’ priorities on issues,” “make special efforts to motivate citizens to participate in decision-making on public issues,” and most importantly, it said, “include ordinary citizens as sources in public affairs stories.”

Pre-election articles from the Grand Rapids Press and Dagblad van het Noorden both detail reactions of readers to certain political events and therefore demonstrate civic journalism. For its coverage of a televised debate for the 2006 gubernatorial election, the Grand Rapids Press ran a standard informational news article about the debate on its front page, and also included a piece on an inside page that involved readers and their opinions. This second article, “Voter reaction to first Granholm, DeVos debate,” quoted several voters who watched the debate and planned to vote in the upcoming election (see Figure 5). The voters were quizzed on such topics as which candidate they thought won the debate and why, as well as which points they considered most memorable. The Grand Rapids Press also printed those voters’ basic demographic information and photographs, not only to show the variety of the voter sampling but to civic-mindedly engage the newspaper’s audience in reading and learning about their fellow citizens (“Voter”). Through this reaction piece, the newspaper followed the first two of the Poynter
DeVos, Granholm come out swinging
First debate does little to separate pair in close gubernatorial race

BY ED GOLDEN
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

EAST LANSING — The first debate between Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm and Republican challenger Dick DeVos was short on niceties and long on political thrust and parry. Granholm went on the attack in the first few minutes — and remained aggressive throughout the debate — challenging DeVos about an ad he started running Monday claiming she did not meet with Honda executives during trips to Japan. She called the ad “an outright falsehood” and directed people to her Web site, which includes pictures of her meeting with Honda leaders on her first trip to Japan in 2005.

She raised a recurrent theme that DeVos eliminated jobs as head of Amway Corp., now Ailico Inc., in the 1990s.

And she went after DeVos for not revealing his financial holdings in a nursing home company accused of allowing physical and sexual abuse of Alzheimer’s patients.

DeVos, in turn, confronted Granholm about her economic plan.

“I frankly find it amazing to hear the governor say the plan is working when the people of Michigan aren’t,” he said.

In response to a question about a prisoner who was released and went on a crime spree, DeVos said Granholm has not done enough to protect residents.

Neither candidate would answer a question about how influential their spouses have been or would be in their decision-making on a scale of one to 10.

“Your wife is a great person and very wise and she offers me wise counsel, and so I take her advice very, very much,” DeVos said of his wife, Betsy, adding he would seek advice from a range of people.

“It’s hard to put a number on it. She’s my best friend,” Granholm said of her husband, Dan Mulhern.

Voter reaction to first Granholm, DeVos debate
The Press asked six voters to share their thoughts after Monday’s gubernatorial debate.

John Ludwig
Age: 49
Job: Retail
Politics: Independent, Republican, Granholm
Supporter: DeVos
Overall: “DeVos won on the final spurts and Granholm won on time of possession. I thought she was able to seize control of the camera time.”
Who won? DeVos

Vicki Asey
Age: 34
Job: Housewife
Politics: Independent, undecided in governor’s race
Overall: “I thought, overall, it really was well done. DeVos didn’t do anything. He kept saying about the questions, instead of answering the questions asked of him, he was waffling.”
Who won? Granholm

Scott A. Barton
Age: 47
Job: Carpenter
Politics: Independent, Granholm
Supporter: Granholm
Overall: “I think he did well. Being a former prosecutor, he knows how to make her point and not get rattled.”
Who won? Granholm

Jim Hale
Age: 73
Job: Retired
Politics: Independent
Overall: “I think they both looked pretty good. She looked great, and I think they’d get better. She seemed to know an awful lot about his business and seemed to spend way too much time telling him how to handle his business. And I did not approve of the way DeVos went after her on the Ricky Holland case. He could have just said ‘It happened on her watch, and that’s that. I happen to agree with her policies.”
Who won? DeVos

Kathryn Smidt
Age: 47
Job: Corporate analyst
Politics: Independent, Granholm
Overall: “I thought Granholm had a great debate to say the same thing over and over again. She actually would say why we got here, how we got here, and what we are doing to get out of here.”
Who won? Granholm

FIGURE 5
Grand Rapids Press; Tuesday, Oct. 3, 2006
Institute’s goals of civic journalism: it let civilians express their opinions about public affairs and motivated them to take part in discussions about important issues.

In another way of reaching out to the public, American newspapers typically aim to interview and quote citizens who are somehow affected by the topic being discussed, which does not necessarily have political implications. For example, the Grand Rapids Press once published an article about a flood that caused a storm pump to malfunction, and instead of writing only about the technical problem, the article focused heavily on the ordinary people affected. The article quoted several neighbors whose basements had been flooded with raw sewage as a result of the malfunction, therefore highlighting the impact the event had on the public (Metro internship).

**Netherlands Catching Up: Dutch Media Moving Toward Civic Focus**

Dutch newspapers such as the Dagblad van het Noorden have begun transitioning into civic journalism only within the past decade. “Ten years ago we were a newspaper for the institutions; now want to be for the people,” said Evert Van Dijk, deputy editor in chief of the Dagblad van het Noorden. During a personal interview, he cited an example of a city council decision that would affect local traffic, saying that today the paper would focus on the impact on local people, rather than just on the facts of the decision: “Now we want to start with bikers and walkers, not the city council discussion,” like the paper would have done a decade ago, when coverage was more institution heavy.

This change is evident in the Dagblad van het Noorden article, “‘Als je stemt, mag je kritiek hebben op de regering,’ ” or “‘If you vote, you can criticize the government,’ ” which quoted opinions of well-known Dutchmen who planned to vote in
the Netherlands’ 2006 general election but had not yet chosen a favorite candidate (see Figure 6). These “floaters,” as Van Dijk called them, were interviewed about why they planned to vote and which issues would influence their decisions (Hankel). The editor said one-third of the country’s voters at the time did not know which candidate or party to vote for, although most of them knew whether they wanted to vote for candidates who leaned either right or left. The coverage of these undecided voters demonstrates the paper’s more civic focus. “That’s why for the elections we had pictures of voters instead of candidates,” Van Dijk said, referring to photographs accompanying the article. Despite this progress, though, he indicated that not all newspapers in the Netherlands have adopted such public-oriented philosophies: “We are a bit ahead in that way.” When the Dagblad van het Noorden was created in 2002 as a result of a merger of two other regional papers, newspaper administrators decided choosing this new focus would positively affect their readers, Van Dijk said, and perhaps would put them ahead of their competition.

The journalistic concept of civic journalism, which involves engaging readers largely by expressing their opinions and thoughts about news items and matters covered by the media, has been present in the U.S. journalism industry since the mid-1990s. An attempt to apply civic journalism is seen when an American newspaper published the reactions of voters to a debate between electoral candidates. Several years later, Dutch media began to value the goals of civic journalism, as well, and it is clear that they are moving in the same direction, as evidenced in a Dutch newspaper article that portrayed the views of voters regarding an upcoming election.
Als je stemt, mag je kritiek hebben op de regering

Morgen in het belang van de gooi
gemeente, zegt pvdA-politicus
dus van Vlaanderen: "Als je stemt,
70 procent toont dat je stemt.
"

"Als je stemt, mag je kritiek hebben op de regering," zegt pvdA-politicus Hans van der Laan. "Zowel in de regering als in de oppositie. Maar als je stemt, mag je kritiek hebben op de regering."
Report: Prominent people discuss elections

‘If you vote, you can criticize the government’

Why is it important to vote, and for whom? Known Dutchmen speak out. “It is 100 percent certain that I will vote.”

DEN HAAG – Jos Brink doesn’t know precisely yet, the announcer says. “Just like many other Dutchmen, I float still. I doubt between VVD and D66. But I will vote anyway. Because if you do not vote, for four years you cannot gripe about politics.”

Writer Harry Mulisch knows precisely what he wants. “I vote for the Party for the Animals. They rise for the weak in the society.”

(cont’d.)
Part 3: Societal Roles

The role of the media as a watchdog of society that is on guard against wrongdoing is highly valued among the American public and even journalists themselves. By and large, American reporters feel it is their duty to expose corruption and dishonesty that are deceiving society. It is common for newspapers in the United States to break stories about actions and decisions that reporters or editors felt were deceitful and deliberately harmed or misled the public. Such a case is found in one American newspaper that published an article revealing the fact that citizens’ privacy was being invaded by the federal government as it sought out possible terrorists. In Dutch media, this role is not nearly as heavily emphasized. In fact, newspapers in the Netherlands generally do not even publish the real names of criminals, much less write about the details of high-profile corruption scandals. This is apparent in one Dutch newspaper article that discussed a series of crimes committed by a man whose only first name and last initial were disclosed. Such enhanced privacy policies tend to make complicated cases too difficult to relate in the newspaper; therefore, many Dutch publications simply omit those items from their agendas. American media, on the other hand, always publish names of criminals and other parties involved. It is only in cases of a victim still in danger or a juvenile offender that U.S. papers refrain from printing names, and some journalists even argue that juveniles’ names should still be published.

Exposing Corruption: American Media Serve as Public Watchdog

U.S. media serve many purposes in today’s society, but the most valued role often seems to be that of a guardian of society with a determination to expose corruption and
misdeeds. W. Lance Bennett and William Serrin said in their essay, “The Watchdog Role,” that “of all the established functions of the press in American public life, the watchdog role is among the most hallowed.” They go on to define “watchdog journalism” as “independent scrutiny by the press of the activities of government, business, and other public institutions, with an aim toward documenting, questioning, and investigating those activities, in order to provide publics and officials with timely information on issues of public concern” (Jamieson and Overholser 169). Often what comes to mind when Americans think of watchdog journalism are “the practices of enterprise or investigative reporting aimed at finding hidden evidence of social ills, official deception, and institutional corruption” (170).

A *Grand Rapids Press* article called, “What’s your terror score? Uncle Sam makes list, checks twice; even meals scrutinized,” shows American media’s emphasis on enterprise stories that expose corruption and underhandedness they believe is present in U.S. institutions (see Figure 7). For this article, the reporter wrote about the way in which the government was invading the privacy of millions of citizens who traveled internationally and assigning them computer-generated scores to evaluate their national security threat. To arrive at these terrorist scores, which could be used against citizens even in courts and with private contractors, people’s everyday activities were monitored by the federal government (Sniffen). Through this article, the reporter brought to light a topic about which he felt readers should be informed. In doing so, he likely believed he was serving the public good by eliminating a certain amount of deception from society. Transgressions such as this privacy invasion can be exposed through several common methods, ranging from posing challenging questions to officials, documenting the
WASHINGTON — Without notifying the public, federal agents for the past four years have assigned millions of international travelers, including Americans, computer-generated scores rating the risk they pose of being terrorists or criminals.

The travelers are not allowed to see or directly challenge these risk assessments, which the government intends to keep on file for 40 years.

Scores are assigned to people entering and leaving the U.S.

The program’s existence was disclosed in November, when the government put an announcement detailing the Automated Targeting System, or ATS, for the first time in the Federal Register, a fine-print compendium of federal rules. The Homeland Security Department said the nation’s ability to spot criminals and other security threats “would be critically impaired without access to this data.”

Still, privacy advocates view ATS with alarm.

Government officials could not say whether ATS has apprehended any terrorists. Customs and Border Protection spokesman Bill Anthony said agents refuse entry to about 414 foreign criminals every day based on all the information they have.

The government notice says ATS data may be shared with state, local and foreign governments for use in helping decide security clearances, contracts or other benefits. In some cases, the data may be shared with courts, Congress and even private contractors.

“Everybody else can see it, but you can’t,” said Stephen Yale-Loehr, an immigration lawyer who teaches at Cornell Law school.

But Raymon Ahern, an assistant commissioner of Homeland Security’s Customs and Border Protection agency, said the ATS ratings simply allow agents at the border to pick out people not previously identified by law enforcement as potential terrorists or criminals and send them for additional searches and interviews. “It does not replace the judgment of officers,” Ahern said Thursday.

FIGURE 7
Grand Rapids Press; Friday, Dec. 1, 2006
behavior of authorities, or digging deeper than surface facts to discover proof of the corruption or deception suspected. And because they are part of an independent media, American journalists are free to exercise such scrutiny of governmental, social, and economic institutions. These inspections are “commonly regarded as fundamental for keeping authorities in line with the values and norms that charter the institutions they manage,” wrote Bennett and Serrin (Jamieson and Overholser 170).

**Protecting Privacy: Dutch Criminals Not Exposed in Print**

Dutch media in general do not possess nearly the watchdog role assumed by their American counterparts. For instance, although it is not unlawful to do so, “the media usually do not publish the names of criminals, nor their portraits, unless with a black bar over their eyes. They use initials instead,” Van Eijk stated (128). This protective practice is demonstrated in a Dagblad van het Noorden story titled, “Drie jaar celstraf geeist tegen Johannes V.,” or “Three-year cell sentence demanded for Johannes V.” The article recounted the case of a man who, after committing a house burglary, dragged a policeman behind his car for 50 to 60 meters when the policeman tried to arrest him for the burglary (see Figure 8). According to the newspaper article, the crime was committed by a criminal referred to by the reporter as only “Johannes V. uit ’tZandt,” or “Johannes V. from ‘tZandt.” Johannes’ last name was not mentioned once throughout the entirety of the text, and even when a newspaper would typically refer to a person by just a last name, the Dagblad van het Noorden reporter used simply the criminal’s last initial. Through this procedure, the newspaper successfully concealed Johannes’ full and true identity from readers and the public at large.
Drie jaar celstraf geëist tegen Johannes V.

GRONINGEN — Het openbaar ministerie heeft gisteren drie jaar gevangenisstraf geëist tegen de 24-jarige Johannes V. uit 't Zandt. De man zou in juni dit jaar een politieman vijftig tot zestig meter hebben meegesleurd met zijn auto. Dit gebeurde tijdens een poging V. te arresteren. Hij zou kort daarvoor een woninginbraak hebben gepleegd.

V. zegt in paniek te zijn geraakt omdat hij dacht dat hij werd overvallen. Zes jaar geledeDen werd een aanslag op zijn vader gepleegd. "Ik dacht, nu ben ik aan de beurt." (DvhN)

→ ZIE VERDER PAGINA 2

FIGURE 8
Dagblad van het Noorden; Friday, Dec. 1, 2006
Partial translation:

Three-year cell sentence demanded for Johannes V.

GRONINGEN – The public ministry yesterday demanded a three-year imprisonment against the 24-year-old Johannes V. from 'tZandt. The man in June of this year dragged a policeman fifty to sixty meters with his car. This happened during an attempt to arrest V. For that reason, he had committed a house burglary.

(cont’d.)
Dutch media’s common standard of using initials to name criminals makes it hard to publish articles detailing important high-profile or complex crimes. This “may be one reason why corruption cases do not get much attention,” said Van Eijk. He described the problem by saying, “In uncomplicated cases with one or two criminals, it is usually no problem to relate the story using initials. But complicated cases become very difficult to recount if one cannot use names” (128). So, as a result, such situations and occurrences are not covered as detailed or thoroughly as perhaps they should be, or at least not covered as completely as they are in the United States.

**Naming Names: Some Identities Kept Under Radar in U.S. Newspapers**

American media typically publish names of all legal offenders, except in the circumstance that the criminal is a juvenile, or a person under 17 years of age. In such cases, it is up to individual media outlets to choose whether to print the name of the teenager or child involved, and no consensus has yet been made among news organizations as to the ethicality of revealing a juvenile’s name. Author Brian S. Brooks, along with several co-authors, said in *News Writing and Reporting* that the question of “whether to use the names of juveniles charged with crimes is a troublesome issue,” and the answer of various newspapers is still not consistent across the board. The arguments presented by both sides of the issue seem to have held their validity throughout the years, and the winner of the debate still remains to be seen. Those who oppose releasing the names of juvenile offenders, Brooks said, claim “the publicity marks them for life as criminals,” and “there is ample opportunity for these individuals to change their ways and become good citizens – if the media do not stamp them as criminals” (298). Added to the
argument is the negative effect of the overwhelming embarrassment likely to be felt by juveniles’ parents or families. Meanwhile, other opponents hold that “in some groups a youth’s notoriety will encourage other young people to violate the law.” American media also have traditionally held the belief that “juveniles are juveniles and are entitled to make juvenile mistakes, even if those mistakes are crimes,” Brooks said, adding that “juvenile court records are, after all, sealed” (505). Others argue that media and the law should treat juveniles like adults when they commit serious crimes such as rape or armed robbery (298). Going even further than the legal ramifications of crimes committed by juveniles, Brooks said, some people claim “the prospect of public humiliation will make other juveniles think twice before committing crimes.” So far, the U.S. court system has “upheld the right to publish juvenile offenders’ names on the public record” (505).

Newspapers in the United States also usually print the names of crime victims unless that person is a victim of rape or a crime for which the attacker is still at large. Such situations are handled delicately because of the present risk of further endangering a victim, which could be the unfortunate result of making that victim’s name publicly known. If a victim’s name is in the newspaper, his or her attacker could more easily track down the victim for a second encounter. Newspapers must exercise an appropriate degree of what is known as “forseeability,” which “refers to what a ‘reasonably prudent person’ would ‘reasonably’ foresee under similar circumstances,” according to Brooks. Carelessly disregarding the foreseeability of one’s actions likely could result in a lawsuit in which the newspaper or reporter is held accountable for the endangerment of the subject: “If an individual engages in conduct that could foreseeably create harm, and if that harm occurs, the individual may be liable for negligence” (295).
In his book, Brooks referenced the liability case of Sandra Hyde, who was the victim of an attempted kidnapping in Columbia, Missouri. Even though she escaped and was at risk because her attempted kidnapper was still at large, a local newspaper published her name and address, leading the kidnapper straight to her. Hyde had filed a police report and “gave her name and address – a couple of facts that her assailant didn’t have until a Columbia Daily Tribune reporter got a copy of the report from the police and the newspaper published her name and address the next day.” Shortly after her contact information was released, “the man started terrorizing her, stalking her at home and workplace and making phone calls to give her messages.” The woman sued in 1983, and the U.S. Supreme Court found the newspaper guilty of negligence for printing Hyde’s name and address. “In doing so, the court sent the message that newspapers could be found liable for printing a news story that exposed a specific victim to an unreasonable, foreseeable risk of harm” (Brooks et al. 296).

Over time, American media have assumed the role of watchdog of the public, a responsibility that encourages reporters to investigate and expose corruption and deception originating from trusted American institutions and organizations. Evidence of this watchdog journalism is found in one U.S. newspaper article that informs readers that their privacy is being invaded as the government records their every move to determine whether they are a terror threat. This guardian role is not as strong of a media function in the Netherlands, however. Corruption typically is difficult to cover and is even avoided in Dutch newspapers because of a tradition of not naming criminals but using initials instead. This practice, which can be observed in one Dutch newspaper article about a
criminal who committed a house burglary and then dragged a policeman by his car, makes it difficult and confusing to write and read about crimes involving more than one criminal, and thus such crimes often go unannounced. In contrast, newspapers in the United States always publish full names of criminals and other people involved, except in cases of at-risk crime victims and often juvenile offenders.
Part 4: Declining Circulations

Newspaper circulations in both countries have been decreasing steadily over the years. Circulations as a whole in the United States fall about 1 percent per year, while newspapers in the Netherlands, if based off the decline of one specific newspaper, have been seeing about a 3 percent annual decrease. Because of the loss of readers, both nations’ industries have been forced to downsize newspaper staffs to cut on costs. Additionally, one American paper is experiencing somewhat of a hiring freeze, resulting in fewer workers to manage an unchanging amount of responsibility. That paper, which is the third-largest newspaper in Michigan, currently staffs its headquarters and one bureau office with about 40 reporters, managed by a staff of around 24 editors. One Dutch newspaper has increased the cost of its newspaper’s price to compensate for the loss of circulation revenues. That paper, the largest newspaper of the northern region of the Netherlands, plans to soon decrease its staff size to about 140 journalists.

Going Down: Circulation, Employees Falling at American Newspaper

The circulations of newspapers in the United States have been dropping at a rate of about 1 percent every year, beginning around 1990, according to The State of the News Media 2004: An Annual Report on American Journalism. Between 1990 and 2002, circulations of newspapers across the country had dropped a total of 11 percent. During the past 30 years, the number of newspapers purchased has decreased drastically, as well. About 55 million papers were sold daily in 2002, compared with the 62 million sold each day in 1970, when American newspaper circulations were at their peak. Today, only about half the American population – 54 percent – reads newspapers on a daily basis.
Along with circulations, the number of American newspapers in existence has also been decreasing by about 1 percent per year since the 1980s. As of 2002, the total number was 1,457 – down about 17 percent from 1980 (“Audience”).

The problem of spiraling circulations nationwide is larger than simply fewer people forming a habit of reading newspapers, according to the report. Not only are fewer people developing the habit, it said, but “people who used to read every day now read less often. Some people who used to read a newspaper have stopped altogether,” and “many people now read newspapers only occasionally, a couple days a week, but no longer every day.” The report attributed this specific loss of readers to the growing trend of people more often choosing to read morning papers rather than those published in the afternoons. These and a myriad of other possible reasons could be to blame, it said, such as the fact that “some people may be getting news online, some perhaps from cable television. Some may be opting out of traditional news sources. Others may be sharing copies of a paper among multiple readers.” Although there are several possible reasons, the outcome is the same – smaller circulations and less revenue: “Whatever it is, these people are not paying every day for the journalism produced by newspapers, even if they are reading it in other outlets such as online (“Audience”).

The steady decline in circulation has led many American newspapers to cut down on costs by offering buyouts to older employees and by freezing hiring, resulting in younger, cheaper employees hired to replace the early retirees, or resulting in many desks simply being left vacant. In fact, in an article dated January 21, 2007, the Grand Rapids Press announced it was offering buyouts – or “early retirement incentives” – to 50 of the 700 full-time and part-time workers it employed at the beginning of the year, both at its
downtown Grand Rapids headquarters and at its production center located in Walker, Michigan. Eligible employees had to be 55 years old or older and had to have at least 20 years of tenure, and they were given just under three months to decide whether to take the offer. The buyout packages were presented as part of a “series of cost-cutting severance offers, voluntary buyouts and a structural change for newspaper delivery,” wrote Grand Rapids Press reporter Julia Bauer in the article about the offer. The effort to reduce expenditures also included plans to offer severance deals to 80 part-time truck drivers who assisted with the daily newspaper delivery process (Bauer). Other evidence of circulation decline is apparent in some hiring practices, or lack thereof. Many papers are experiencing some type of hiring freeze, a situation caused when upper management mandates a stagnation of the number of employees in order to prevent increases in company’s salary payments. For example, when one reporter left his job at the Grand Rapids Press in August 2006 to take a more prestigious position at a different publication, the newspaper chose not to replace him with a new employee. Instead, his work was distributed among several existing reporters, who then had to handle the former employee’s responsibilities as well as duties of their own. Through such an arrangement, the newspaper administration was successful in cutting costs and saving money by eliminating the need for a hiring replacement reporter (Metro internship).

**Grand Rapids: The Personnel Informing West Michigan**

Before the early retirement plan took effect, the Grand Rapids Press was run by about two dozen editors and assistant editors. At the top of the hierarchy is one executive editor, who oversees the editorial mission, duties, and content of the newspaper’s
operations. Around 10 section editors report directly to the executive editor, and about 14 assistant editors work beneath them, including a deputy editor and bureau editor. These positions include titles such as editorial page editor, food editor, entertainment editor, photo editor, assistant sports editor and assistant metro editor, among others (“Telephone”). Each editor has specific tasks to complete on a daily basis, which cover a broad range of duties that result in what the newspaper hopes is a diverse and well-rounded final product. For instance, the suburban editor coordinates content for the suburban, or community, section that publishes once per week. Her daily roles include finding stories that need to be covered as well as photo opportunities, assigning reporters to make phone calls and write articles, and editing stories once they have been submitted. She also is in charge of finding reporters to keep track of news in various small communities within the paper’s circulation area and compiling news briefs about news in those areas (Metro internship). The section editors and assistant section editors oversee about 40 reporters who generate the majority of the articles seen in each day’s paper and six writers who write weekly or daily editorials or opinion columns (“Telephone”). When there are too many stories to be covered by the regular full-time staff, editors also rely on the help of freelance writers, or “stringers,” who get paid per story and typically write from home, electronically submitting their stories to section editors via e-mail (Metro internship).

Although section editors preliminarily copy edit articles written by reporters, more thorough copy editing is done by people hired for that specific job. At the Grand Rapids Press, there are approximately 30 copy editors, which include nine designated specifically for the sports section, one for the features section, and the rest for the
remaining sections of the paper (“Telephone”). Besides copy editing, these employees also write headlines, subheadlines, and photograph captions, as well as design newspaper pages, eliminating the need to hire and pay specialized designers. Photographs are taken by 14 photographers, most of whom are part-time employees or freelance photographers who do not spend much time at the office. They typically come into the office only to drop off photographs they have taken or to seek out new assignments. Four graphic artists design graphics that appear on the newspaper’s pages, such as charts and graphs to accompany stories with facts that are better understood through visual elements rather than blocks of text (Metro internship).

The Grand Rapids Press has one bureau, located in Holland, Michigan. The bureau is run by one editor who is equal in terms of status and pay to the headquarters’ assistant metro editors, who are in charge of specific segments of the metro, or local, coverage. Content is generated by three bureau reporters and several freelancers, and three photographers take pictures in the Holland area (“Telephone”).

Compensating: Dutch Paper Cuts Employee Costs, Raises Prices

As of late, the Dagblad van het Noorden has found itself in a situation very similar to that of the Grand Rapids Press in terms of decreasing circulation leading to attempts to save costs through cutting employees. The Dutch paper is experiencing about a 3 percent circulation decline per year, according to Van Dijk, who said the growth of the Internet and the increasing ease of finding free news electronically are the main factors contributing to the drop. “Young readers don’t want to pay to read the paper; it’s free on the Internet,” the editor said. In American media, too, “young people appear to
read newspapers less than their elders,” said the State of the News Media report. The document cited statistics – published by a consumer market company called Scarborough Research – that said in 2003 “only 40 percent of people aged 18 to 24 read a paper on weekdays,” and people 25 to 34 years old also have about 41 percent readership on weekdays. Van Dijk indicated that the ups and downs of markets in general have an effect, too: “The economy is going down, and people stop reading. But they don’t start again when the economy goes back up.” Because of the loss of readers, the Dutch newspaper company has been forced to compensate by raising the prices of its product. The main effect of the circulation decreases, however, is a change in personnel and hiring, he said. Like the Grand Rapids Press, the Dagblad van het Noorden is being forced to decrease the size of its staff to make up for the loss of revenue created by the decline in circulation: “Because the circulation rate is dropping, the amount of journalists also has to fall,” Van Dijk said.

Currently, the Dagblad van het Noorden has about one reporter for every 1,000 readers, a ratio which Van Dijk said is favored by the publisher of the newspaper. Therefore, to keep that ratio steady as circulation falls, the newspaper will have to downsize the number of journalists to 140 within two years, according to Van Dijk. The average age of an employee of the Dutch newspaper is 47, which means many staff members have been with the company a long time and are earning larger salaries that reflect the time they have spent with the paper. However, the newspaper administration would like to hire more young journalists who have only recently received their degree, allowing the company to pay them smaller beginner salaries. To speed up this employee replacement process, Van Dijk said, the Dagblad van het Noorden has an arrangement
with its parent company that 15 senior employees may retire two years early, and the paper will be allowed to hire seven younger staff members in exchange. This not only decreases the number of employees, but also decreases the amount of money the company must pay for each salary.

**Two Provinces: The Staff Reaching Northern Netherlands**

The editorial staff of the Dagblad van het Noorden is currently headed by an editor in chief – the equivalent of the Grand Rapids Press executive editor – and two deputy editors in chief. Below them are 12 to 15 section editors, called “chiefs.” Also working in the newsroom are about 20 copy editors, who sometimes double as extra reporters. Photographs are taken by five main photographers, as well as many freelancers. Twenty designers set up the newspaper pages, and five graphic artists add visual elements (Van Dijk).

The Dagblad van het Noorden has about 90 to 100 reporters writing for its nine editions, as well as for two or three free, smaller papers the company produces that are delivered weekly to each household in the circulation area. Reporters for these weekly papers help constitute the staffs of the company’s 10 bureaus, and occasionally reporters from the main office work out of the bureaus, as well. The bureaus – called “city offices” – are located throughout Groningen and Drenthe, and the nine different editions of the Dagblad van het Noorden are all tailored and delivered to specific regions and cities. Each different edition is distributed to a unique part of the circulation area and features news coverage more relevant to that specific area. This tailoring of coverage is apparent in not only the content of the articles but also the photographs that accompany them.
These specialized articles and photographs are the second section of the paper – the “Regio,” or “Region,” section. The first page of this section is known as the “second front page,” and it consists of second-string major news stories, which is also the case with American newspapers. Located at the Dagblad van het Noorden headquarters is the printing press and the offices of the main section editors, such as the sports, culture, economics, and Internet editors. The city desk and city reporters – regional reporters who, like American general assignment reporters, cover all types of stories rather than being assigned specific beats, or subject areas – all work out of the bureaus (Van Dijk).

As newspaper circulations fall in both the United States and the Netherlands, print media in both countries are trying to make up for the lost revenue by shrinking their staff sizes through ways such as early retirement incentives. Even one of Michigan’s largest daily newspapers recently offered buyouts to veteran employees in an attempt to decrease a reporting and management staff of currently about 65 people. One of the Netherlands’ biggest papers also has begun attempting to motivate seasoned employees to retire early, with a goal to ultimately achieve a smaller staff of about 140 journalists. The publication also has recently increased the cost of purchasing the publication to help recover from the circulation declines.
Conclusion

American newspapers, when compared with newspapers in the Netherlands, can be said to better exemplify the high principles commonly expected of journalists by the public. This is done despite the ever-present trials of declining circulations and the subsequent cuts in employee numbers and changes in hiring practices, including early retirement offers and quantity limits on new personnel. While newspapers in both countries have begun to adopt a more civic focus in their coverage, media in the United States more often adhere to standards of fair and neutral coverage and serve as guardians of society.

The goal of objectivity in writing and reporting emerged in the United States more than a century before it entered Dutch media culture. The fact that this ideal was established earlier and is more institutionalized in American media than in the Netherlands is noticeable in types of coverage in certain newspapers. For instance, the day before a significant news event was to occur, one American paper published a completely objective piece that included neutral facts and information, while on a very similar occasion, a Dutch newspaper ran a piece presenting the opinions and views of the newspaper staff regarding the event.

Newspapers in both countries have recently begun to practice civic journalism, aimed at involving readers in news coverage. The fact that they are moving toward this public-oriented model is demonstrated when one American newspaper quoted the reactions of randomly selected citizens after an important news incident. Similarly, a Dutch paper published statements made by key community members regarding an upcoming event.
The public often relies on the media to sift through untruths and present the facts as they really are, rather than what certain institutions would have the public believe. American media have stepped up to this duty, assuming a watchdog role in society for which they publish pieces uncovering corruption, dishonesty, and scandal. One example of this is found in an American newspaper article informing readers that the government was invading their privacy and telling them the way in which such events were taking place. Newspapers in the Netherlands, however, rarely cover cases of corruption. Reporters even refrain from revealing the full names of criminals and only publish initials instead. This tradition makes complicated crimes hard to follow, so media frequently overlook such cases.

If trends continue, Dutch media will continue to adopt more and more qualities possessed by the U.S. industry, and American journalism will persist in holding true to long-established principles such as objectivity, as well as civic and watchdog journalism. Perhaps James Curran said it best when he wrote:

The media should keep people informed about public affairs so that individuals are adequately briefed when they take part in the processes of self-government. The media should be fearless watchdogs, vigilantly examining the exercise of power and protecting the public from wrongdoing. The media should also provide a platform of open debate that facilitates the formation of public opinion. In addition, the media should be the voice of the people, representing to authority the citizenry's views and expressing the agreed aims of society. In short, the primary
democratic tasks of the media are to inform, scrutinize, debate, and represent. (Jamieson 120)
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