

Sam Semerau

23 July 2021

## FURSCA 2021 End of Summer Report

My FURSCA project for this summer, *The Opinion Section at War: An Exploration of the Pleiad's Opinion Section During Wartime*, sought to examine how the Opinion Section of the Albion College newspaper, the Pleiad, covered wars involving the United States. Focusing on war coverage within the Pleiad allowed me to observe change over time both in Albion College community opinions and in the technical format of the Opinion Section.

My analysis of these changes was supported by secondary sources that provided larger context regarding trends in journalism and public opinion. Additionally, I sought to look for journalistic practices in the Opinion Sections of the past that withstand the test of time as both entertaining and valuable content. I utilized secondary sources in this process to gain a better understanding of what defines quality opinion journalism. My goals for this project were to examine the function of the Opinion Section of the Pleiad and to articulate how it has changed over time. In doing so, my plan was to create an amendment to the Pleiad-Handbook regarding how the Opinion Section should be operated (Fig. 1).

I was successful in my goals and plan on continuing this work in the upcoming semester. In creating my proposed amendment for the Pleiad Handbook, I outlined a series of requirements and advice for opinion writers and editors, which included my compiled list of editorial practices that withstand the test of time and are appropriate for our current majority-online publication. Though the paper began publication in 1883, I decided to start my work of chronologically examining bound editions with 1903 when the Pleiad first introduced a separate editorial section. I also decided to end my research in 2008 when the Pleiad switched from print to online publication to fit the 10-week schedule. While in the archives, I searched for a labelled editorial or op-ed (opposite-editorial) page which contained opinion journalism in its own section distinct from

To: Albion College Media Board and Albion College Pleiad staff  
Issue: Approval of amendment to Albion College Pleiad Student Handbook  
Effective: TBD  
Submission date: TBD

### PROPOSED AMENDMENT FOR THE ALBION PLEIAD STUDENT HANDBOOK ON THE OPINIONS SECTION

#### I. Background & Reason for Proposed Amendment

A. The following proposal was written as part of Samantha Semerau's summer 2021 Foundation for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity (FURSCA) project advised by Dr. Krista Quesenberry. While I initially set out to research the change over time in the Pleiad's coverage of war in the Opinions Section, I was increasingly drawn towards investigating what defines a quality Opinions Section. I did this by analyzing issues of the Pleiad from its first print publication in 1883 to the switch to primarily online publication in 2008. In addition, I utilized secondary sources which provided information on the technical side of opinion and news journalism writing. Some of these sources include: Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel's *The Elements of Journalism* (Three Rivers Press 2007), Bob Franklin's *Pulling Newspapers Apart: Analyzing Print Journalism* (Oxofordledge 2008) and Conrad C. Fink's *Writing Opinion for Impact* (Wiley-Blackwell 2004). The requirements and advice I have outlined are derived from my experience as Pleiad's Opinions editor for the 2020-2021 school year, reviewing over a century of opinion and editorial writing featured within the Pleiad and reviewing work on the subject by professionals in the field.

#### II. Requirements for opinion articles written by staff writers

- A. The article must work to SEA - stimulate, educate, and advocate (Fink).
1. Stimulate: The article contains commentary on a topic that stimulates public dialogue and may lead readers to think in new ways about the topic.
  2. Educate: The article contains information that educates the reader on the topic in new ways and explains the topic beyond what is featured in a news article on the topic.
  3. Advocate: The article advocates a position and may lead readers to a conclusion with new insight.
- B. The article must have some form of localization if not directly on issues related to the Albion Community ~~community~~.

\*This is an amendment to the current 2014 Student Handbook, which describes Opinion articles as "content that expresses individual opinion about local, state, or national events or matters," but does not specify the need for localization.

Fig. 1: The first page of my proposed amendment for the Pleiad Student Handbook, including my background and reason for the amendment.

news journalism. Once this was found, I would browse the articles included for any mention of contemporary military conflict, then go over again to see if the section or articles had included unique language, purpose, or audience-reader engagement that entertained me but also added

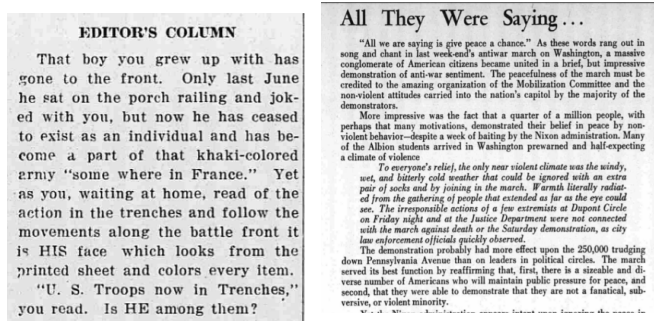


Fig. 2: The editorial on the left from Nov. 1917 and the editorial on the right from Nov. 1969 demonstrate a shift in both format and opinion on military involvement.

insight that I did not have previously. I would ultimately use these observations while writing my proposal. I would also collect pictures and scans of the articles that are important to help accomplish my research goals. These images helped me visually see the change over time in the Opinion Section. In the content of the articles, I discovered a general shift from a focus on military support and patriotism to more introspective thinking regarding war and U.S.'s place in military conflict. In the formatting, I discovered a gradual change from text-heavy essay-like editorials to more succinct columns (Fig. 2).

In the 2021-2022 academic year, I plan on continuing my work on the historical analysis of the Pleiad's Opinion Section. I would like to look further into what these changes were, what they look like in the larger context of U.S. journalism and public discourse, and what this says about the changing attitudes of the Albion College community. I will explore this concept as a part of my Prentiss M. Brown Honors Program senior thesis. I also plan on sharing the findings made this summer at the Elkin Isaac Research Symposium next spring. Finally, I intend to submit my finalized amendment proposal to the Albion College Media Board, the Fall 2021 staff of the Albion Pleiad, and other members of the English Department invested in the future of the Pleiad.

This research has given me experience in conducting archival research, utilizing skills from my English and history backgrounds beyond the classroom, and writing policy proposals. Additionally, this project has given me a fuller understanding of quality journalism practices, which I will apply as Editor-in-Chief of the Pleiad for the Fall 2021 semester. I would like to thank the Richard L. and Barbara J. Meyer Student Research Endowment as well as FURSCA Director Dr. Vanessa McCaffrey and Assistant Director Renee Kreger for making this possible.