Reporting controversy requires estabishing a sound process

Part of the difficulty in reporting controversy is how to define the term and the concept. \ Any article, if misreported in some way, can be controversial. Journalists would, in a process akin to Taoism, first rectify the issues, then rectify themselves. This process starts with looking at the news gathering, observation and research for stories.

Resources:

- **Making sense of news**
  http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=136&aid=188735

- **Sense-making project (Poynter)**
  http://vimeo.com/3926080

- **How facts backfire (research to support the above)**
  http://vimeo.com/3926080

- **Truthsquad results: How to fact-check the news**
  http://blog.newstrust.net/2010/08/truthsquad-results.html

- **Example of making sense of news**
  http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=136&aid=188702

- **How Facebook can be used to practice journalism**
  http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=173363

- **How do I find new and interesting story ideas**
  http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=78&aid=178946
  asp?id=136&aid=188735

Principles of Controversy:
First we look at some basic principles:

1. Controversy is in the eyes of the beholder. Controversy is a difficult concept to predict or assess. The best way of handling controversy is preparation.

2. Preparation for handling controversy includes following and practicing professional standards of journalism like those espoused by the Society of Professional Journalists, The Poynter Institute, Radio Television Digital News Association, National Press Photographers Association and the Journalism Education Association.

3. Those professional standards include measurable " best" practices as well as ethical considerations. It is important to note that ethical standards are guidelines and not rules and thus cannot be used to punish those who do not achieve them.

4. The foundation for implementing professional standards is publishing the truth. All other journalistic processes are built on this foundation

5. The publishing process must also emphasize accuracy, thoroughness and context.

6. Also essential are source diversity and balance.

7. Packaging involves all of the steps above so published material is in perspective and complete.

8. If students feel reported material can lead to controversy, they should design an assessment process to thoroughly vet foreseeable issues before publication.

9. School officials – including journalism teachers, advisers and administrators – should provide students with the tools and background to make this assessment process successful and then trust them to carry out the process.

10. The goal of reporting "controversial" stories is not to sensationalize or tantalize, but to create better understanding and communication about topics or issues essential to community well-being.

Questions about Controversy:
Secondly we ask questions about the reporting process:

1. Is there a way to go beyond the fear of "controversy"because it really is in the eye of the beholder? Are there principles of journalism all stakeholders agree are important in the reporting process no matter what the topic?

2. Do journalism curricula contain professional standards and ethical practices as outlined by the major commercial organizations?

> **"** The goal of reporting "controversial" stories is not to sensationalize or tantalize, but to create better understanding and communication about topics or issues essential to community well-being.

Resources:

• **Critical thinking about journalism: a high school student's view**
http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=102410

• **News literacy project: students figure out what news and information to trust**
http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=102410

• **Thinking about multitasking: it's what journalists needs to do**
http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=102398

• **News-focused game playing**
http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=102419

3. Do journalism curricula contain as basic educational structure professional standards and ethical practices? Are these standards an integral part of the daily teaching and learning process?

4. Do journalism curricula hold as basic the search for the truth behind all stories? Do all aspects of the journalism program center on this principle?

5. Do journalism curricula hold as basic the concepts of accuracy, thoroughness and context as best practices? Do all aspects of the journalism program focus on these principles?

6. Do journalism curricula hold as basic the concepts of source diversity and balance as essential practices? Do all aspects of the journalism program focus on these principles?

7. Within the curriculum and student media, what is the role of packaging? Is it to enable audiences to focus on the content and context of the reporting or to highlight the aspects less important but more controversial?

8. Within the journalism curricula and with student media, are there critique sessions and rubrics to evaluate the basic principles of truth, accuracy, thoroughness and context? Have students, school and community stakeholders been made aware of these standards and how they are accomplish and then evaluated?

9. Are journalism programs, courses and media provided with the tools and learning opportunities needed to make them successful? Are stakeholders in the school's various communities aware of the journalism program's mission, its standards and its needs?

10. Are all stakeholders given an opportunity to discuss the journalism program, its mission, standards and needs at regular intervals?

Lastly, we look at the answers and begin to carry out the process of reporting, using our answers to find the best ways to ethically and legally report the information.

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