

The Origins of Journalism Education at UNC-Chapel Hill

by

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Thank you. I'm deeply honored to have been asked to deliver this Gladys Coates University History Lecture for 2009. I am humbled as I look at the scholars in the audience who have studied UNC history for much longer than I have.

I want to recognize and thank a special person today. My wife, Mary Ellen Bowers, has been my inspiration and a critical reader of the book manuscript. I also want to recognize and thank Jean Folkerts, dean of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, for asking me to write the school's history as part of the commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the first journalism course at UNC.

To write that history, I read every issue of the *Tar Heel* from 1893 to 1924. I examined the correspondence and archives of presidents, chancellors, deans, former faculty members and alumni. I interviewed more than 40 former students and faculty members. Today, instead of skimming across one hundred years of that history, I will focus on the origins of journalism instruction at Carolina — up to the creation of the Department of Journalism in 1924.

My research was guided by an effort to learn what led to the creation of the first journalism course in 1909, and I assumed it happened because of three factors. One, there had to be students who were interested in learning about journalism. Two, there needed to be a faculty member who was interested in journalism and who was qualified to teach the course. Three, the university had to see enough value in a journalism course to divert resources from other courses. I found all three factors.

The birth of the *Tar Heel*

The existence of a campus newspaper in 1909 was *prima facie* evidence of student interest in journalism at the time, and a weekly student newspaper had been published for sixteen years before the first journalism course. The University Athletic Association published the first issue of the *Tar Heel* on February 23, 1893, in part to build support for athletic activities.

In the 1890s, students in the Athletic Association exercised considerable control over both intercollegiate and intramural athletic activities on campus. Stories in the *Tar Heel* indicated that the association hired coaches, purchased equipment, scheduled games and secured facilities. Illustrating how athletics and journalism were co-mingled at the time, the first editor of the *Tar Heel*, Charles Baskerville, was also the star halfback and manager of the football team — and a chemistry teacher.

Although it was published by the Athletic Association, the four-page newspaper that appeared every Thursday devoted itself to the larger interests of the university. It was also a business venture, and it promoted itself as the “best, quickest and surest” way for advertisers to reach students.

The *Tar Heel* was not the first student publication, however. A literary magazine, the *North Carolina University Magazine*, was first published in 1844 and was followed sporadically by other publications with the same or similar names. Louis Round Wilson said the magazine’s first issue was criticized because it included news items that were deemed suitable for a weekly newspaper but not a literary magazine. Kemp Battle reported that a newspaper called the *Chapel Hillian* was published around 1889 but disappeared before the *Tar Heel* came on the scene. In 1894, a group of students who were opposed to the influence of fraternities in the Athletic Association started a rival newspaper — the *White and Blue* — but it was absorbed by the *Tar Heel* in 1895.

Sports coverage dominated the *Tar Heel* in its early decades. The front page was devoted primarily to sports stories, and editorials were often about athletics. Intercollegiate football got the most attention, along with baseball, tennis, and track and field. An 1898 editorial asked why basketball had not been introduced at the university. Ten years later — in 1908 — a news story reported that 20 students who had played basketball in high school had formed a basketball association and collected 18 dollars to support their effort. That was the beginning of basketball at Carolina, which is also celebrating its centennial this year.

The interest in journalism was not just an extracurricular activity, and many former *Tar Heel* staffers became journalists after they graduated — without formal journalism education or training. Three members of the class of 1897 worked for major newspapers. Ralph Graves was Sunday editor of the *New York Times*, Robert Follin was city editor of the *Charlotte Observer*, and William Bost was Raleigh correspondent for the *Greensboro Daily News*. Charles Phillips Russell of the class of 1903 was the city editor of the *New York Call* and later became a journalism faculty member. Victor Stephenson of the class of 1905 worked for the *New York Evening Post* and the *Charlotte Observer*. Quincy Sharpe Mills of the class of 1906 was an editorial writer for the *New York Evening Sun*.

The University Press

The *Tar Heel's* editorial offices were in a storeroom near the Methodist Church on Franklin Street. The newspaper was printed in a separate location by a private company called the University Press — which has its own interesting story.

Five faculty members incorporated the University Press in February 1893. John Manning was professor of law; Francis Venable was professor of chemistry; Joshua Gore was professor of physics and natural philosophy; Richard Whitehead was professor of anatomy, physiology, and *materia medica*; and Collier Cobb, who was manager of the company, was professor of geology and mineralogy. The shop foreman was Zachary Broughton, who may have had a connection with Broughton and Edwards Printing Company in Raleigh. The printing operation occupied three rooms on the north side of the first floor of New West.

In addition to commercial printing, the company printed scientific journals, university catalogs, the *University Magazine*, and the *Tar Heel*. The company started with a press capable of printing a tabloid-sized newspaper, and the fact that the first issue of *Tar Heel* on February 23 immediately followed the formation of the University Press was no coincidence.

Wilson said the university accommodated the University Press as a private enterprise in a campus building because it provided a convenient and inexpensive service. It also provided employment and training for students who were interested in the production aspects of newspaper journalism.

Among those students was Oscar Coffin of Asheboro, who earned 15 cents an hour as a typesetter. A member of the class of 1909, he had been editor of the *Tar Heel* and later was editor of the *Raleigh Times*, chairman of the Department of Journalism and first dean of the School of Journalism. The quotation that Coffin chose for his half-page in the 1909 *Yackety Yack* foretold his philosophy when he headed the journalism program from 1926 to 1953: "Here's to those who love us well; all the rest can go to hell."

He recalled that the printing shop had two cases of 11-point type for the *Tar Heel*, German and French fonts for scholarly journals, and a Greek font for course examinations. Coffin particularly remembered two cases of 10-point italic type he used to set the names of bones in a course outline for Professor Charles Magnum. The university purchased the company's assets for \$2,000 on December 31, 1899, and moved it out of New West. The expanding Department of Pharmacy needed the space, and university officials were concerned about the fire danger associated with having the printing operations in the building. Printing processes of that era involved the melting of lead at high temperatures, and the interior of New West was made almost entirely of wood.

In 1901 the university built a one-story, brick building for the University Press near the current site of the Phillips Annex next to Carroll Hall. The building was called the Engine House or Printery. That makes for an interesting coincidence — the current School of Journalism and Mass Communication is near the site of some of the earliest journalistic activities on campus. It also suggests an image of Oscar Coffin gazing out the window at the future site of a school of journalism that he could not begin to comprehend.

The print shop included an old Babcock cylinder press that was powered by an unreliable steam engine connected to the nearby power plant — which stood where Carroll Hall now stands. The antiquated press was so loud that people on nearby Cameron Avenue could tell when the *Tar Heel* was being printed.

The University Press Association

I discovered the story of another journalistic activity on campus that has not been chronicled in other histories of the university. The *Tar Heel's* first issue in 1893 included a directory of campus organizations — probably to fill space. The directory listed what one would expect — the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies and the University Athletic Association. It also included the University Press Association, an organization of students who wrote stories about the university and sent them to their hometown newspapers. University administrators supported the Press Association because the students' stories publicized the university in the absence of a news bureau, which was not created until later. Students met regularly on Fridays to receive news reports from William Cunningham Smith, an assistant in the university library, who conferred with President Edwin Alderman to assemble news for the students.

I've accounted for two of the factors leading to the first journalism course. One, student interest was evident in the weekly student newspaper and the University Press Association, and several graduates worked for major state and national newspapers. Two, the university was favorable to the idea of journalism courses because student journalists provided valuable publicity through the student press association. The third element was a faculty member who was interested in journalism, who had some newspaper experience, and who clearly understood the importance of journalism to the university. It is easy to visualize how the three factors came together.

The Press Association held annual banquets — often at the old Eagle Hotel — that were attended by university leaders who wanted to support the students' publicity efforts. At the banquet on February 14, 1907, the guest of honor was Edward Kidder Graham, who was a charismatic 31-year-old faculty member in the Department of English and dean of the College of Liberal Arts.

Graham spoke to the students that night in glowing terms about college journalism,

saying, “The man who sees every side of life in this country, and the man who has the most power in the nation today is the newspaperman.” It was especially true in North Carolina, he said, and for rapid advancement and attainment of power and fame, no calling offered as much opportunity as journalism. He said the number of students interested in journalism had been growing steadily, and students saw the opportunity that journalism offered for a good life.

At the end of the banquet, members of the Press Association surrounded Graham and beseeched him to teach a journalism course. (Do I know for a fact that such a thing happened? No. The report in the *Tar Heel* did not say it happened, but it is easy to imagine that it did.)

Journalism instruction begins

Less than two years later, on September 9, 1909, Graham greeted students in the first journalism course, English 16. The class was probably held in Smith Hall — now known as Playmakers Theater — because I found a letter stating that journalism classes in 1916 were taught in “the old library,” which is what Smith Hall was called at the time. I believe Smith Hall was used for English Department classes after the library was moved to Hill Hall in 1908 and that it was the location of Graham’s first journalism course.

The fact that it was taught in the English Department was not unusual. The earliest college journalism courses were about writing, and journalism programs at other universities had similar origins in English departments. College-level journalism instruction in the United States began in 1869 at Washington College — later known as Washington and Lee — in Virginia. The program, which was championed by the president of Washington College, General Robert E. Lee, included scholarships and internships. It lasted only one year, however, probably because of Lee’s death in 1870 and opposition from leading newspapers. The nation’s first school of journalism was founded at the University of Missouri in 1908.

Graham taught the two-credit journalism course in addition to English 3, “Advanced Composition,” which was a prerequisite for the journalism course. The catalog described English 16 as “the history of journalism; the technique of style; the structure of the news story; and the study of modern journals, including discussions and practical exercises.”

Graham was a logical person to teach the journalism course. Before graduating in 1898, he had been president of the Athletic Association, associate editor of the *Tar Heel* in 1896 and editor-in-chief in November and December of 1897. As dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Graham was in a position to respond to students’ desires to create a journalism course, especially because he was so well-liked by students. A *Tar Heel* story in 1908 about his impending marriage said he was “one of the strongest men in the faculty and universally respected by the students, who

recognize him as a friend, a gentleman, who will give a square deal under all circumstances, and a teacher of rare ability.”

Graham also had ties to a family of journalists in Chapel Hill. In 1900, he was a boarder with Mrs. Julia Graves in her boarding house at the present site of the Carolina Inn. One of her sons, Ralph, had graduated from UNC in 1897, had worked on the *Tar Heel* at the same time as Graham, and later became Sunday editor of the *New York Times*. A younger son, Louis, lived in the home while Graham boarded there. Louis graduated in 1902 and also worked at the *New York Times*, was manager of the Parker and Bridge public relations firm, and worked for the New York City government. In 1921, he would return to UNC to teach journalism, run the News Bureau and start the *Chapel Hill Weekly*.

There was another connection between the Graham and Graves families. Edward Kidder Graham married Susan Moses in 1908, and their son, Edward Kidder Graham Jr., was born in 1911. Louis Graves married Susan Moses’ sister, Mildred Moses, and they raised the younger Edward Graham after his parents died. He later became chancellor of the North Carolina College for Women in Greensboro.

Little is known about students in the early courses, but an editorial note in 1911 said the editors had given responsibility for one issue of the *Tar Heel* to students in the journalism course, who were Frank Hough, John Halliburton, Thomas Nash Jr., and Levi Brown. Brown probably took the course as a graduate student — because he wrote his undergraduate thesis in 1910 about journalism at Carolina.

After receiving a master’s degree from the university in 1911, Brown was a Washington, D.C., correspondent for the *Raleigh News and Observer*, White House correspondent for the *Philadelphia Record*, and director of publicity for the U.S. Committee on Public Information in World War I. He later wrote for several publications, was president of Lord, Thomas, and Logan advertising agency in New York City, and was public relations director of Pan American Airways when he died in 1947. When the university raised money in 1931 to build Graham Memorial Building to honor Edward Kidder Graham, Brown donated the considerable sum of \$80,000.

Despite their low numbers on campus at the time, women were on the *Tar Heel* staff, and some were probably in early journalism classes. Mary MacCrae, the first woman admitted to UNC and the daughter of Law School Dean James MacCrae, was associate editor in 1898, and Hazel Holland was managing editor in 1901. Louise Wilson was associate editor in 1911 and may have been the first woman to enroll in a journalism course. Watson Kasey, a woman, was associate editor in 1912, and Anna Liddell was associate editor in 1915.

Graham taught the journalism course again in 1912 and 1913. In the intervening years of 1910 to 1912, and again from 1913 to 1915, the course was taught by Professor James Finch Royster, a Shakespeare expert in the English Department.

Nothing is known of Royster's journalism background, but he was related to Vermont Connecticut Royster, who graduated from UNC in 1935 and became editor of the *Wall Street Journal* before returning to the university to teach in the School of Journalism from 1971 to 1986.

Graham became university president in 1913, and Richard Hurt Thornton was hired in 1915 — primarily to teach journalism courses — after he visited the University of Wisconsin to observe its journalism program. The UNC journalism program expanded to four courses in 1915, including news writing, news editing, editorial writing, and feature writing. Students who completed the four journalism courses and certain liberal arts electives could receive what was called a certificate in journalism.

The North Carolina Newspaper Institute

A year later, Graham enlisted Thornton and the journalism program in his public service effort to extend the boundaries of the campus to the boundaries of the state. On December 7, 1916, one hundred newspaper people from North Carolina gathered in the Dialectic Society Hall in New East for the first North Carolina Newspaper Institute, which was cosponsored by the North Carolina Press Association.

In welcoming the newspaper people, Graham said the university and newspapers needed to work together to “solve the great problems of the people in both prosperous and stunted communities.” The newspapermen had been invited to the university, he said, “not to be taught by us, but that we may be a medium through which knowledge may be spread and given to the great bulk of the people which both newspapers and the university try to reach. Just as the university is the product of the ideas and feelings of its community, so is the newspaper.” The idea of the Newspaper Institute has continued to the present day.

The staff of the *Tar Heel* published the *Press Institute News* for institute attendees. It was the first daily newspaper published on campus — albeit for only three days — on December 7th, 8th, and 9th. The United Press wire service provided national news, and a typesetting machine was provided by the Mergenthaler Linotype Company of New York.

Two global events affected journalism instruction in 1917 and 1918. The United States entered World War One in April 1917, and journalism courses were curtailed because of military activities on campus. Many students enrolled in military courses, joined the Student Army Training Corps, conducted drills and maneuvers, and practiced digging trenches in Battle Park. Some dormitories were called barracks, and the Army opened a post exchange on campus. The *Tar Heel* did its part to conserve paper by reducing its type size and the number of pages from six to four.

The end of the war on November 11, 1918, brought an end to military activities on campus.

A devastating epidemic

The worldwide Spanish influenza epidemic — which began as the war ended — also had an impact on the university. More than five hundred of the one thousand students enrolled at the time became ill, but only three died. A three-week quarantine of patients was lifted in October 1918 as the epidemic was waning. When two university doctors became ill, second-year medical students helped to care for the sick. A *Tar Heel* editorial implored professors to open classroom windows to let in healthful fresh air.

The greatest tragedy of the influenza epidemic was reported in the *Tar Heel* on October 30, one week after the newspaper had reported that the influenza epidemic was almost over. A front-page story reported the death of 42-year-old President Edward Graham on October 26, five days after he became ill. The *Tar Heel* had mentioned another notable flu victim a week earlier when it reported that “Mr. T. C. Wolfe, managing editor of the *Tar Heel*, left the Hill last week to be with his brother, reported very ill with pneumonia at his home in Asheville.” That referred to Thomas Wolfe’s visit to his brother Ben, whose death was portrayed as the death of Ben Gant in Wolfe’s novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*.

Graham’s role in the development of journalism education in North Carolina was recognized at the North Carolina Press Association meeting in 1919 in a 12-stanza poem by William Hill, which ended thusly:

*Weed well his grave, here sleeps a man so true,
Tis well to honor him,
So bright a gem (alas! we find so few,)
His fame shall never dim.
And as we think, of all that he hath done,
To build and hearten youth,
We now can see, the victory he won,
For God, and Man, and Truth.*

Journalism instruction continues

Clarence Hibbard began teaching journalism courses in 1919. Student journalists did not understand the nature of an academic department, and a news story in the *Tar Heel* identified Hibbard as head of the journalism department in the English department and said he was qualified because of his extensive experience as a newspaper correspondent in Japan. In offering the position to Hibbard, Edwin Greenlaw, chairman of the English Department, said he would teach three

journalism courses to twenty-five men, five days a week. He also said Hibbard and his wife could rent a new bungalow in Chapel Hill for \$25 a month. It had water, electricity, and a good location. Its lack of a furnace would not be a problem, Greenlaw said, because it had a fireplace and an adequate supply of pine and oak firewood.

The *Tar Heel* was optimistic about the future of journalism instruction at the university, saying the journalism “department” would get permanent quarters, including a reading room, in the basement of Alumni Building as soon as the Electrical Department moved into Phillips Hall, the new science building. The news story read like an editorial, expressing hope for a “school” that would compare favorably to others in the country. It said the new “department” and the new School of Commerce showed that educators had responded to demands of the times and had given young people in the state what they wanted at UNC instead of making them go out of the state. The story boasted that journalism students at UNC took only five percent of their courses in journalism, compared to 15 percent in the “big schools of journalism in the large Eastern universities.” Despite what the story said, the university had not yet created a department or a school of journalism.

Journalism at the university reached a significant milestone in 1921 with the hiring of Louis Graves as head of the News Bureau and the first person to hold the title of professor of journalism in the Department of English. Graves, the first journalism teacher who had significant newspaper experience, replaced Hibbard, who continued to teach American literature in the English Department. The student newspaper said Graves was an “old Carolina man” who finished school in 1902. The story said he had been a great football player and was the best tennis player in the university.

One of Graves’ first actions was to join the North Carolina Press Association, and he addressed the group’s annual convention in Asheville on July 28. He spoke colorfully about the role of journalism education. “The craft of newspaper writing has suffered from a vagabond atmosphere which used to surround it, and writers used to be looked upon as freaks, strolling minstrels and drunkards, who are looked upon as hanging around the fingertips of reputable society.” More preparation should be given to training in journalism, he advised, and a school of journalism was the solution.

Graves’ News Bureau duties forced him to cut back his journalism teaching, and he compensated by assigning students to work in the News Bureau to write news stories about the university for the state’s newspapers. However, he was further distracted by his efforts to start his own newspaper in Chapel Hill, which occurred with the first issue of the *Chapel Hill Weekly* on March 1, 1923. The newspaper won the tug-of-war for Graves’ time, and he resigned his university positions in 1924. University officials concluded that it would not be practical to combine both responsibilities and that a separate department of journalism was needed.

The birth of a department

With a front-page story on May 27, 1924, the *Tar Heel* reported that although university officials had kept a “sphinx-like silence,” students had heard rumors about plans to open a Department of Journalism for the coming academic year. The report said Gerald W. Johnson, an editorial writer for the *Greensboro Daily News*, had agreed to be the chairman of the department. He was a North Carolina native and a 1911 graduate of Wake Forest University who had worked at the *Lexington Dispatch*. When classes started on September 19, 1924, thirteen students were in the basic course and four in the advanced course, with five women among the seventeen students. The department was located on the second floor of New West, above the student newspaper offices and below a room where the wrestling team practiced.

Fifteen years after Edward Kidder Graham taught the first journalism course, journalism at Carolina reached a milestone as a separate academic department in 1924. Graham legitimized journalism education at the University of North Carolina and made it an integral part of the university’s academic mission and service to the state. From that humble beginning, journalism at Carolina has grown to more than 800 students, nearly 50 faculty members, and more than 20 staff members. It is recognized today as one of the premier programs of its kind in the world.

Johnson was followed by other visionaries who shaped the school as it adapted to changing demands. He was chairman for only two years before he was succeeded by Oscar “Skipper” Coffin, a legendary curmudgeon who led the department and school for 27 years. Neil Luxon came from Ohio State in 1953 to turn the school sharply to a more academic focus, including a graduate program. Wayne Danielson, from 1964 to 1969, and Jack Adams, from 1969 to 1979, provided continuity and stability as the campus weathered growth, racial integration and the Vietnam War. From 1979 to 2005, Richard Cole transformed the school by expanding its programs, raising millions of dollars, and moving it to a newer and much larger home. Today, Jean Folkerts leads the school as it enters the second century of journalism education at UNC.

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Sources

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Nina Thornton to N. Ferebee Taylor, July 19, 1976, the Office of Chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: Nelson Ferebee Taylor Records #40023, University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Nina Thornton was the widow of Richard Thornton, who taught journalism courses in 1915-18.

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Thomas Bowers delivered this talk on October 15, 2009 in UNC's Wilson Library for the Gladys Hall Coates University History Lecture series.

*He served on the faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication from 1971 to 2006. He was associate dean and senior associate dean beginning in 1979 and interim dean from 2005 to 2006. He has been honored with the University's John L. Sanders Award for Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching and Service and the David L. Brinkley Teaching Excellence Award in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. A native of Indiana, he earned three degrees from Indiana University. His book, *Making News: One Hundred Years of Journalism and Mass Communication at Carolina*, was recently published by the School and is distributed by UNC Press.*