

Book Review

Getting the Whole Story: Reporting and Writing the News

By Cheryl Gibbs<<http://www.earlham.edu/~publicaf/gibbs091802.html>> and Tom Warhaver< www.journalism.missouri.edu/faculty-staff/warhovert.html>, Guildford Press, September, 2002.

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At last, a textbook for basic news writing and reporting presented from the civic journalism point of view is available. Long ignored by standard reporting textbooks, on the few occasions when civic journalism was included it often was treated as a “trend,” relegated to a specific chapter, mentioned in passing reference, or, most demeaning of all, reduced to a footnote. Fortunately, that no longer is the case.

Getting the Whole Story, as the title implies, is a textbook devoted to comprehensive news coverage. But, beyond a solid grounding in reporting and writing, students of this text will learn the basics of journalism from the perspective of experienced journalists who are committed to supporting democratic processes in their work.

At 451 pages, the book covers the standard elements presented in a basic journalism course.

What is unique to this particular textbook is the emphasis on the idea of civic journalism and the role of the journalist in democratic society. This underlying philosophy starts with the introduction and runs throughout each chapter. Chapter one is titled “The Journalist’s Role in Society.”

The key role of the U. S. journalist in maintaining democratic freedoms is presented powerfully. Students quickly will realize that this text breaks new ground without ever tossing over traditional standards of quality.

Foundational chapters on interviewing, writing, covering beats, and producing in-depth stories are included, and, as in all good texts, key concepts, exercises, suggestions for further reading are also offered within each chapter. The organization of the book is straightforward.

Current examples and a clear, breezy style make the work accessible to entry- and mid-level students. More accessibility is provided through lists of websites and movies that supplement the textual information.

Along with the conventional skills of the journalist (e.g. use of attribution, safeguards for accuracy, etc.), the authors integrate the tools of civic journalism. These range from instructions on how to map a community to a discussion of framing news reports.

Appendices list and describe various newsroom jobs, cover common grammar, punctuation and spelling mistakes, show how to cover emergencies, and provide several journalists' creeds, platforms, and codes of ethics. The book ends with a glossary of newsroom terms.

To the traditional description of journalists as professionals who record and report the ongoing story of daily life and provide context for understanding the meaning of it, the impetus of the civic journalist is added. This is presented as the journalist's responsibility to provide "a 'public space' for people to share perspectives and work through challenges" and "play a key role in maintaining . . . democratic freedoms."

The authors are long-time Civic Journalism Interest Group <
<http://www.has.vcu.edu/civic-journalism/>> members in the Association for Education in
Journalism and Mass Communication. Cheryl Gibbs, who teaches journalism at Earlham
College, is the group's current chair, and Tom Warhover, who after a career in reporting
and editing at *The (Norfolk) Virginian Pilot*, is now an associate professor at the
University of Missouri School of Journalism and the executive editor of the *Columbia
Missourian* < <http://digmo.org/>>.

For faculty interested in updating their journalism texts, *Getting the Whole Story*,
should be given serious consideration. This book deserves be incorporated across
university-level journalism programs.

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By Cheryl Gibbs and Tom Warhover
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