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# In Search of an Effective Citizen Journalism Platform: A Case Study of the Resolving Door Project

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IN SEARCH OF  
AN EFFECTIVE CITIZEN JOURNALISM PLATFORM:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE RESOLVING DOOR PROJECT

by

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A thesis submitted to the  
faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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A CASE STUDY OF THE RESOLVING DOOR PROJECT

By Jenny J. Dean

*has been approved for the School of Journalism and Mass Communication*

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*The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we  
Find that both the content and the form meet  
acceptable presentation standards  
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.*

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In Search of an Effective Citizen Journalism Platform: A Case Study of the Resolving Door Project

Thesis direction by Associate Professor Elizabeth A. Skewes

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of citizen journalism at a hyper-local level through understanding how and why students use the Resolving Door website, a University of Colorado Boulder School of Journalism and Mass Communication effort which offered a potential citizen journalism platform through a question-and-answer platform. Public sphere, credibility, gatekeeping, gatewatching, and uses and gratifications theories help build the theoretical framework for the evaluation. This study looks at the user's experience through both a quantitative survey and follow-up qualitative interviews among Resolving Door participants. It concludes with why the Resolving Door, in its current state, is not an example of citizen journalism.

**DEDICATED TO:**

My mom and dad. I couldn't have done it without you.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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for all her patience, guidance, and help.

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# Chapter 1

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## ◆ INTRODUCTION ◆

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Over the past 10 years, the newspaper industry has faced radical challenges due to the economy and new technologies. Before the 2008 industry meltdown, individuals at newspapers were able to specialize in a particular area. If it was an environmental story, the environmental reporter would write the story, an editor would edit the story, a copy editor would recheck the story for errors and a news designer would lay out the story on the news page. Today, this is typically not the case because newspapers are so short on staffing that instead editors want people who have a more generalized set of skills. Any writer may be assigned the environmental story and an editor may not have time to go over the story before the copy editor reads it. In some cases, the copy desk has merged with the design desk in an effort to allow both designers and copy editors the opportunity to edit stories. Sometimes even a reporter can be found working on the design or copy desk.

These challenges have resulted in the loss of 15,000 full-time reporting and editing jobs in the last three years (Pew Research Center, 2010b), resulting in

newspaper staffs having to do more with fewer people and less time to complete the same amount of work. In addition, the economic impact has led to the reduction of \$1.6 billion in reporting and editing capacity since 2000 (Pew Research Center, 2010b). As traditional print publications continue to struggle to report the news, social media sites, such as Twitter, continue to expand through the mobilization of citizens to help report information. In 2009, 59 percent of Internet users reported using some kind of social media (Pew Research Center, 2010b).

Despite these dismal reports about the state of the news industry, it has slowly shown signs of adapting to the changes in technology, particularly in the area of social media, with the help of entrepreneurs, universities, and industry leaders. As more traditional newspaper readers turn to social media for their news and information, entrepreneurs have begun to create niche websites. The University of Colorado Boulder (CU) School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SJMC) began experimenting in this area with a new website called the Resolving Door, in an effort to capture the attention of a highly focused audience. The Resolving Door website offers students, faculty, and staff members at CU the opportunity to write user-generated content.

This project began in the spring of 2008 as an initiative by the SJMC at the University of Colorado Boulder. I participated as a student in the citizen journalism class in the 2010 spring semester. This is where I first became interested in what role the Resolving Door plays in conveying information, as well as whether a project like this has journalistic value (particularly since it was a product of the journalism school). This research, however, was not conducted as if I was an insider, but rather that of an outsider who surveyed and interviewed participants.

Part of the role of the Resolving Door project was to allow students to interact in the news process acting as “citizen journalists.” Although this term has many varying definitions by different scholars, for the purpose of this paper, citizen journalists are defined as individuals who may or may not have any journalism training but who try to fulfill the role of a professional journalist by reporting important news stories or other information. Citizen journalism is often at its best when an ordinary citizen happens to be in the right place at the right time, catching breaking news that the professional journalist wasn’t able to cover.

As citizen journalists increase the amount of information that is contributed to the news process, it is important to understand their exact role in helping convey the news (Rosen, 2006). A Pew Research Center (2010a) survey suggests that readers find three methods important when connecting and participating with the news: portability (33 percent of those surveyed access the news via their cell phone), personalization (28 percent of Internet users have customized their home pages to reflect their news and other interests), and participation (37 percent of Internet users say they have contributed to the news process through commenting and/or posting stories to social media sites).

## Chapter 2

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### ◆ THE RESOLVING DOOR ◆

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The Resolving Door website, [www.resolvingdoor.com](http://www.resolvingdoor.com), offers a platform for students, faculty, and staff to share information through a process of asking and answering each other's questions. It is similar to Yahoo Answers, but on a hyper-local level, which means it focuses on a very specific, local area that is definable. In this case, it is the CU campus. Dean Paul Voakes from the SJMC sought three years of funding to launch and support the project through the McCormick Foundation, a nonprofit philanthropic group that supports journalism. The foundation agreed to provide initial funding of \$110,000 over the two-year period (from Jan. 1, 2009 through Dec. 31, 2010, and at that point, the school could reapply for additional grant money.)

Dean Voakes hired Project Manager Daniel Schaefer, who also acted as the instructor for the citizen journalism class, which was offered as course number JOUR 4872/5872. Together, they decided on a hyper-local community because of finite resources and staff for the project. The creators of the Resolving Door website sought to

offer a new alternative journalism format that would incorporate citizen efforts. The idea of this type of journalism is that, as citizens see news happen around them, they can report it back to their community by posting to a website.

During the spring semester of 2009, Schaefer and his students began to research information about what type of site would be best to build, while the second semester was spent building the website and getting it ready for launch. The final two semesters were spent developing the website further and getting students to participate. With a campus of 28,572 students according to the Office of Planning, Budget, and Analysis (2010) at CU, the Resolving Door project had the opportunity to tap into a large and diverse student body with 23,888 undergraduates and 4,684 graduate students, as well as 3,980 faculty and 3,255 staff. Currently, though, the Resolving Door website is almost exclusively used by students who became involved through different incentive programs, offered by a citizen journalism class in the form of gift cards, which were usually valued at \$10 but went up to \$200. These incentive programs were the main method for attracting student participants. However this became unsustainable once the funding ran out. In total, \$6,673 was spent on incentives to attract students to the Resolving Door. Because of university policy, faculty and staff were not allowed to participate in the incentive programs.

The questions asked on the website were typically about CU and Boulder events, or were about other more general facts. For example, one user recently asked, "What are some good places to park for free on campus?" Four users answered the question with different responses to the original post. To participate in one of these incentive programs on the website, each person was required to register with the site by using his

or her CU email address. Each question and answer was moderated by the citizen journalism class at the SJMC, meaning that each question and answer had to be reviewed in order to make sure that none of the information was inappropriate, according to the Resolving Door rules of conduct. Other than that, no editing occurred of content posted to the Resolving Door.

The website expected to included training for citizen journalists regarding how to make news and information more credible to their audience. However, the class never settled on a method for training students outside of the citizen journalism class. With the current lack of funding for the Resolving Door project, as of Jan. 1, 2011, this has made the creation of a student-training program even more unlikely. Still, the creators of the website, Dean Voakes and Schaefer, are both hopeful that the website will continue to operate.

As a teaching assistant in the broadcast journalism class, I have found few students who can define journalism, let alone citizen journalism, even when they are studying to be journalists as a career. In general, it is important to note that the validity of the postings published by citizen journalists is unclear because of the lack of sourcing of news and information. Although the field of citizen journalism is expanding rapidly, it is unclear whether contributors to it understand the term or would qualify themselves as citizen journalists.



# Chapter 3

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## ◆ LITERATURE REVIEW ◆

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### **The Public Sphere**

The environment where citizen journalists share information virtually and have the opportunity to influence both the citizenry and the government resembles what scholar Habermas termed a public sphere. He suggests that the public sphere incorporates three important elements: It is the focal point from which public opinion is formed, it is available to all citizens regardless of social standing, and its focus was on the individual merit of ideas, not the individual (Habermas, 1989). Yet, despite this broad definition, Habermas' own public sphere was derived from the social and political situations in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, where bourgeois men were able to come together in coffee shops and salons and challenge public opinion and influence government decisions. He writes:

“The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this

political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason" (1989, p.27).

It is also important to note that in Habermas' original conception, the public sphere was restricted by both class and gender. It wasn't until the entertainment industry, the commercialization of the press, and the field of advertising grew in popularity that Habermas' vision of the public sphere began to erode and ultimately became corrupt (Habermas, 1989; 1992).

Habermas stops short of developing a post-bourgeois public sphere. This has led other scholars to consider that his conception of the public sphere is too idealized. Fraser suggests that there are competing public spheres: the main group of supporters and an opposing viewpoint. Both Dahlgreen (2001) and Fraser (1990) have suggested that Habermas' original conception of the public sphere may not have been realistic, especially when they examined the theory in more modern situations. In their view, they argue that any given locale is too complicated to simply have a single public sphere (Dahlgreen, 2001; Fraser, 1992).

This led Fraser to modernize the public sphere, suggesting that diverse contemporary American society is full of social inequalities, which could not be contained within a single public sphere. In Fraser's opinion, with the forming of each of the public spheres, there was a possibility of an additional fragmented piece (1992). Although she acknowledged the existence of a dominant public sphere, Fraser diverges from Habermas by acknowledging the existence of counter-publics, which arose from those who do not fit into the dominant paradigm. Her vision accounted for the inclusion of more people with differing backgrounds and views, including many of the

marginalized groups. In addition, Fraser (1992) and Schudson (1997) went on to question whether a true public sphere, as defined by Habermas, could have ever existed, even during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, because Habermas' theory focused too much on a single public sphere (Calhoun, 1992).

Dahlberg (2001) takes the view of Fraser and Schudson further by suggesting that the public sphere is formed around important issues, not simply particular groups. Hauser agrees and suggests, "Publics may be repressed, distorted, or responsible, but any evaluation of their actual state requires that we inspect the rhetorical environment as well as the rhetorical act of which they evolved, for these are the conditions that constitute their individual character" (1998, p. 92). Dahlberg (2001) challenged Habermas' definition of a public sphere by suggesting that each public issue could have its own public sphere. An example of this would be the debate over the federal budget where members of society have very polarized views as to how this issue should be dealt with. Another example could encompass the society's views on global warming. Instead of these issues being a part of one public sphere as Habermas described, Dahlberg divides this information up into separate spheres.

As the concept of the public sphere becomes more refined, Palczewski (2001) writes, "Just as we are on the verge of celebrating and recognizing the democratizing potential of counter-publics, a technology [the Internet] arises that creates the appearance of being open to all publics, yet this technology represents economic barriers that make it difficult for the ideal to be realized" (p. 181). As recognized by Palczewski, the Internet can both help and impede communication. In the current digital

age, theorists remain divided as to whether a public sphere on the Internet exists and thus whether the Resolving Door website could be an example of one.

Habermas continues to question new technologies as a source of communication that could create a public sphere. Habermas writes:

“The publics produced by the Internet remain closed off from one another like global villages. For the present it remains unclear whether an expanding public consciousness, though centered in the lifeworld, nevertheless has the ability to span systematically differentiated contexts, or whether the systemic process, having become independent, have long since severed their ties with all contexts produced by political communication” (Habermas, 1998, p. 120).

A similar view is held by Sunstein, who argues that radical websites, discussion groups or comment boards skew perception and often allow the public to bypass pertinent information because of the way in which the Web fragments news and information. Because of this extreme polarization, which Sunstein expects will continue to get worse over time, the Internet negatively affects democracy (2001, p. 59).

Habermas goes on to suggest that, “[The] use of the Internet has both broadened and fragmented the contexts of communication. This is why the Internet can have subversive effects on intellectual life in authoritarian regimes” (Habermas, 2006).

In order to assess whether an online space can fulfill a public sphere in the mind of Dahlberg (2001), he created six criteria, which this study will use to assess whether the Resolving Door website creates a public sphere. The six elements include:

- *Autonomy of state and economic power.* The concerns addressed must be those of the citizens, not those of the government or financial markets.
- *Thematization and critique of criticizable moral-practical validity claims.* It is important not just to make a reasonable claim, but it is also essential to be able to justify each statement. The back-and-forth ability of email is an example of this function.

- *Reflexivity*. Each person must be able to assess his or her own experiences and be able to put them in a larger context.
- *Ideal role-taking*. Each participant must try to understand the opposing viewpoint through respectively listening and responding to others.
- *Sincerity*. Each participant must be truthful in how they identify themselves when responding to a particular topic.
- *Discursive inclusion and equality*. This element is typically hard to achieve in cyberspace because of accessibility issues and the possibility of a dominant voice overpowering each of the individuals.

One of these inequalities is the digital divide. According to Rogers (2001), “The digital divide is the gap that exists between individuals advantaged by the Internet and those individuals relatively disadvantaged by the Internet” (p. 96). At CU, all student, faculty, and staff members have access to a computer while on campus, though some individuals may have more access than others based on their jobs and whether an individual owns a personal computer. This allows the potential for all members of this community to participate in the Resolving Door project, but also allows members of this community to opt out of participation.

Although these criteria fail to represent all of the elements that are needed for a public sphere to exist in Habermas’ eyes, it offers a solid platform by which the Internet (or part of it) can form a public sphere, according to Dahlberg (2001). For the Resolving Door website, these criteria offer a form of assessment and application of public sphere theory in a virtual environment. For Rosen (1999), the definition of a public sphere in the terms that both Habermas and Fraser write about is too technical and inaccessible

for nonacademics to understand. Yet, Haas and Steiner (2001), feel that it can help strengthen public life, despite the complexity of the definition of public sphere.

### **Defining Journalism**

With the Web, there is greater potential for all citizens to contribute news and information, a job formerly done by journalists who have helped frame the news in broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, and online. The Web environment has changed the role of professional journalists by no longer giving them primary control as to how news and information are portrayed to the public. In traditional media, the professional journalist, along with the editor, decides what news stories to cover. They typically are educated in media ethics and seek to uphold the values set forth by the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ):

- *Seek truth and report it.* This suggests that the journalist be able to report and interpret information fairly.
- *Minimize harm.* The journalist must respect and show compassion for his or her sources of information.
- *Act independently.* As a journalist, one must be loyal to the public's right to know, not a particular need by an individual or group needs.
- *Be accountable.* A journalist must be accountable to the audience he or she serves. (1996)

With these ethical standards in mind, the field of journalism has continued to evolve around a changing news environment. According to Rosen (1999), the term public journalism (also known as civic journalism) emerged in 1993 as an effort to more aggressively include the public in the reporting process, as well as to listen to the way individuals frame issues and to understand their solutions (Voakes, 2004). Public

journalism was practiced by the trained professional journalist, who chose to use that method in hopes of better connecting the reader to the story. According to McDevitt (2003), the role of the public journalist was “to set the community agenda, to guide discussion on topics, and to encourage civic leaders to respond to the discussion with initiatives or policy proposals” (p. 137). In addition, he suggests that public journalism draws on the existing traditions of investigative journalism and advocacy journalism.

By 2003, the availability of new technologies allowed for a shift from public journalism to that of citizen journalism (also known as participatory journalism). It differed from the public journalism movement in that the average citizen became the reporter of information, not the professional. The citizen journalist differs from the professional in that there may or may not be any formal training in journalism, but the citizen journalist tries to report news or other pertinent information to his or her community. Rosen (2008) defines citizen journalism further as a place where the audience becomes an active participant in the news process by reporting the news and informing one another. As more software and other new technologies, such as Facebook and YouTube, become available for the ordinary citizen, each increases the information gathering potential of the citizen participant. The Resolving Door project hoped to create a website that would act as a place for students, faculty, and staff to contribute useful news and information in the form of citizen journalism, according to the original proposal to the McCormick Foundation. According to the proposal, “...With the Resolving Door as our platform, we will gather the local CU-Boulder campus community — its students, faculty and staff — with a ‘citizen’—written, interactive, multimedia website.”

Although the Resolving Door does not feature a code of ethics, it does have a code of conduct, which lists the four criteria that the members are expected to follow.

- *Be accountable.*
- *Be fair.*
- *Promote interactivity and dialogue.*
- *Respect the community.*

One example of citizen journalism that attracted the attention of newspaper editors around the country was Janis Krums' (2009) photograph of the plane landing in the Hudson River. With that photo, he commented on Twitter, "There's a plane in the Hudson. I'm on a ferry going to pick up the people. Crazy." Krums didn't plan on helping report the news that day, nor did he consciously think that sending his photograph out via Tweetpic would make him a citizen journalist. It is more likely that Krums contributed to the news because he happened to have the right tools with him and was at the right place, at the right time, and was participating in what is referred to in academia as citizen journalism. In this example, citizen journalism added to the story by capturing a photograph that could only have been taken in that moment. By the time the professional newspaper photographers or broadcasters had heard about the story, the exact image taken by Krums was gone. That image became a lead front-page photograph used by newspapers across the country, challenging the traditional newspaper paradigm of not using citizen journalism within the confines of the mainstream newspaper.

Although it has always been possible for non-journalists to get a one-of-a-kind photo published in the newspaper, the emergence of social media, camera phones, and other technologies have increased the likelihood of the ordinary citizen capturing the news.



It wasn't until recently that researchers began taking a closer look at what types of information citizen journalists post to the Web. Not all information reported by the public actually fulfills the role of citizen journalist; some provides the role of news, while other information can be more generally classified as user-generated content. Despite the lack of differentiation in meaning by most scholars, I will use these three terms as follows:

- *User-generated content* is any data or other form of media that an individual contributes to a website (It is inclusive of information and news.). An example of this would be all the different types of videos on YouTube. Some of the videos convey news, others offer information, and some are there for our amusement. Accuracy is always in question.
- *Information* is the facts, such as public records, interviews or other sources that add to knowledge. An example of this is Wikipedia or Twitter. It can sometimes be accurate and sometimes not. (News falls into this category.)
- *News* is more specific. For example, a reporter takes the information and doesn't just say what he or she heard happened, but verifies the information being reported. The different elements that a reporter might find are combined to tell a story, something that the reader/viewer might not find if searching for information on a particular subject. News from a traditional news source is usually credible. News from a citizen journalist may or may not be credible. This may be due to lack of experience or training.

In the case of the Resolving Door website, during the 2010 fall semester, the students in the citizen journalism class began to go through the questions and answers posted to the site over the past year and a half to see if they could spot trends in the types of questions that were asked. This resulted in an "identify trends" category on the homepage of the website where registered users could submit trends that they had noticed. The website asks students, faculty and staff to:

“Write a short (at least 25 word) description of a trend or a pattern you discovered from researching Resolving Door questions and answers. Explain why you think this would make a good news story. (Please no fluff, bad, or nonsense explanations.) Suggest story length and multimedia elements for the story (photo and/or audio/video ideas, Google maps, etc.). Link to the questions and answers where you noticed the trend.”

The idea behind the trends section was to allow the users of the site the opportunity to suggest topics, in effect, recommend that the CU Independent (school newspaper) write stories based on these trends. The CU Independent was then given an incentive based on the quality of the story and the multimedia. An incentive was given in the amount of \$75 to \$150 for each story written, which included multimedia elements once the story was available to the reader on the CU Independent. Students were offered a larger amount of money based on the quality of what they produced and the different types of components that went with the story. Newspaper staff were offered a higher amount for a well-written story, as well. In total, the CU Independent received \$250 in incentives from the Resolving Door. The CU Independent staff decided that this money would be placed in their general account. It was decided that it would be too unfair to let certain reporters keep the money for themselves because what assignments a reporter receives can often be random.

### **Issues of Credibility in the Digital Age**

As citizen journalism — and professional journalism — continues to evolve, questions about credibility arise: Where is our news and information coming from? With a quick click of a mouse, a tweet containing incorrect information can go viral.

Traditionally, newspaper editors have played the role of gatekeeper, meaning that the

editors controlled what stories were covered and what actually was printed in the newspaper.

According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010b), 61 percent of Americans get their news online, which means the Web is only second to television as a source that citizens rely on for the news. Yet despite the significant number of people who get their news online, there are no universal standards for posting news and information, which has resulted in information that can be easily altered, plagiarized, or created anonymously under false pretenses (Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003). Fogg, Soohoo, Danielson, Marable, Stanford, & Trauber (2003) conducted an experiment to see how individuals assess the credibility of two websites. The results of this experiment indicated that the user assessed credibility by looking for accuracy, authority, coverage, and objectivity. The user was not concerned with the currency of the information. Metzger (2005) then builds on their findings by adding that credibility is determined by trust, believability, and perceived information bias in the eye of the user in today's digital media environment. She suggests five criteria for assessing the value of news and information:

- *Accuracy.* Can the information be found elsewhere on the Web?
- *Authority.* Who is the author of the website and what are his or her qualifications or credentials? Does the organization or person have a name on the website? Did the information come from someone you know?
- *Coverage.* Is the information complete?
- *Currency.* Is the information up-to-date?
- *Objectivity.* Is the information fact or opinion, and what are the author's goals in writing the piece? (2005).

Despite the availability of an assessment tool such as the one stated above, users do not go step-by-step through a checklist, such as the one offered above. Instead, users focus their evaluation of information on the elements most important to them. Over a period of three years (1999-2001), Metzger asked five sample groups (ranging in size from 274-718) to indicate how often they perform these five criteria when visiting a website. In each case, the subjects reported assessing the value of the news and information either “rarely” or “occasionally” in each study (n=274-718). In the case of the Resolving Door website, because each user must register with his or her CU email address, each person is identifiable to those who manage the website, even though that information may not be available for the user to see.

Burbules (1998) raises an additional concern about how the Internet places news, information, and user-generated content all on a level plane, making it more difficult for the consumer to determine the latest news. This means that a similar weight is given to reputable news sites, as well as individual sites, such as blogs or cloaked websites (sites that look like they are informative, but actually have a hidden agenda). As a result, it has become the role of the information seeker to determine the credibility of news and information. Although there are many more models that have been used to examine how the user assesses credibility of a website, these models are far too complicated and impractical for the average user to attempt.

The issues raised by Burbules (1998), Metzger (2005), and Fogg et al. (2003) are even more important in the global environment of the Internet. A recent example of information accidentally being misinterpreted occurred when two Bangladeshi newspapers picked up a story from a satirical U.S. paper (the *Onion*) that stated the

moon landing had been faked. “We thought it was true so we printed it without checking,” said associate editor Hasanuzzaman Khan to the AFP news agency (BBC, 2009). The error was corrected the next day in print. Because of the viral nature of the Web, stories similar to this can easily be picked up and sent around the world in a matter of seconds.

As credibility concerns grow, people continue to become more skeptical of the media, partly because many lump the wide range of media outlets into one big concept, instead of thinking about different subsets of media outlets. A study by the Pew Research Center (2008) found that the public remains skeptical of what they see, hear, and read in the media — whether broadcast, cable, online, or print. This trend has continued for the past 10 years with the decline in the credibility of media, based on the criticisms of the audience.

The study also showed that online news sources are considered to be less credible than traditional ones (Pew Research Center, 2008). According to Moturu and Liu (2009), the advent of social media has increased the amount of user-generated content. Although much of this information has proven to be useful, it is difficult to detect which information is actually trustworthy. The Resolving Door project seeks to keep its website credible by checking each question and answer to make sure that the information being posted does not violate the Resolving Door code of conduct. It does not, however, fact-check the answers. In addition, the project offers tutorial sessions to students about how to be more credible with their questions and responses.

What was once the job of the media, determining the value and credibility of the news, has now become the job of the consumer of the information. With an unlimited

amount of information on the Web, this makes the job of the user incredibly difficult. When the burden of verifying information falls to the Web audience, there is a risk of “rumor masquerading as news” (Sundar, 1998, p. 64). Sundar voices concern that a piece of new information on the Web could, and often is, quickly transmitted across the world in a matter of seconds, even if there is no source attribution or verification of the facts.

According to Pogatchnik (2009), Shane Fitzgerald, a student of Dublin University, was able to fool newspapers all over the world when he put up a fake quote on Wikipedia shortly after French composer Maurice Jarre’s death. Fitzgerald said he did this to test the credibility of Wikipedia. With his social experiment, he found that news sites from all across the globe picked up the quote and published it in their newspapers and online. “One could say my life itself has been one long soundtrack,” read the fake Jarre quote, written by Fitzgerald. “Music was my life, music brought me to life, and music is how I will be remembered long after I leave this life. When I die there will be a final waltz playing in my head that only I can hear” (as cited in Pogatchnik, 2009). Only Wikipedia, through its tiered-use editing system, caught the error and removed it from its site. Although Wikipedia is a user edited-site, it still takes precautions to make sure that information displayed for other users is correct. It does not, however, have the same civic responsibility that a newspaper website or story has. It wasn’t until Fitzgerald wrote the newspapers to tell them about the hoax, a month later, that some of the sites removed the “bad” quote from their online stories.

Examples like these suggest that the audience must proceed with caution when viewing any information on the Web. Even news sites can and do succumb to pitfalls of the Internet. Sites such as Wikipedia have some ability to verify posted information,

while others do not. Information from sites such as Twitter spread so fast that often the user doesn't take the time to verify the information, but instead retweets it (Starbird, Palen, Hughes, & Vieweg, 2010). This results in misinformation that can ultimately affect the sender's credibility.

### **Traditional Journalists as Gatekeepers**

In the past, legacy media have acted as the gatekeepers of news and information, but that role has begun to change with the Internet. According to Shoemaker and Vos (2009), gatekeeping is the process by which information is filtered by the media before it is published, which limits the information available for the public to see. Lewin (1951) coined the term "gatekeeper," creating a general theoretical framework for gatekeeping theory. White (1950), one of Lewin's students, was first to adopt gatekeeping theory to journalism by initially looking at how an editor, "Mr. Gates," chose and rejected stories from wire services. White concluded that editors were individuals who made decisions based on the news value of the stories, as well as their own personal experiences and interests. Westley and MacLean (1957) proposed a variation on this model of gatekeeping by focusing on the journalistic organization, instead of the individual.

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) expanded this theory further by developing five distinct levels of influence:

- *The individual level of analysis.* Decisions are personal and based on a person's likes and dislikes.
- *The communication routines level of analysis.* Decisions are made based on a pre-established set of ideas and norms that state how particular job should be done.

- *The organization level of analysis.* The corporate structure acts as the frontline gatekeepers that pass information to others. Their goals and structure can feel constraining to the individual (Shoemaker, 1991).
- *The social institutional level of analysis.* It is not only communication organizations that play a role, but other groups, including marketers, audiences, advertisers, and financial markets, that affect how messages approach the gates, if they do at all.
- *The social systems level of analysis.* At this more complex level, influences on news media content come from social structure, ideology, and culture (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

Although in gatekeeping the level of influence is at the individual level, often by that of an editor, this allows the reader to establish the credibility of information by how it is filtered through the different gates. Although the role of the media has been to act as the main gatekeeper of information, with the field of citizen journalism, that role must now be shared (Paulussen, Heinonen, Domingo, & Quandt, 2007). Citizens now can selectively publish their own information.

### **A Shift from Gatekeeping to Gatewatching**

Although gatekeeping is still prevalent in our society today, there are questions about what role gatekeeping will have in the age of the Internet. A shift has occurred from gatekeeping to that of gatewatching (Bruns, 2005), which is the idea that information can be posted immediately and edited later, if at all.

Traditionally, editors have acted as the gatekeepers of information, helping to produce a specific worldview for the reader (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). With the rise of blogs, that may or may not use gatekeeping, the line between the professional and nonprofessional journalist has blurred (Singer, 2003). In some cases, this leads to both



gatekeeping and authenticity being lost. Citizen journalism challenges the gatekeeping paradigm associated with traditional journalism; no longer does the mainstream press have dominant control over what information is shared with the public.

The rise of citizen journalism has changed the emphasis on news from being more nationally focused to that of hyper-local coverage and increased community involvement (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). It has also put a focus on speed over the values of accuracy and verification. This has led to concerns among some scholars. Arant and Myer (1998) believe that traditional journalists still continue to adhere to the values of objectivity and independence, whereas Voakes (1999) suggests that small papers in rural markets are more likely to welcome citizen journalism because close attention has always been paid to community news and involvement. Allowing everyone to be a citizen journalist and post his or her information is hard to accept for some, particularly professional journalists.

To add to this potential complication, the birth of social media further challenges the gatekeeping paradigm. This shift has given rise to a relatively recent theory called gatewatching, which gives credibility to news outlets by allowing users to post information without going through a gatekeeper (Bruns, 2005). Instead, the crowd—which is reading the information—decides the importance of what is being presented. This information is submitted to a website, which then can be edited by editors or left unverified. Bruns' model has two levels: the input stage and the output stage. In the input stage of production, the public identifies the important material and posts it on a particular website. In the output stage, the publication's own gates are being watched as users view the story. Bruns' (2005) suggests, "It is entirely possible for a news

organization to engage in communal gatewatching at the input stage while retaining a modified gatekeeping regime at the output stage” (p. 18).

Currently, both gatekeeping and gatewatching theories play a role in deciphering and determining the news based on the role of citizen journalism and traditional journalists. If the shift continues from professional to citizen journalists, gatekeeping theory may become less prevalent and Bruns’ theory of gatewatching may continue to grow in importance. However, it seems as if both processes will continue to play a significant role in the future.

Although the trend on the Web is toward gatewatching (which requires fewer staff and less cost), the Resolving Door website has chosen to use a modified version of gatewatching, by moderating each question and answer before it is posted for all participants to see. Each moderator looks to see if the content violates the Resolving Door code of ethics. Each of these criteria is evaluated by a Resolving Door class participant, who uses his or her own knowledge to make a determination (this allows for potential inconsistencies):

- Post stories or comments that deliberately obscure their vested interests. (There is no way to determine this, other than to hope everyone understands the rules and follows them.)
- Plagiarize the work of others or fail to get permission from the source for images without permission from the source. (Currently, the website does not allow the posting of images by participants. This rule is there for the possibility in the future of allowing users to post images.)
- Abuse, threaten or verbally attack other members, individuals, or Resolving Door staff.
- Post libelous, irrelevant, obscene, or pornographic material.

- Post stories that are intentionally untrue, false, or misleading.  
(Information is generally not verified unless the student moderator feels that the information is incorrect)  
(Resolving Door)

The question or answer is only edited if information contained within it is in violation of this code of ethics, otherwise it is approved for all the users of the site to see. This premise contradicts with Kovach and Rosenstiel's view of what journalism should do. Both are explicit about the journalist's obligation to truth and the need for verification.

In addition to using gatekeeping, the Resolving Door also relies on gatewatching as a method of identifying the trends on the website. Members of the citizen journalism class went through the different questions that were asked and answered to help identify trends in what was being asked. Then, the class opened this opportunity for the users of the website.

### **The Uses and Gratifications Model**

The Web is complex and made up of many different types of media, from blogs to chat rooms, from social media to news sites. Each of these sites provides motivation for someone to participate or the website would likely not exist. Because of the capabilities of the Internet, the Web can offer a place for everyone. Some use it for shopping, while others use it to seek out information or news. But, with what seems like an infinite number of websites out there to choose from, how can users decide which ones best fit their needs? As a new website, this was the first hurdle for the Resolving Door class: Why would someone want to come to the website? The Resolving Door project needed to grab the attention of CU students to participate. One of the initial methods used was

for readers to register and ask and answer three questions. At the completion of this task, each person was awarded a \$10 gift card to Amazon for participating. Other prizes were offered for the most questions and answers in a particular month. These prizes were larger and in some cases were as much as \$200 or were tickets to a sold-out concert.

Elliott and Rosenberg (1987) suggest that uses and gratifications theory can explain why the user makes the decisions that he or she does, which they suggest is particularly relevant with new technologies. This theory also suggests that the user needs to be motivated in some way to access a new website and that it must, in some way, meet a need of that individual if he or she are to continue to come back.

Traditionally, legacy media would have been the first to report the news, but now, the Internet often offers a faster, more up-to-date option for keeping pace with what is going on throughout the world (In some cases, television still may be as quick as online or faster.). Kaye and Johnson (2004) suggest that those who study the Internet often look at it as a single entity, instead of researching how individual aspects of the Internet can motivate the user. Uses and gratifications theory also assumes that there is an active audience and that it is goal-driven (Kaye & Johnson, 2004).

This theory can be broken down into three general types. People use a particular medium because of the content it carries or they use it to browse through it and see what it has to offer (Stafford & Stafford, 2001). Cutler & Danowski (1980) suggest that content gratifications occur through the messages carried by the medium, while process gratifications is concerned with the actual use of the medium. A third option to explore

is that of the social environment and what role the Web plays in meeting these needs (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004).

In the case of the Resolving Door website, it has to prove itself as an important resource. At CU, there are other competing websites that offer similar types of information, such as “Ralphie’s List,” which answers commonly asked questions at CU. Although the Resolving Door is an information platform, the question becomes whether it is something that students, faculty, and staff feel is needed. Uses and gratifications theory suggests that if the user doesn’t come back to a new technology, then that technology may not be meeting a particular need and thus the user moves on to try another source. If people do not return to the website, this suggests that something is not right and may need to be re-evaluated.

## Chapter 4

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### ◆ RESEARCH METHODS ◆

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As a news designer in two different newsrooms, I found it to be commonplace to try new technologies, such as “tweeting” during a football game. Yet it was never known if that tool was effective and worth the time of the reporter or editor. This is a similar issue for the Resolving Door where all these technologies were combined into a new website for CU students, faculty, and staff, but no research was done in the two years of the project to see if the website met the needs of the community. The Resolving Door website is made up of several different layers: the leadership team who created the concept and procured the funding, the students who offered ideas of what should be added to the website, and the audience.

Because of these many layers, a mixed methods approach was taken to better understand the participants and the project itself. The study focused on collecting, analyzing, and combining both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2007).

Creswell suggests that mixed methods are a key research tool because it “provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research” (Creswall, 2007). In the case of this project, using mixed methods complements the hypotheses and research questions posed.

On the quantitative research element, a survey (*see Appendix D*) was distributed to participants in the Resolving Door website (n=522). This method, in particular, was important because it allowed the researcher to gain access to as many opinions as possible from those who participated in the Resolving Door project, allowing for the potential of statistically significant results. This method also allowed the researcher to quickly contact a large number of participants in the Resolving Door project who were scattered throughout the Denver-Boulder metro area. Yet this research technique alone doesn't tell the complete story. The survey contained mainly close-ended questions, which may not have allowed the participants to share their complete thoughts.

With this in mind, follow-up qualitative interviews (n=15), which were semi-structured, were incorporated as part of the method for data collection, which was approached using open-ended questions, allowing the participants to respond in their own words. In addition, the creators of the website were also interviewed. Anderson and Meyer (1988) suggest, “Qualitative methods are distinguished from quantitative methods in that they do not rest their evidence on the logic of mathematics, the principle of numbers, or the methods of statistical analysis” (p. 247). Unlike the quantitative survey, the qualitative interviews had fewer participants and allowed for more in-depth responses.

Three hypotheses will be used to evaluate the Resolving Door website and determine whether students in the citizen journalism class and students who were not part of the class view information, news, and citizen journalism similarly or differently. The first hypothesis suggests that the primary marketing campaign for the Resolving Door website was focused on giving participants an incentive to participate. Each semester, different incentives were offered to entice students to join the website, mostly through monthly prizes for the most questions asked and the most questions answered. Additional incentives were then offered to students so that they would continue to use the website.

***H1:** The primary reason for students to visit the Resolving Door website was to register and receive an incentive for doing so.*

The second hypothesis suggests that students who participated in the Resolving Door project class, called “citizen journalism,” will be more likely to believe that the Resolving Door project is an example of citizen journalism.

***H2:** Students in the citizen journalism class will define the Resolving Door as citizen journalism, whereas participants on the website will not define it as any form of journalism.*

Because journalism students have been trained in journalism and are familiar with the different values that create credible journalism, it would seem natural for these students to find more credibility in traditional news sources over other social media options. This leads to the third hypothesis of this study that:

***H3:** Students who are majoring in journalism or media studies will consider traditional news sources to be more credible than social media.*

In addition, follow-up interviews were used to help explain student behavior further and



assess whether the project envisioned by Dean Paul Voakes and project manager Daniel Schaefer met student needs.

***RQ1:** Can user-generated content (such as the Resolving Door), serve the public's need for information in the same way that traditional journalism does?*

It is also important to figure out how students differentiate information and news. With so much new information and news making its way onto the Internet each day, each person must have some way to decipher which news and information is the most important to focus in on.

***RQ2:** Can students who view user-generated content (such as that found on the Resolving Door project) differentiate between news content and information? Why or why not?*

Many might refer to a public sphere as a good place to engage in civic conversation.

Although the format of the Resolving Door does allow for back and forth conversation, whether it takes that conversation to the next level is in question.

***RQ3:** Although the Resolving Door website most likely does not create a public sphere in the mind of Habermas, does it meet Dahlburg's (2001) criteria for an online public sphere?*

In evaluating the Resolving Door website, it is not sufficient to only understand student habits, but it is important to be able to explain why the students do what they do. For this reason, this thesis will use both quantitative and qualitative methods to help gain a better perspective of students actions on the Web.

### **Quantitative Method: Online Survey**

Each of the 522 Resolving Door participants was recruited to take part in an online survey with the goal of better understanding how students perceive the Resolving Door website, as well as how and why these students use the site.

*Sampling.* An online survey was distributed over a secure Web connection using Survey Gizmo (online software used to create surveys). An email was sent out to 522 individuals who had registered with the Resolving Door website. The email asked participants if they would be willing to take part in a short survey; a link to the survey was provided. The participants in the Resolving Door website no longer occupy the geographic space of campus because some have already graduated. Because student email accounts are kept open only for a period of time after graduation, it is impossible to know how many of the 522 individuals who were sent an email, actually received it. A total of 80 students responded and completed the survey (which is a 15% response rate).

The survey, containing 31 questions, was made available online from Dec. 13, 2010 - Jan. 21, 2011. Beginning Dec. 13, 2010, an email inviting students who participated in the Resolving Door website was sent out with a link to the survey. Each student with a valid email address was sent an invitation. The list was obtained from the project manager, Daniel Schaefer.

*The survey process.* Each person used his or her own computer, in the setting of his or her choosing. Because it is unknown how many people access their CU email address, the actual response rate may be higher than what has been calculated. One week after the initial e-mail was sent out, a follow-up thank-you email was sent, as well as a reminder about the survey for those who hadn't taken it. An additional reminder

was sent out to the participants of the Resolving Door website at the beginning of spring semester, the week of Jan. 17, 2011.

*Journalism measures.* Questions were explicitly asked about each participant's use of the website, as well as how each individual would define the Resolving Door website. For each of the following matrix questions, a four-point scale was used, with 1 meaning "never" and 4 meaning "often."

- When using the Resolving Door website, what are the primary topics of the questions that you ask? (Student government... Nightlife... University policies... Sports... music... Off-campus events... Campus events....Academic...)
- When using the Resolving Door website, what are the primary topics of the questions you answered? (Student government... Nightlife... University policies... Sports... music... Off-campus events... Campus events....Academic...)

The following matrix questions were asked using a four-point scale with 1 meaning "never" and 4 meaning "always."

- Information goes by different definitions. Would you define information on the Resolving Door website as... Journalism... Citizen journalism... A place to chat... Information... Useful...
- Are these sources examples of journalism? CNN... The Denver Post... The Denver Channel... YahooAnswers.com, Resolvingdoor.com... Twitter... Google News (news.google.com)...

*Credibility measures.* Participants were asked what sources they found credible. In addition, questions were asked about who participants found to be most credible and how credible different types of stories are. The first question was asked using a four-point scale with 1 meaning "not important" and 4 meaning "extremely important."

- How important is it to you to have all the facts verified in a TV newscast or newspaper?

Five additional matrix questions were asked using a four-point scale for each of the topics with 1 meaning “never” and 4 meaning “always.”

- What sources of information do you consider to be credible? (Entertainment Tonight... The Boulder Daily Camera... Facebook... Denver Post... MSNBC... The Resolving Door... Twitter... The National Enquirer...)
- When information is posted to the Resolving Door website, what types of people do you believe to be the most credible? (Fellow students... Those who run the Resolving Door website... Student government leaders... Journalists...)
- How credible do you find these types of stories? (News stories... Feature stories... Sports stories... Opinion stories...)
- Do you often find information to be incorrect on the Resolving Door website?
- Are these sources examples of journalism? (CNN... The Denver Post... The Denver Channel... YahooAnswers.com... Resolvingdoor.com... Twitter... Google News (news.google.com)... National Enquirer...)

*Incentive measures.* Questions were also asked about how many participants joined using the incentive program and how much time each individual spent on the website.

- Did you join the Resolving Door website through the incentive program? (Yes, No)
- Would you have joined the Resolving Door website if an incentive was not offered? (No, Maybe, Yes)
- During an average week, how many times do you access the Resolving Door website? (1 time, 2 times, 3 times, 4 times, 5 times, 6-10 times, 11-20 times, 21-30 times, 31-40 times, 41-50 times)

*Demographics.* Each of the participants surveyed took part in the Resolving Door project. The demographics of the sample showed that 42.5 percent of participants were

male (n=34), while 57.5 percent were female (n=46). Of the 80 respondents, 52.5 percent are seeking a degree from the College of Arts and Sciences (n=42), 17.5 percent are seeking a degree from the College of Engineering (n=14), 7.5 percent are seeking a degree from Leeds School of Business (n=6), and 22.5 percent are seeking a degree from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (n=18).

*A need for incentives to get participation.* Because many of the participants joined the Resolving Door project through an incentive offered on the Resolving Door website, participants were invited to submit their email address and name to be entered in a raffle for four \$50 Amazon gift cards for participating in the survey.

*Participation in qualitative interviews.* The last question on the survey asked the participants to write down their email address if they would be interested in participating in one-on-one interviews at the beginning of the spring 2011 semester. From those who responded (n=15), a list was generated with their emails for later contact in the spring.

### **Qualitative method: In-Depth Interviews**

*The participants.* Each student who said they would be interested in participating in the Resolving Door in-depth interviews was sent an email the week of Feb. 7, 2011, to see if they would still be interested in participating. A reminder email was sent the week of Feb. 14, 2011. Of the 14 participants who responded, four had taken the citizen journalism course (29%) and ten participants who had participated in the Resolving Door website responded (71%).

In addition, both Dean Paul Voakes and Project Manager Daniel Schaefer were interviewed about the project's conception and their respective involvement in the project. This was done to better understand the goals of the project and to gain further insight as to how Dean Voakes and Schaefer envisioned student participation in the website. By adding these additional interviews, a comparison can be made to the similarities and differences in the perception of the student participants to the leaders.

*The interview process.* Both Dean Voakes and Schaefer were asked by the researcher to participate in the project. Both interviews took place the second week of December 2010 and lasted approximately one hour. Each person was questioned from a script, which was similar to that of the students, except with more of a concentration on the idea and development of the Resolving Door project.

Each student was sent an email asking what time would be most convenient, as well as their preference for interview locations. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes. Over the next two weeks (Jan. 17, 2011- Jan. 31, 2011), all the interviews were conducted. Each of the interviews was scripted so that each person had the opportunity to answer the same questions. This also allows for the potential of more comparison among each of the interviews. On occasion, an interesting point or observation would lead to follow-up questions related to a particular statement. Each interview was recorded for accuracy, along with notes taken by the researcher.

*The questions.* For both Dean Voakes and Schaefer (*see Appendix A*), it was important to gain an understanding of how each person became involved in the project, his other interests and goals. The questions primarily followed the script, but on

occasion, further follow-up questions were asked to help clarify points. Some of the questions included:

- Tell me about your basic background and how you got involved in this type of project. How did it come about?
- What makes the university a good or a bad place to try something like this out? Is there an advantage for doing it here versus the whole city of Boulder?
- Who did you find the most supportive of the project?
- Describe how you differentiate the concept of citizen journalism and journalism? How do you see these two terms?
- When you look at the Resolving Door, how do you see the many different pieces of this right now? What role does it fill? And is it citizen journalism?
- What is the Resolving Door bringing forth to students that they can't get somewhere else?

Students were asked several dozen questions regarding their thoughts and participation on the Resolving Door website, as well as their overall Internet use (*see Appendix C*). The questions included:

- How did you first become involved in the Resolving Door project?
- What do you think the role of the website is?
- What did you find most useful? Not useful?
- How important was the incentive for you to join?

Additional questions were then asked about each interviewee's use of the Internet. Sample questions include:

- Are there websites out there similar to the Resolving Door?
- What sources do you like to frequent on the Internet?
- Are there sources you really dislike out there?

- Do you have concerns about the accuracy of the information on the Internet?
- What sources do you consider news? Information?
- When you go on the Web for information is it always credible?
- When you look at the Resolving Door website, do you find these same standards?
- How do you define citizen journalism? How do you define journalism?

For those students who participated in the citizen journalism class, several extra questions were asked to gain a better understanding of what role the students played in building the project (*see Appendix B*).

- Was the class what you anticipated it to be? How would you categorize it?
- What role did you play?
- After the class was completed, did you continue to work on the Resolving Door project?
- Was there a particular reason you decided to use/not to use the site?

*Levels of analysis.* At the completion of each interview, a transcript was typed up from the voice recorder. These transcripts were then coded based on their content and application to particular key words.

Although the results of the qualitative interviews cannot be generalized due to the small number of interviews conducted, combining the quantitative data with the qualitative data allows for a more robust data set and increases the validity of the comments and empirical results.



## Chapter 5

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### ◆ Results ◆

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#### **The role of the leadership team**

The importance of a technology project like the Resolving Door for Paul Voakes, Dean of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, is that it offers the opportunity to explore one of his core missions.

“My mission is to create an environment that prepares students for success in media work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to the greatest extent possible. On the flip side is the teaching mission to discover new ideas and new methods for the gathering and the delivery of journalism.”

The personal interests and ideas of both Voakes and Project Manager Schaefer also played a significant role in shaping the Resolving Door website. Each went into the project with a prescribed set of goals. For Voakes, there were many different projects to choose from. “I think for the last four or five years, I have really felt that I have been in the mode of throwing spit wads at the wall and seeing which ones fall off and which ones stick. And this is the one [the Resolving Door] that really seemed valid week after week

and month after month.” Voakes felt that the Resolving Door project would give the school the opportunity to create a unique journalism hybrid within the context of citizen journalism.

In order to get the project off the ground, Voakes needed to hire a project manager to build and run the website, as well as teach the class. Schaefer, who was the school’s technology coordinator at the time, applied for the job and got it. He used his technical know-how, as well as other skills, to build the site and teach the citizen journalism class. “I felt like I brought a unique understanding to the project. I think I have a unique blend of both technical understanding necessary to do the project, and it would be a pretty sophisticated project... Also I had this practical experience helping manage the Campus Press [the student newspaper which is now called the CU Independent],” Schaefer said.

Both Schaefer and Voakes began with the goal of creating a citizen journalism website that could be run by students (who were participants in the citizen journalism class and help fulfill the role of the moderator for the website). In the class, Schaefer suggested, “What we discovered, or I have discovered, through the class is that journalism is hard to do well. Anyone can tweet, anyone can put together a video, but for someone to do that well, to tell a story well, with quality and little to no mistakes, being credible.... That is really hard to do.”

Both Schaefer and Voakes differentiate citizen journalism from journalism in the same way. Each defines citizen journalism as offering untrained participants a chance to take part in all aspects of the news process, which was traditionally controlled by trained journalists in a newsroom. But, despite their agreement on the definition of citizen journalism, they differed in deciding how the Resolving Door should be

categorized at the completion of the two-year project. Voakes suggested that:

“Yes [the Resolving Door], I think it is citizen journalism.... It is close to the crowdsourcing side [He is referencing his idea of a continuum from crowdsourcing to journalism], but that is not to say that it is straight up crowd. It does have a team of organizers and it is well organized. It is closer to that side than to high quality, prizewinning journalism. It is moving closer and closer to the middle by virtue of what has happened in last two months [the CU Independent writing stories off the information on the Resolving Door website].”

Schaefer, on the other hand, chooses to use the word “crowd” whenever referencing those who participated on the website (not citizen journalist). He chooses to only use the term “citizen journalism” when talking about the topic in general terms. But, in all other references to the Resolving Door project, Schaefer uses the term “crowd.”

According to Schaefer, “The project [Resolving Door] is really focused on meeting the crowd.”

Although the leadership team of Voakes and Schaefer set out to have the project go in a particular direction, it became obvious to both leaders that the students were the ones contributing all the good ideas and that the project would need to adapt. For example, one student in the class suggested the “Crowd Says,” which was the idea the student participants needed to be able to easily access the most popular topics. This was further built upon the final semester where, instead of the “Crowd Says,” a new option was added to the website called “Trends,” which allowed participants to mine current questions and answers and create trends by topic. Additional suggestions were also made by the class, from a badge systems rewarding participants for their participation and expertise, to a red phone that would send questions straight to student government to be answered. Although this red phone feature was developed, the student government voted not to use it.

When asked about the project, Schaefer said, “What I realized is that it is so valuable to have student input. The ideas are what matter. The technical stuff isn’t as important. Their feedback was crucial.... The largest burden for me was to take care of the technical aspects and work with the students on getting really good feedback.”

### **The Project**

The project attracted a wide variety of students on the CU Campus (*See TABLE 1*). Although 90 percent of those who participated and responded to the survey were undergraduates (n= 72), 10 percent of those who participated were graduate students (n=8). Because of this small number, the results from both the master’s and Ph.D. participants are not highly significant, yet the results still offer a glimpse into the different perspectives this group brings to the Resolving Door project.

Each participant became aware of the Resolving Door project through different methods (*see TABLE 1*). The most common method was through the Buff Bulletin (an email that goes out to the whole campus from the University of Colorado Boulder several times a week advertising activities and other events on campus), which is where 67.5 percent of the participants surveyed first heard about the Resolving Door (n=54). Marisa said, “I had actually seen a student Buff Bulletin about it, and I think it was the Dead Maus [a popular band] contest. So I went to the site and looked at the questions and decided to try out the contest and started participating, asking questions and answering questions.”

Several other methods were also used. A total of 16.3 percent heard about the project from a friend (n=13), while 7.5 percent heard about the Resolving Door through another class (n=6). According to Patricia, “A friend of mine that was in the class was first talking about it to me and then suggested I finally signup and get involved with what they were doing.”

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**TABLE 1 | Cross Tabulation**

**How heard about the Resolving Door project/gender**

	Male	Female	TOTAL
<b>A class</b>	2 (2.5%)	4 (5%)	<b>6</b> <b>(7.5%)</b>
<b>A friend</b>	5 (6.3%)	8 (8.8%)	<b>13</b> <b>(16.3%)</b>
<b>Buff Bulletin</b>	24 (30%)	30 (37.5%)	<b>54</b> <b>(67.5%)</b>
<b>CU Independent (school newspaper)</b>	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.3%)	<b>2</b> <b>(2.5%)</b>
<b>Google search</b>	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.3%)	<b>2</b> <b>(2.5%)</b>
<b>In Citizen Journalism Class</b>	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	<b>1</b> <b>(1.3%)</b>
<b>Orientation</b>	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	<b>1</b> <b>(1.3%)</b>
<b>Sidewalk chalk</b>	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	<b>1</b> <b>(1.3%)</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b> <b>(42.5%)</b>	<b>46</b> <b>(57.5%)</b>	<b>80</b> <b>(100%)</b>

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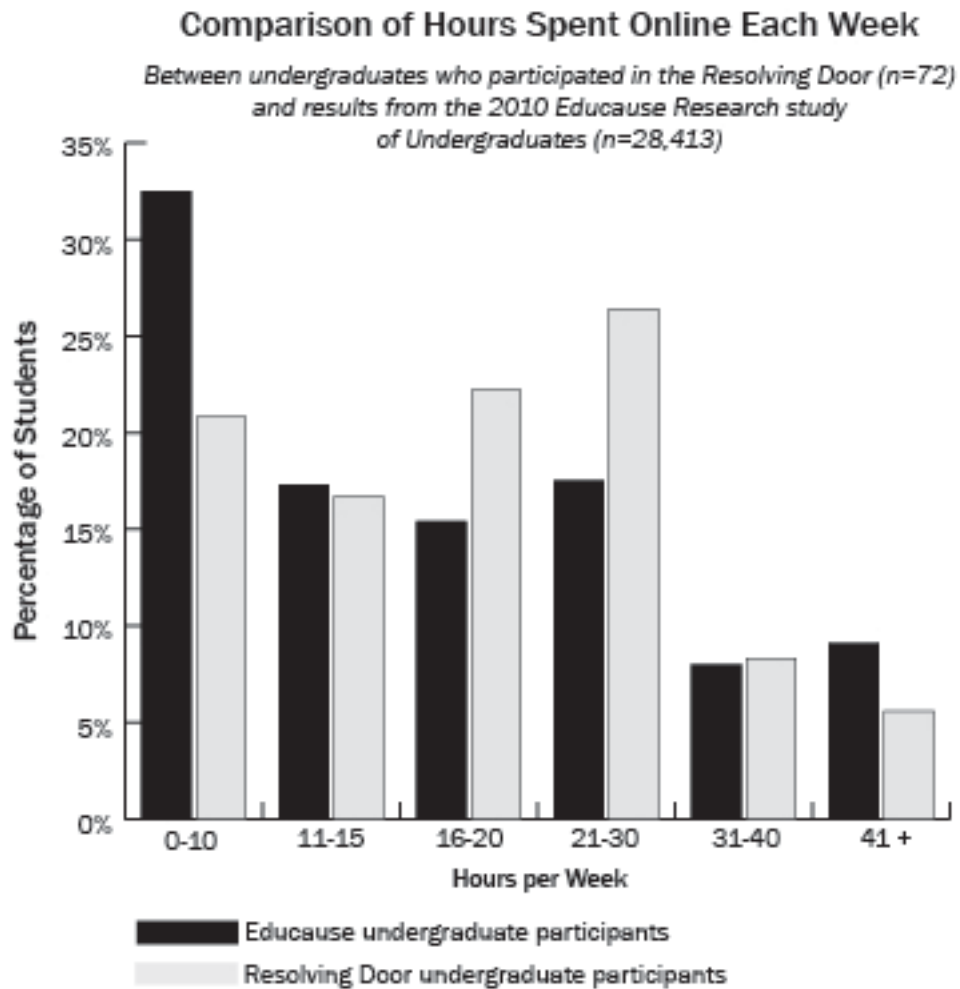
**The Participants**

Each person who participated on the Resolving Door site spent a significant part of his or her week on the Internet. Student demographics were compared against their

general Internet use to better understand how each student spends time on the Internet by gender, age, year in school, and also by which school a degree is sought. Of the undergraduates (n=72), 20.8 percent spend 10 hours a week or less on the Web (n=15), 16.7 percent spend between 11 and 15 hours a week on the Web (n=12), 22.2 percent spend between 16 and 20 hours using the Internet each week (n=16), 26.4 percent spend between 21 and 30 hours a week using the Internet each week (n=19), 8.3 percent spend between 31-40 hours a week using the Internet each week (n=6), 5.1 percent spend 41 hours or more a week using the Internet each week (n=4) (*see Table 2*). An Educause (2010) research study (n=28,413) found that 32.7 percent spend 10 hours week or less on the Web (n= 9,291), 17.3 percent spent between 11 and 15 hours a week on the Web (n=4,915), 15.4 percent spent between 15 and 20 hours a week on the Web (n=4,376), 17.5 percent spent between 21 and 30 hours a week on the Web (n=4,972), 8 percent spent between 31 and 40 hours on the Web (n=2,273), and 9.1 percent spend 41 hours or more on the Internet each week (n=2,586) (*see Figure 1*).

Like the majority of the Resolving Door participants who were interviewed, Megan, a participant in the citizen journalism class, said, "I feel like I am on the computer all the time. I guess I am just doing schoolwork." Yet one of the participants interviewed who embraced the use of technology for certain uses, felt technology didn't need to be part of everything. Mary said, "I am probably one of the very few people who gets newspapers delivered to my door. I use Twitter, but I still support the use of cell phones, the ones that just make calls."

FIGURE 1 | Bar Graph



\*\* All Educause (2010) comes from their independent survey

TABLE 2 | Basic Demographics

	Hours spent online each week								TOTAL N=80
	10 hr or less	11-15 hrs	16-20 hrs	21-30 hrs	31-40 hrs	41-50 hrs	51+ hrs		
<b>GENDER</b>	<b>Male</b>	11 (13.8%)	6 (7.5%)	4 (5%)	6 (7.5%)	2 (2.5%)	2 (2.5%)	3 (3.8%)	34 (42.5%)
	<b>Female</b>	4 (5%)	8 (8.8%)	13 (16.3%)	15 (18.8%)	4 (5%)	2 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	46 (57.5%)
<b>AGE</b>	<b>18-24 years</b>	14 (17.5%)	12 (15%)	16 (20%)	20 (25%)	5 (6.3%)	4 (5%)	1 (1.3%)	72 (90%)
	<b>25-29 years</b>	0 (0%)	2 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	5 (6.3%)
	<b>30+ years</b>	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	3 (3.8%)
<b>YEAR IN SCHOOL</b>	<b>Freshman</b>	1 (1.3%)	4 (5%)	0 (0%)	3 (3.8%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	9 (11.3%)
	<b>Sophomore</b>	4 (5%)	3 (3.8%)	4 (5%)	6 (7.5%)	2 (2.5%)	2 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	21 (26.3%)
	<b>Junior</b>	5 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	8 (8.8%)	4 (5%)	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	19 (23.8%)
	<b>Senior</b>	5 (6.3%)	5 (6.3%)	4 (5%)	6 (7.5%)	3 (3.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	23 (28.8%)
	<b>Master's</b>	0 (0%)	2 (2.5%)	1 (1.3%)	2 (2.5%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.3%)	7 (8.8%)
	<b>Ph.D.</b>	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.3%)
<b>SCHOOL SEEKING DEGREE FROM</b>	<b>College of Arts and Sciences</b>	7 (8.8%)	10 (12.5%)	9 (11.3%)	11 (13.8%)	1 (1.3%)	2 (2.5%)	2 (2.5%)	42 (52.5%)
	<b>Leeds School of Business</b>	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.3%)	2 (2.5%)	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	6 (7.5%)
	<b>School of Journalism and Mass Communication</b>	5 (6.3%)	2 (2.5%)	4 (5%)	3 (3.8%)	3 (3.8%)	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	18 (22.5%)
	<b>College of Engineering and Applied Science</b>	5 (6.3%)	1 (1.3%)	3 (3.8%)	5 (6.3%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	14 (17.5%)



## The Role of the Incentives

Although many of the participants in the Resolving Door website heard about the site in different ways, 67.5 percent of those students who decided to join did so through one of several incentive programs offered (n=54). According to Schaefer, “The incentives, the money incentives, have played a very important role in getting the project kick-started.” This led to the first research hypothesis:

***H1:** The primary reason for student to visit the Resolving Door website was to register and receive an incentive.*

With such a large number of participants joining the Resolving Door through incentive programs, it would seem likely that those programs had a significant impact on attracting participants. An ANOVA was used to compare the means of students who participated in the incentive programs to the semester in which the student decided to join. A significant difference was found,  $(F 3, 76) = 4.249, p = .008$  (see Table 3). This test did not, however, indicate the semesters that were most significant.

A pairwise comparison was done using the Bonferroni method. The comparisons indicate that there was a significant increase in incentive participation in the spring and fall of 2010 at the overall significance level of .05. During 2010, the number of incentives offered increased, and so did their value. In the spring of 2010, \$10 gift certificates were given a way to students who asked three questions and answered three questions. During the fall of 2010, the incentives were even larger with concert tickets and \$200 AMEX cards offered for different levels of participation. Schaefer further explains this. “We have kick-started it with incentive money, and I think that the website is sometimes attracting people just because of the incentive and so that is one thing. People need

carrots and so I think that it is important.” Throughout the two year period, \$4,555 was spent a gift certificates and \$1,832 was spent on schwag (bumper stickers, keychains, bottle openers, lighters, etc...).

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TABLE 3 | Crosstabulation

		Which semester did you join the Resolving Door website?				Total
		Spring 2009	Fall 2009	Spring 2010	Fall 2010	
Did you join the Resolving Door website through the incentive program?	No	0 (0%)	1 (1.3%)	5 (6.3%)	20 (20%)	26 (32.5%)
	Yes	2 (2.5%)	4 (5%)	18 (22.5%)	40 (37.5%)	54 (67.5%)
	Total	2 (2.5%)	5 (6.3%)	23 (28.8%)	50 (62.5%)	80 (100%)

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In the spring semester of 2009, of the two participants who joined the Resolving Door, two participants (100%) joined through the incentive program and zero (0%) participants joined the Resolving Door without an incentive. In the fall semester of 2009, of the five people who joined the Resolving Door, four people (80%) joined through an incentive program and one participant (20%) joined the Resolving Door without an incentive. By the spring of 2010, of the 23 participants who joined, 18 participants (78.3%) joined through an incentive program and five participants (21.7%) joined without an incentive. In the fall of 2010, 30 participants (60%) joined through one of the incentive programs and 20 participants (40%) did not join through an incentive.

Students who participated in the citizen journalism class offered other opinions, although all four interviewees agree that some sort of incentive was needed to grab

students' attention. Matt, a class participant, said, "Having the incentive programs spiked participation, but I don't think this is how the website should be run. To pique initial interest, sure. As far as sustaining, it just won't work."

For Tim, another class participant, the issue was more about the financial end of the incentives.

"I thought we spent a massive amount of money on incentives. Thousands of dollars. I think most people are used to getting no rewards online, maybe a badge or a designation that they are a super-user. I think if you offer to give people \$10, that is a major incentive to participate. But, when you offer to give them \$200 or concert tickets that are highly in demand, that may be going a little bit overboard."

Both Schaefer and the participants in his class found that as the dollar amounts increased, so did the participation, which had both a negative and positive effect on the website. A total of \$6,637 was spent on incentives, with the majority of that money being spent in the spring and fall of 2010. During the Dead Maus ticket giveaway, Schaefer was informed by a student participant that others had figured out that when they hit the submit button, there was a lag of several seconds before the box would disappear. This allowed the students to be able to continue to click the box while their question or answer was loading, thus rapidly increasing an individual's point totals.

During this incentive, students were given different amounts of points for each question and answer submitted. The point system was automatic. Schaefer, along with his class, could not figure out why there were so many duplicate questions and answers in the system until a student who felt it was unfair came forward about participants "cheating." Schaefer said:

"So I had a student who emailed me and say, 'Hey, I just wanted to let you know that there is a bug,' I was astonished that a student would email an instructor saying that students were cheating. What the student said was that because this other person was cheating, that they felt they had to cheat."

Schaefer also suggested that this incident was an indicator that the participants were members of the crowd and that if there is a way to exploit the system, they will. Tim admitted, though, that fixing the problem caused by those who “cheated” was incredibly time-consuming. “On the last day when people were really putting in that last push to get into the top 25, I spent a lot of time weeding through duplicate posts [questions and answers].”

For each of the participants interviewed, the main reason for joining the Resolving Door was to participate in a contest and win. Sarah explained, “To be completely honest, I went on the Resolving Door in order to be eligible for the Amazon gift card giveaways that I had read about in the Buff Bulletin. Once done, I didn’t go back.” Amy, another Resolving Door participant, agreed with Sarah but found additional use for the site. While that may have been the main purpose for each participant, many found that the site had more to offer than just a prize. Amy said, “That’s totally the reason [the incentives] I joined. They [the incentives] were important. After I had discovered it and after I had done that, I thought it was cool, and I have checked it since then because it was a cool idea.”

An ANOVA test was done to see if there was a difference in the number of incentive programs individuals participated in ( $M=1.00$ ,  $SD=2.746$ ,  $n=80$ ) by what each student liked best about the Resolving Door ( $M=5.50$ ,  $SD=2.765$ ,  $n=80$ ). A significant difference was detected,  $F(10, 69) = 2.473$ ,  $p = .014$  (see Table 4). In order to figure out where the differences lie between variables, a repeated-measures analysis of variance was performed using a Bonferroni comparison. The two factors found to be most significant were those students who liked having the ability to ask questions and those

students who liked the opportunity to win prizes (at the .05 level). This would suggest that the more incentive programs an individual participates in, the more likely each participant is to suggest that the best part of the Resolving Door is the ability to ask questions or the opportunity to win prizes.

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TABLE 4 | ANOVA

Participation in incentive programs

		df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squared	F	Sig.
What did you like best about the Resolving Door?	Between Groups	10	11.610	1.161	2.473	.014*
	Within Groups	69	32.390	.469		
	Total	79	44.000			

\* p<.05

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A chi-square test was performed to test the null hypothesis of no association between whether students used the site after the incentive program ended and whether each participant joined the Resolving Door website through the incentive program. An association between the variables was found,  $\chi^2 (1, N=80) = 11.183, p < .001$ . Through examining the cell frequencies, the results showed that of the 54 (67.5%) participants who joined the Resolving Door through the incentive program, 36 (66.7%) discontinued using the website at the end of the incentive program, while 18 (33.3%) continued to use the website.

## Student perceptions of the Resolving Door

For Schaefer, the role of the Resolving Door was simple: allow students to walk in with a question and walk out with an answer. “We wanted to build a website and platform to be a very specific geographic hyper-local community where people could walk into the Resolving Door with a question or issue. We would help facilitate getting that question answered.” For Voakes, it was all about creating a new model. “... Instead of crowdsourcing or citizen journalism as an exclusive alternative to legacy, traditional reporting, what would it look like to bring those two forms of newsgathering together, taking the best of what both has to offer, to see if we could create a kind of hybrid, journalism hybrid in the context of citizen journalism?” This leads to the second hypothesis:

***H2:** Students in the citizen journalism class will define the Resolving Door as citizen journalism, whereas participants on the website will not define it as any form of journalism.*

Each of the four students who participated in the citizen journalism class was asked how they defined the Resolving Door. Each defined the project as something other than journalism, even though the class that they were in talked about citizen journalism before working on the Resolving Door website.

Tim, one of the participants in the class, said:

“I think it is a legitimate experiment [the Resolving Door], though I don't think it is citizen journalism. It is an experiment in engaging the community in information sharing and I think basically it is a good idea to give people a space that isn't Facebook or Yahoo Answers, that isn't national or international, that is very self contained and just deals with CU and the issues of students, faculty and staff at CU. I think it was useful in many cases. People did get good answers to good questions, occasionally.”

Matt took a slightly different view of his experience with the Resolving Door.

“When you think citizen journalism, you don't think running a website. You think going out and finding stories, rolling with them as a citizen journalist. I was surprised that was not how the class was run. I can't say that it was a bad idea, it just wasn't what I had expected and I don't consider it citizen journalism. It is a forum for solving problems.”

Community participants in the Resolving Door website were unsure how to categorize the website and none of those participants ever used the term citizen journalism when referring to the Resolving Door. Mary suggested that, “It seems like it is a CU-based social-media site. Maybe not social media, maybe a social research site. A collaborative site where students can get information on anything related to CU.” Others suggest that it is more of a question and answer platform, yet still others suggested that it is a CU website that makes information more personal. Patricia suggests that, “I treat it kind of as an idea or a forum since it is a question and answer format.”

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to see whether there was a difference in how students defined the Resolving Door website by whether they participated in the Resolving Door class or not (*see TABLE 5*). A significant difference was detected for defining the Resolving Door as journalism,  $F(1,78) = 4.937$ ,  $p=.029$ ,  $M=2.03$ ,  $SD=.779$  and as a place to chat  $F(78,1) = 5.377$ ,  $p=.023$ ,  $M=2.61$ ,  $SD=.864$ . No significant difference was found for the definition of the Resolving Door with the terms citizen journalism ( $p=.514$ ), information ( $p=.831$ ), or useful ( $p=.208$ ).

TABLE 5 | ANOVA

Participants in Resolving Door class

Define information on the Resolving Door		df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	M	F	Sig.
<b>Journalism</b>	Between	1	2.855	2.855	2.03	4.937	.029
	Groups	78	45.095	.578			
	Within Groups	79	47.950				
	Total						
<b>Citizen Journalism</b>	Between	1	.373	.373	2.48	.430	.514
	Groups	78	67.577	.866			
	Within Groups	79	67.950				
	Total						
<b>A Place to Chat</b>	Between	1	3.804	3.804	2.61	5.377	.023
	Groups	78	55.183	.707			
	Within Groups	79	58.988				
	Total						
<b>Information</b>	Between	1	.021	.021	3.25	.046	.831
	Groups	78	36.366	.466			
	Within Groups	79	36.387				
	Total						
<b>Useful</b>	Between	1	.744	.744	3.03	1.614	.209
	Groups	78	35.955	.461			
	Within Groups	79	36.688				
	Total						

### Defining Citizen Journalism and Journalism

As was defined in the literature review of this paper, a citizen journalist differs from professionals in that the citizen journalist typically does not have any formal education in journalism and tries to report news and other pertinent information to his or her community. Even without this training, the citizen journalist becomes an active participant in the news process by doing his or her best to report news or information to the community.



This is where the original conceptualization of the Resolving Door began, yet participants' understanding of the term citizen journalism played a role in how each person evaluated the website. The original concept of the Resolving Door website was framed as citizen journalism by both Voakes and Schaefer, yet it was unclear whether participants would also classify the site as this.

All of the students who took part in the citizen journalism class and were interviewed for this project (n=4) were journalism majors and had some familiarity with the term citizen journalism, but there was still a sense of uncertainty of the definition. According to Katie, "I think as soon as a citizen journalist realizes what they're doing, becomes self aware about it, they become a real journalist. If you are someone posting on Flickr for fun, you are a citizen journalist."

Megan added to this:

"For me, citizen journalism is more like an opportunity for ordinary people to participate in journalism. There is definitely a difference between professionally trained journalists and everyday people. I see it as this opportunity for people to have a voice at a time when everyone is questioning everyone else."

In contrast, of the people interviewed who participated in the website but not the class (n=11), six participants were unclear what the term citizen journalism meant. One interviewee said she knew the term and couldn't define it. Amy said, "Let me think about this. I know what the concept is, I just don't know how to explain it." Kenny was able to give a much more confident response. "It means having people publishing or commenting or communicating news. In this case, it would be like right from the source and without being part of a journalism organization where information is processed, edited and finally presented in a form that might be very, well changed throughout the process."

Although defining citizen journalism was a challenge for both groups, each participant in both the class and the Resolving Door website was able to respond more confidently when defining journalism. Kenny, a non-journalism student but participant in the website, suggested, “A journalist would be a professional who is dedicated to analyzing information from a source, from different sources regarding a topic. They are putting information together and basically filtering it, analyzing it and presenting it to the public, trying to tell them the news.” Patricia added to this definition saying, “I think to be a real journalist you must have training.”

For the students participating in the Resolving Door class, each person was working toward a degree in journalism and also had taken an elective. All four interviewees suggested that both professionalism and ethics were essential elements of journalism. For Tim, “Journalism, what I consider real journalism, is much more structured [than citizen journalism], has more controls in place, more rigorous standards in place, and levels of editing, I guess you could call it, whether it is video, print or online, levels of editing that combine to ensure a high level of accuracy, fairness, ethics, and they [the journalists] operate with some perspective and objectivity is a word thrown around a lot.”

Katie also agreed, “I think of journalists as people who are committed to truthful, ethical fact-finding, and communication.” Each class participant thought that it was important for journalists to have some sort of rationale for what they are doing, while being a citizen journalist is often about being in the right place at the right time and is often unplanned. It is, for example, the plane landing in the Hudson River as Janis Krums

snapped the famous photo of passengers on the wing of a plane and posted it for his friends.

### **Credibility of Sources**

Each participant (both in the class and not) has different perceptions about what information is credible on the Web. This suggests that students majoring in different subjects may classify different websites as more credible than others.

***H3:** Students who are majoring in journalism or media studies will consider traditional news sources to be more credible than social media.*

An ANOVA test was performed looking at the amount of time an individual spends searching for news media sites each week with the school each student is seeking a degree. The overall differences in means was found to be significantly different,  $F(3,76) = 4.930, p < .01$ . To determine at which points time spent searching for news sites has an effect, a Bonferroni comparison was done between the dependent and independent variable. The results indicate a significant difference between students in the College of Arts and Sciences and the students seeking a degree in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the 0.05 level (*see Table 6*).

TABLE 6 | ANOVA

School seeking a degree in		df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Time spent searching news sites each week.</b>	Between Groups	3	4.553	1.518	4.930	.004
	Groups	76	23.397	.308		
	Within Groups	79	27.950			
	Total					

An ANOVA also was performed to compare the degree sought by the student with what sources of information students find to be credible. Although the results found were not statistically significant, the results came close to reaching a statistically significant level for Twitter,  $F(3,76) = 2.460$ . A Bonferroni test was then used to perform pairwise comparisons revealing that the statistical difference was occurring between students in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication and the School of Arts and Sciences. For all others, no significant differences was found: Entertainment Tonight at  $F(3, 76) = .878$ , The Daily Camera at  $F(3,75) = .215$ , Facebook at  $F(3,76) = .234$ , The Denver Post at  $F(3,76) = .692$ , MSNBC at  $F(3,76) = .271$ , the Resolving Door website at  $F(3,76) = 1.656$ , or the National Enquirer at  $F(3,76) = .638$  (see Table 7).

TABLE 7 | ANOVA

School seeking degree in

		df	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	M	SD	F	Sig.
<b>Entertainment Tonight</b>	Between Groups	3	1.581	.527	2.10	.773	.878	.456
	Within Groups	76	45.619	.600				
	Total	79	47.200					
<b>Daily Camera</b>	Between Groups	3	.276	.092	3.04	.645	.215	.886
	Within Groups	76	32.611	.429				
	Total	79	32.888					
<b>Facebook</b>	Between Groups	3	.443	.148	2.29	.783	.234	.872
	Within Groups	76	47.944	.631				
	Total	79	48.387					
<b>Denver Post</b>	Between Groups	3	.967	.322	3.29	.679	.692	.560
	Within Groups	76	35.421	.466				
	Total	79	36.387					
<b>MSNBC</b>	Between Groups	3	2.133	.711	3.20	.736	1.329	.271
	Within Groups	76	40.667	.535				
	Total	79	42.800					
<b>Resolving Door</b>	Between Groups	3	1.276	.425	2.7-	.513	1.656	.184
	Within Groups	76	19.524	.257				
	Total	79	20.800					
<b>Twitter</b>	Between Groups	3	4.424	1.475	2.11	.795	2.460	.069
	Within Groups	76	45.563	.600				
	Total	79	49.988					
<b>The National Enquirer</b>	Between Groups	3	1.994	.665	1.90	1.014	.638	.593
	Within Groups	76	79.206	1.042				
	Total	79	81.200					

For those students who participated in the citizen journalism class, each person had his or her own way of choosing the most credible information on the Internet based on purpose of the information he or she was seeking. Students seeking information for a paper for a class tended to go towards journals, where at other times it was more convenient to go to Google the information that was of interest. Matt said, "It depends on

what I am looking at. I see something on CNN or FOX News, I am always skeptical, but I generally take that as being more accurate than say Wikipedia or opinion pieces.” Matt goes on to suggest that, “I am a journalism major. You are always skeptical, I am already skeptical of what I read and hear. It is important to understand that it may not always be true, but it is the information you have. Make your own conclusions.” For Megan it is more than reading a story in the news. She takes the information that she hears and double-checks it with an academic source that she feels is more credibility. Katie finds that the newspaper is too outdated by the time she reads it in the morning and for that reason, she prefers the online version. “Well, I actually think that the websites are more credible because they can be updated more quickly if there is an error. In that way, I trust them just as much if not more [than legacy news].”

Among those students who are not journalism majors but who participated in the Resolving Door project, there is a wider range of information that is found to be credible on the Web. Patricia said, “I have looser standards [credibility of information] with things that are more social. Like with Twitter, it is a conversation and you can’t expect everyone to have perfect ethics and communication.” Mary, on the other hand, doesn’t feel that credibility on the Internet is really an issue. She suggests that the actual issue may be more related to finding relevant information.

Bob, a journalism major who was a participant on the website, said, “I believe that everything isn’t credible unless you have been able to look at it yourself so that you can make a judgment call or look at it further.” Others tended to believe what their friends said or posted. If the information was coming from a major newspaper or TV station, the information was generally thought to be credible as well.

Elizabeth suggested that, “With Facebook, it is just like everyone is posting their own preferences and ideas and stuff. That site is about people’s opinions. It is something that could be reliable but isn’t. The same is true with YouTube. People post video of breaking news or fake stuff. You just never know.”

### **Citizen Journalism and the Public’s Need for Information**

The public will always get its information from somewhere, whether it be journalism, citizen journalism or some other source of information, yet do these different sources of information always serve the same purpose. In part, it depends on the person who is seeking information.

***RQ1:** Can user-generated content (such as the Resolving Door), serve the public’s need for information in the same way that traditional journalism does?*

An area of concern for those in the citizen journalism class was whether the information posted by a citizen journalist could be considered accurate enough to trust. Because citizen journalists don’t cover a beat or write for someone who already has an established reputation for authority or credibility on the topic at hand, it becomes difficult for the students in the class to buy into that information. Journalism, on the other, is done by professionals who have experience and a reader can gain a sense of how truthful information is presented over and over again.

As Matt pointed out, “In terms of journalism, I think the bottom-line is that you need to get the news or information out. You need be accurate. You need to be objective when reporting. Those are the most important pieces of journalism and citizen journalism.” Matt pointed out another key point about citizen journalism in that it is at

its best when information doesn't have to be manipulated and is transmitted directly. The only difference, he said, is that you don't get a press badge to go with the stories.

Katie noted that important news and information can come from just about anywhere on the Web. Katie said, "So I think with any body of information you have to think about where it came from, who wrote it, who posted it, what their motivations were, and I think that that is not different on the Web than it is in any media form."

Each participant was asked in the survey which information he or she considers to be most credible. Using an ANOVA, a difference in means was found between the credibility of MSNBC and gender,  $F(1,78) = 4.563$ ,  $p = .032$ . No significant difference was found for Entertainment Tonight  $F(1,78) = 1.672$ ,  $p = .200$ , The Daily Camera,  $F(1,78) = .633$ ,  $p = .429$ , Facebook  $F(1,78) = .050$ ,  $p = .824$ , The Denver Post,  $F(1,78) = 1.594$ ,  $p = .210$ , the Resolving Door,  $F(1,78) = .008$ ,  $p = .930$ , Twitter,  $F(1,78) = 1.185$ ,  $p = .280$ , and The National Enquirer,  $F(1,87) = .126$ ,  $p = .724$ .

According to two Resolving Door participants, an important factor in what makes citizen journalism or user-generated content credible is the ability of the community to self-regulate itself. Interestingly, having a moderator suggested to them that the community was not trustworthy. Bill said, "You have to trust the community you are a part of and the information. It doesn't matter if it is citizen journalism, journalism, crowdsourcing. The administration of the [Resolving Door] site was too heavy handed. They took too much responsibility on themselves, which just created extra work for them when they should have farmed it out to the rest of the community."



Linda suggested that on information sites like the Resolving Door, “I kind of take everything with a grain of salt. It depends what you are asking. If you are asking ‘what is a good restaurant,’ you could get good information then.”

Each person who signed up for the Resolving Door website and agreed to be interviewed (n=11) agrees that different types of information are more useful or valuable depending on the particular situation. If each were to get breaking news faster by viewing more user-generated content, they would be willing and at least somewhat skeptical of what they heard or saw because the information would be coming from ordinary citizens and not professional journalists.

### **Differentiating Between News Content and Information**

Besides understanding whether information serves the needs of the public in the same way as traditional journalism, it was also important to look at how different types of content were differentiated.

***RQ2: Can students who view user-generated content (such as that found on the Resolving Door project) differentiate between news content and information? Why or why not?***

Each person interviewed (n=15) was able to offer his or her own method for how to distinguish news content and information on the Web. For those that participated in the citizen journalism class, the line between information and news was less clear than for those who participated only in the Resolving Door website. Matt said, “Honestly, for me, it is the site that I visit. Like I said, unless I go to 20 different sites, there is no way to distinguish what is news and what isn’t news, unless I happen to know otherwise. I generally do go to specific websites for news, unless I am looking for information.” Three

of the students in the class felt Twitter was very important in communicating news and information. All four in the class also decided what news sites they use by what traditional newspapers they read.

Two of the four respondents in the class felt the key to coming back to whatever site interested them was whether it provided a needed service. Tim said, "They either provide a service for me or I get something I need or want from them. Research, television programs, information or entertainment is how I primarily use the Web." For all four class participants, once the class was completed, none of them went back to the Resolving Door website because none found it useful in their everyday lives.

For those who were participants only in the website, there was a larger range of explanations as to how each person went about looking for information and news. The two most popular options suggested were Wikipedia (n=5) and Google (n=9). For Wikipedia, students generally found that it was fairly dependable for accurate information. Amy said, "Wikipedia, even though anyone can edit Wikipedia, people generally don't go on there and mess with things. People write about what they know about. Each person was also asked where they go for information (n=6). "If I am looking for information, it is usually for work or a paper and I need to define what I am looking for," said Amy. In the case of Google, three participants listed all the Google products they use (such as Gmail and Google calendar) as part of the reason each had adopted the Google search. Lizzy said, "I use Google because I have a lot of success with their searches. I have seen commercials for Bing, but it doesn't ever come up with the information." This same concern was brought up by Leeann who suggested, "Google has the most specific answers where as other engines, like Bing and Yahoo, are more general,

and I can't find what I was looking for." All three also felt Google products could be trusted. The branding of the Google products gave the participants a sense of security when using Google. The Resolving Door, as a new product, has to work to gain the trust of those who participate in it. Without this trust, the research suggests that the students will not keep coming back to the Resolving Door.

When looking for news, the participants had different feelings about what direction to go. Four suggested using an aggregator to find news, either Google News or Yahoo News. The other seven had particular news sites they preferred, both local and national.

For Linda, the difference between news and information can be seen through an event such as the Egyptian revolution. If she wanted to know about Egypt and the news, she would find about the ongoing conflict: She suggests looking at The New York Times for information related to this. If she was looking for an information site, she would want to look for historic information, as well as how the country came to be. She would take a different approach in this situation and look up travel sites and the history of the country.

Patricia challenged the views held by the other participants by suggesting that user-content can be news. "So there is the traditional news sources and user-generated things from YouTube. I think they all fall under news. I think it depends on what type and who consumes it." Instead of looking to specific sources for news, Patricia takes a look at all the information as a whole and then determines what role that information will play in her life. She often feels that what is traditionally defined as news — a story in The New York Times, for instance — can be considered by one person to be news, yet

not by another. She suggests that people have certain interests that they care about most, such as those who care most about celebrity news. They may be less interested in a New York Times news story because the topic doesn't interest them, but they might consider something on TMZ to be news.

### **The Potential Online Public Sphere**

The final research question comes from Habermas' public sphere theory. Instead of looking at the Resolving Door in the context of another website, does the Resolving Door have a bigger purpose on the Internet?

***RQ3:** Although the Resolving Door website most likely does not create a public sphere in the mind of Habermas, does it meet Dahlburg's (2001) criteria for an online public sphere?*

This will be addressed through comparing the Resolving Door to using Dahlburg's six criteria.

*Autonomy of state and economic power.* This addresses whether the website is controlled by the citizens or some other entity. Although the website allows participants to ask and answer, as long as the code of conduct isn't broken, there are still moderators who make the final say as to what can be posted and what not. As Bill noted, "The community can't moderate itself. How can a community be trusted by its members if the members don't have control?" An additional issue noted by Matt in the class is that those contributing content to the website had no idea who the moderators were. "When you tell people on the website that their content will be moderated by people in the class, I think it would be fine to know who it was."

Tim described the process of being a moderator. "We just logged in a few times a week and went to the questions and answers that had been posted but not published and read them and assessed them whether they were appropriate or inappropriate." Tim approved all the questions and answers he moderated. There was not any information that infringed on the rules of conduct. Tim found it problematic that no specific training was given for the job of the moderator other than to assess whether something was appropriate or inappropriate.

*Thematization and critique of criticizable moral-practical validity claims.* Each participant was able to communicate back and forth with any question he or she wished. One of the participants noted that it was difficult to find an initial question because of the navigation setup. For her, this made it difficult to receive an answer to her question, as well as to add additional responses to others comments. This ability to communicate back and forth, clarifying information and justifying statements is a critical element toward the creation of a public sphere. An example of the dialogue that occurred on the Resolving Door can be seen in a conversation about skateboarding. A Resolving Door participant asked, "Has CU or the city of Boulder taken any steps to promote bicycle/skateboard safety when traveling to and from classes?"

This was followed up by a response from another individual, "D.I.R.C. stands for "Dangerous, Irresponsible, Reckless and Careless." According to The Daily Camera, CU's Environmental Center posted the signs as part of a weeklong campaign to encourage safe biking and skateboarding on campus. Peter Roper, a program manager for the CU Environmental Center, told Daily Camera reporter Melanie Asmar that biking and skateboarding to class is environmentally friendly but "speeding cyclists and zippy

'boarders can cause problems, especially in areas without clearly distinguished bicycle paths. The CU Environmental Center set up mock pedestrian/bicycle accidents every day last week (from Oct. 21 through Oct. 23). The campaign's blog at [recklessatcu.blogspot.com](http://recklessatcu.blogspot.com)."

Another student followed up that question with another statement, "There needs to be more measures taken to ensure student safety when commuting to and from classes. Especially the blind curve down the Colorado Ave. is very dangerous." These statements show the back-and-forth nature of the website. This type of conversation was not very common, as most participants chose to ask "best" questions, taking the form of "where is the best place" to do something, like grab Chinese food or get a car repaired.

*Reflexivity.* Each person must be able to assess his or her own experiences and be able to put them in a larger context. (Although this element is very difficult to judge online, there is the ability for students, faculty, and staff to take information from the Resolving Door and place it within a larger context.) Bill commented, "For me, there is no engagement [with the website]. It didn't click. It didn't get the involvement. I would have to go back and look more closely. I haven't been back in a year. Some stuff clicks. Facebook clicks. Others don't. There are weird subtleties in between. They don't have the right balance. They haven't figured out what the students' sincere interests are." Another student, Patricia, found that when evaluating the types of questions on the website that, "There is a content quality there that varies a lot." For her, this put a limited value on the information from the site. It also resulted in her looking for other sites to get the information she sought that would better meet her personal needs.

*Ideal role-taking.* Each participant must try to understand the opposing viewpoint through respectively listening and responding to others. In general, those interviewed felt that the site didn't contain very much in-depth information. Instead, most of the questions were very lightweight. Each felt that there were too many opinion questions with too many one-word answers. Amy noted that, "During contests, there was lots of crap questions. They were obnoxious. If there aren't good questions, how can I be expected to answer them?" Marisa also noted problems. "There were a lot of questions that asked about the same thing. I would notice that one had already been answered, but then someone would ask the same question a week later."

The skateboarding example demonstrates the potential for people to state their opposing viewpoint and have someone list and respond on the other side of the issue. As of yet, there are few examples of that taking place. As a method for deepening the level of conversation, the Resolving Door partnered with the CU Independent at the end of fall 2010 semester, writing four articles from trends on the Resolving Door website. Voakes recognizes that the Resolving Door has not become a place for controversial opinions. He notes that, "The success is in bringing together traditional journalism and citizen journalism in a functional sense with the CU Independent." Voakes suggests that this will increase the amount of debate that takes place on the Resolving Door around particular issues. Currently, the Resolving Door doesn't have the level of debate that Voakes had hoped for at the conception of the project.

*Sincerity.* Each participant interviewed has found that answers on the Resolving Door tend to be at least as credible, if not more so, than questions on the Web. Each participant states that this is because students must register with their CU email address.

This makes each participant identifiable to students in the class who are moderating, even if those participating on the website don't know their names. Lizzy said, "I know people give honest answers. Sometimes when there is a question that I know the answer to and I see there is already an answer to it, it is exactly what I would put." Linda added to this by noting, "It is ... well... It is so subjective. People's opinions will vary, but overall I think folks are sincere." The users of the Resolving Door website do not feel a need to know the real identity of each participant. Participants in the Resolving Door were able to learn about each other through their pseudonyms and identify people on the website by what types of questions or answers that person wrote.

When asked in a survey how often each student found wrong information on the Resolving Door, 50 percent said rarely or never ( $n=40$ ) (*see Table 8*). This suggests the users of the website might not find it as credible as hoped by Schaefer and Voakes.

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**TABLE 8 | Frequencies**

**How often information is found  
to be incorrect on the Resolving Door**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Never</b>	6	7.5
<b>Rarely</b>	34	42.5
<b>Sometimes</b>	38	47.5
<b>Always</b>	2	2.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	80	100.0

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Leann went as far as to rank the quality of information on the Web. "I would say on a scale of one to ten, I would give it a seven. It's mostly accurate, but it's kids contributing, so not everyone will be honest."

This contrasts with the class participants who feel that those on the website are not always truthful and sincere with their answers. "Simply because it is moderated by people who don't have experience in the field they are moderating, and aside from that, people can write anything they want. I have seen a lot of wrong answers and a lot of opinion answers," Tim said. Katie added, "I think that no matter what it is, traditional media that migrated to the Web or a forum like the Resolving Door. It is important to read everything with some sort of skepticism."

*Discursive inclusion and equality.* This element is easier to achieve on the Resolving Door than in other locations in cyberspace because nearly everyone at CU has access to a computer during the workday, although some may have better access than others, depending on their jobs. One of the areas of concern brought up by students in the class, as well as those who participated on the website, was the need for better advertising of the project in order to gain more participants.

"In regards to the website, I am not sure there is anything in particular that I could identify. It is more that awareness of it. I had never heard of it except through this particular research and Daniel [Schaefer]." Of those who participated in the Resolving Door survey, 3.8 percent (n=3) felt that the website needed to work on advertising so that there were more participants and thus more people to answer a wide variety of questions. The Resolving Door project relies on participant contributions to the website and it is important for it to maintain a large participant base to continue the questions

and answers. As for the Resolving Door's potential of becoming a public sphere, the lack of involvement by students, faculty, and staff could result in the Resolving Door not meeting the criteria for a public sphere.

## Chapter 6

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### ◆ Conclusion ◆

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Despite efforts to make the website financially sustainable or find additional funding, the Resolving Door has run out of money, no longer has a classroom component, no longer has a project manager, and has lost most of its audience.

Uses and gratifications theory suggests that the user makes particular decisions based on his or her needs, particularly with new technologies. This theory also suggests that the user needs to be motivated by something to access a website (Elliott and Rosenberg, 1987). Sarah, who opted not to be interviewed, said in an email, “To be completely honest, I went on the Resolving Door in order to be eligible for the Amazon gift card giveaways that I had read about in the Buff Bulletin.” The results from this research suggest that the primary reason for students to register and participate on the website was for monetary incentives. In addition, both Paul Voakes, the dean of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, and Daniel Schaefer, the project

manager and course instructor, felt the incentives were necessary to give the project a jumpstart.

Another important element discussed in this project, brought up by both Voakes and Schaefer, is the idea that the Resolving Door would act as some form of citizen journalism that would help bridge the gap between the professional and the citizen in journalism. Both gatekeeping and gatewatching theory play a role in helping to describe these two models. Traditional journalism revolves around the idea of gatekeeping, where writers and editors make the decisions as to what stories the audience reads or hears. Gatewatching works the opposite way in that citizens put up their information and the crowd decides what is most important.

In the case of the Resolving Door, students who took the “Citizen Journalism” class specifically spent time talking about the idea of citizen journalism and working on new ideas for the website. Their experience suggests that they would consider the website to be a form of citizen journalism, while students who did not participate in the class would be unfamiliar with that terminology. The results of this research show that neither students in the citizen journalism class nor participants on the Resolving Door website referred to citizen journalism when they discussed the Resolving Door during the standard interviews. Also, the results from the survey indicate that most Resolving Door participants, when prompted, did not feel that they would associate the term citizen journalism with the Resolving Door. With these research results, it was clear that these participants did not consider the Resolving Door to be a form of citizen journalism. The Resolving Door website does not match the basic models of gatewatching or gatekeeping, but falls somewhere in between. The website does not have an editor

deciding what information is posted in the traditional sense as a newspaper would. Instead, it has a moderator who checks to make sure that the information posted does not break any of the rules of conduct that the Resolving Door states as part of its policies. The website also was not a pure example of gatewatching because there are people moderating the information at a minimal level, and the crowd can't control the placement of information. However the site does fit several of gatewatching models.

Further research would need to be done to determine why students consider the website to be a form of journalism, yet not a form of citizen journalism. Although the Resolving Door doesn't fit the basic definitions of journalism or citizen journalism, but is user-generated content, it is interesting that the participants would tend to classify the website as journalism. Students' general Internet habits suggest that student participants from both the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at CU spend a significant amount of time searching the Web for news sites each week. Student participants in different schools did not find the sources listed on the survey (*see Table 7*) to be particularly credible. Twitter was the one source that almost reached a significant level and might reach research significance with a larger survey sample. The individual interviews might suggest that this is because each person has his or her own particular favorite sites that he or she visits everyday. It is those sources, which are idiosyncratic to each person, that students who participated in the class and those who participated on the website found to be useful, which may have an important connection to credibility. Further research would need to be done to evaluate the connection between the terms "credibility" and "useful." This particular research did not explore this area.

Research results do indicate, however, that students who participated in the Resolving Door website felt that it could either be considered to be journalism or to be a place to chat. Because the project is part of the journalism school, this may have primed participants to think that if the journalism school was doing the project, it must be some form of journalism.

Not everyone needs traditional journalism training to put a value on information. This suggests that the code of journalism ethics — seek truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently, and be accurate — may not be as important to the audience as it is to the traditional journalist. For the Resolving Door, similar values are written in its code of conduct, which include: be accountable, be fair, promote interactivity and dialogue, and respect the community. For many of those interviewed, both in the class and participants on the website, instead of going directly to particular websites, these individuals use search engines such as Google to get reliable results as to which websites a person should look at for particular information. This suggests that those individuals who primary use Google to search for news and information do not have particular sites they feel they must go to get accurate information and news, suggesting that for some people, the public's need for information can be served in the same way by Google as by traditional journalism (This is not suggesting that the quality of information and news is either the same or different between traditional news sites and other user-generated content).

Others felt strongly about going to particular traditional news websites for their news and information. These students preferred their local hometown news sources and also large national ones, such as The New York Times or CNN. Ultimately, each person

who was interviewed found that different types of information are better at different times than others, which suggests that, although students tend to use Google to find information or go to particular sources, there is a need for different types of information at different times, and the multitude of sites out on the Web offer those options.

Although all participants were able to note that there was a difference between news and information by giving different examples of sites, students were unable to define what makes the sites different. Because of the presence of so many websites, several participants noted that it is hard to tell what is a news website and what is an information site: It is a matter of knowing about the sources before you reach a particular website. Two of the participants suggested that the real reason they would come to a particular site again was if it provided a service they needed. Each participant, both in the class and on the website, offered a unique set of websites that he or she finds important to view every day. These websites vary by the participants' interests and by past experiences with websites that they found useful or not useful. Further research would need to be done to develop categories that describe these differences, and a larger sample size might help better define some of the differences.

All of the research questions and hypothesis are comprised of the bigger research question, which is whether the Resolving Door, according to Dahlburg's definition, creates a public sphere. This is significant because the creation of a public sphere on the Web would allow everyone on campus to communicate and debate issues important to them. Dahlburg's criteria are difficult to meet and, although the Resolving Door website meets several of the criteria, it also fails to meet many of the others. The website is currently operating, but there is no longer someone scheduled to moderate the content,

meaning that even if a participant in the website were to ask a question, there is no guarantee that the question will ever post or that someone will be able to answer it. In order to meet Dahlburg's standards, the students participating would have to gain total control over the website. Although the Resolving Door provides a forum with the potential for back-and-forth dialogue on issues that affect students, faculty and staff, it is currently underutilized. Instead, this feature is mainly used to suggest the best places to eat, the best running trails, and so on. To meet Dahlburg's criteria, a significant amount of back-and-forth dialogue would need to take place that addresses community issues.

Another requirement is that users must be able to evaluate their experiences and put them within a larger context. Using the Resolving Door, each person can take information from the site and place it within a deeper context. Along with this, the user must try and understand the opposing viewpoint of the information posted. The Resolving Door also is unique because it is on a university campus, which offers free computer access to nearly all faculty, staff, and students. This makes participation in the Resolving Door accessible for all users, though some may have better computer access than others. The final requirement is that each user must be truthful about his or her identity. This is partially met by faculty, staff, and students having to use their CU email address to participate in the Resolving Door. However, everyone on the Resolving Door may know each other, which results in this criteria not being met.

Although the Resolving Door does not meet the criteria for a public sphere in its current form, there is still the potential for a public sphere to be met if those running the Resolving Door take measures to meet Dahlburg's requirements. Currently, though, the project has run out of funding and its future is uncertain.



### Limitations

It is important to note that the results of this study are limited by several factors related to the quantitative and qualitative methods used to gather data. For the survey, which was distributed by email, a random sample was not gathered. Instead, all students who participated in the Resolving Door project were invited to take part in the survey and were able to self-select whether they wished to participate in the survey for this project. Each question had a limited set of options for an answer and may or may not have offered the appropriate option for each participant. It is also important to note that this Internet survey does not represent the general population of Resolving Door users, resulting in potential bias and sampling error (Vaux & Briggs, 2006). Each person who took the survey had the option to also participate in a structured interview. With open-ended questions, the interviewee was able to give his or her perceptions about the Resolving Door without being limited to a few answer choices, as was used in the survey process. Although the results of the qualitative interviews cannot be generalized due to the small number of interviews conducted, by using both quantitative and qualitative methods for collecting data, this allows for a more robust data set and increases the validity of the comments and empirical results.

An additional limitation of this study resides in the fact that the majority of the research done—both the survey and standard interviews—was conducted near the end of the Resolving Door project funding and thus only represent the end results, which may have varied throughout the two-year project.

### **Conclusion/Future Work**

**FOR THE PROFESSIONAL:** Many lessons can be learned from the Resolving Door project, among them some basic suggestions for building a startup website. The first is to know your audience: What are the demographics? Will building the site fulfill a need for this group of people? How much is the project really going to cost to startup and continue? The second area is marketing. It takes a lot of work to get a community to join a new website when there are seemingly endless options. Look at what will be unique about the site and make sure to clearly market those details. A third area that needs to be examined closely is whether the website will be moderated or not. As the results from the Resolving Door website indicate (and were not expected), students do not want to be moderated and felt that crowdsourcing was more trustworthy. Finally, the Web offers an evolving platform and it is essential for any website that is going to be successful to continue to evolve and adapt to the needs of the user.

**FOR THE RESEARCHER:** It is recommended that with all further research a better effort would be made to gather a random sample to ensure accuracy and make the data more able to be generalized. This will allow for better comparisons between other studies.

An additional area to evaluate is whether a connection exists between the terms “useful” and “credible.” Students were more concerned with a website being useful rather than credible, which leads to the research question: Do students use the term “useful” in the same way as the word “credible” is meant? The Resolving Door website was often thought of as not useful, according to participants. Further research should look at this relationship and also examine what websites students find useful and

why, looking for specific ways to categorize this information. This has the potential to explain why the Resolving Door did not have the success that was originally hoped for by both Voakes and Schaefer, because the original project was meant to involve the students, faculty, and staff. Although this project assesses how students' viewed the Resolving Door project, it stops short of evaluating the faculty and staff perceptions.

Further research would need to be done to understand the needs of these additional two groups, both faculty and staff, to understand what their expectations were and whether they were the same as those of the students or different. Any reassessment of the website would need to be done to incorporate this information. A final recommendation is to evaluate and research other websites that are similar to the Resolving Door, but that have been sustainable and well used by their audiences. Understanding these models could contribute to a better determination of why the Resolving Door project was not successful. An example worth looking at is the Davis Wiki from Davis, Calif., where one in six community members contribute to the Wiki each day and one in seven contribute unique content to the site (KDMC, 2011).

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## Interview Questions for Voakes and Schaefer

### BACKGROUND:

1. Tell me a little about your background and interests.
  - a. What role did your interest in new technology play?

### PROJECT CONCEPTION:

1. Describe how the idea for the Resolving Door came about?
2. Why do you think that the university setting is good place (or not) for a project?
3. Where did you find the most support for this project and why?
  - a. *Funding...*
  - b. *Faculty...*
  - c. *Students...*
  - d. *Other...*
4. How did you go about finding funding for this project? (Voakes)
  - a. *Who funded the project?*
  - b. *Did you try for any other funding?*
  - c. *Has the project been able to sustain itself with this funding?*
5. Can you describe the challenges you faced getting the project started?
6. How do you define citizen journalism?
7. How do you define journalism?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

### GOALS:

1. What goals/aspirations did you come into the project with?
2. Were these goals met? How/how not?
  - a. *Did you meet the goals that you set out to in your project proposal?*
  - b. *Were you able to define what kinds of stories are better read, unguided, unfiltered “social networking” stories/information, or ones that are edited and written by trained journalists?*
  - c. *Did students distinguish between material incentives (cash) and intangible rewards? Were they more responsive to one or another?*
    - a. Are you going to be able to continue to offer incentives for this program? Or is there a plan to gradually move away from incentives?



- b. Without incentives, do you think that students will continue to participate? Why/why not?
4. How many students participated in the project?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**THE CLASS (Schaefer):**

1. What role did you play as the instructor?
2. How was the class set up?
3. What was the class's role in the Resolving Door project?
4. What was the class's role with the incentive program?
  - a. *How many different types of incentives were offered?*
  - b. *Which were the most successful?*
  - c. *Could the project work and sustain student interest without the incentive program?*

**THE PROJECT IN ACTION:**

1. What are some of the unique aspects/qualities of the Resolving Door website?
2. Why should a student want to use the site?
3. What have you been most impressed about with this project so far? Why?
4. Most disappointed about?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**OUTCOME:**

1. If you could set up the project differently, what would change?
2. What role will the Resolving Door play in the future?
3. What lessons did you learn from this project?
4. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

## Interview Questions for Participants in the Resolving Door Class

### PARTICIPATION IN CLASS:

1. Why did you decide to take the Resolving Door class?
  - a. *Was it what you expected?*
2. What do you think the role of the Resolving Door website is?
3. What has been your role in working on the website?
  - a. *Which semester were you in the class?*
4. Do you contribute content to it beyond class time? If so what?
5. Do you look for answers on it beyond what you do during class time?
6. What did you find useful about the Resolving Door/not useful?
7. Do you believe that the incentives to get people to join the website were appropriate?  
Necessary?
8. What incentive programs did you participate in?
9. What do you think about the new “Red” phone feature to student government? Do you use it? Why/why not?
10. What would you change about the Resolving Door website? Keep the same?
11. Do you find information on the Resolving Door website to be accurate? Truthful?  
Why do you say that?
12. Have you ever found wrong information on the Resolving Door website? Did you do any thing about it?
13. Is there another website that you would consider similar to that of the Resolving Door? Which one(s)?

### GENERAL INTERNET USE QUESTIONS:

1. What sources do you like to frequently visit on the Internet?
  - a. *Ask follow up about why for each.*
  - b. *Which sources do you dislike?*
2. Do you ever have concerns about the accuracy of information from these sites?
  - a. *Why/why not?*

3. What sources on the Internet do you go to for news? Name a few.
  - a. *What is it about those sources that makes them sources you rely on for news?*
4. What sources do you go to for information? Is this different from news sources? Why?
5. What sources do you access to get news content on the Web?
6. Are you someone who makes lots of posts to different sites? Why or why not?
7. Is information on the Web always credible? (Yes, No)
  - a. *Why?*
  - b. *Do you put these same standards on the Resolving Door website? Why/why not?*
8. How do you define citizen journalism?
9. How do you define journalism?

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS (In the class):

*Please answer each question as accurately as possible.*

Pseudonym (instead of real name): \_\_\_\_\_

1. How old were you on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_ Prefer not to answer

2. What is your gender? \_\_\_Female \_\_\_Male \_\_\_Prefer not to answer

3. How often do you access the Resolving Door website each week? \_\_\_\_\_

4. When did you sign-up for the Resolving Door website? (Month/Year) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Why did you choose to sign-up for the Resolving Door website/class?

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6. What did you like best about the website/class?

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7. What did you like least about the website/class?

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8. What year are you in school? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What school are you seeking a degree in? \_\_\_\_\_

10. What field will your degree be in? \_\_\_\_\_

## **Interview Questions for Participants NOT in the Resolving Door Class**

### **PARTICIPATION IN THE RESOLVING DOOR PROJECT:**

1. How did you first become involved in the Resolving Door project?
2. What do you think the role of the Resolving Door website is?
3. Do you contribute content to it? If so what?
4. Do you look for answers on it?
5. What did you find useful about the Resolving Door/not useful?
6. How important were the incentives to you joining the project?
7. What do you think about the new “Red” phone feature to student government?
  - a. *Do you use it? Why/why not?*
8. What would you change about the Resolving Door website?
  - a. *Keep the same?*
9. Do you find information on the Resolving Door website to be accurate?
  - a. *Truthful? Why do you say that?*
  - b. *Have you ever found wrong information on the Resolving Door website?*
10. Are there other websites that you would consider similar to that of the Resolving Door?
  - a. *Which ones?*

### **GENERAL QUESTIONS:**

1. What sources do you like to frequently visit on the Internet?
  - a. *Ask follow up about why for each.*
  - b. *Which sources do you dislike?*
2. Do you ever have concerns about the accuracy of information from these sites?
  - a. *Why/why not?*
3. What sources on the Internet do you consider news? Name a few.
  - a. *What is it about those sources that makes them that?*
4. What sources do you go to for information? Is this different from news sources? Why?
  5. What sources do you access to get news content on the Web?
6. Are you someone who makes lots of posts to different sites? Why or why not?
7. Is information on the Web always credible? Yes, No?

*a. Why?*

*b. Do you put these same standards on the Resolving Door website? Why/why not?*

8. How do you define citizen journalism?

9. How do you define journalism?

## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS (NOT in the class):

*Please answer each question as accurately as possible.*

Pseudonym (instead of name): \_\_\_\_\_

1. How old were you on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_ Prefer not to answer

2. What is your gender? \_\_\_Female \_\_\_Male \_\_\_Prefer not to answer

3. How often do you access the Resolving Door website each week? \_\_\_\_\_

4. When did you sign-up for the Resolving Door website? (Month/Year) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Why did you choose to sign-up for the Resolving Door website/class?

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6. What did you like best about the website/class?

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7. What did you like least about the website/class?

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8. What year are you in school? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What school are you seeking a degree in? \_\_\_\_\_

10. What field will your degree be in? \_\_\_\_\_

## Quantitative Survey:

*All Participants*

**1. How did you first hear about the Resolving Door website?**

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**2. When did you join the Resolving Door website (month/year)?**

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**3. When using the Resolving Door website, what are the primary topics of the questions that you ask?**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Student government	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nightlife (including restaurants and bars)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University policies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Off-campus events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campus events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**4. Using the Resolving Door website, what are the primary topics of the questions you answer?**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Student government	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nightlife (including restaurants and bars)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University policies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Off-campus events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campus events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**5. The Resolving Door website implemented a new “Red” phone to student government this fall. Have you tried this new feature?**

No

Yes



**5a. If you have used the “Red” phone feature, do you find the answers given by student government to be credible?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

**6. Did you join the Resolving Door website through the incentive program? (the prizes you received or can receive for signing up with the Resolving Door website or for reaching different achievement levels)**

- No
- Yes

**Participation in Incentives**

**6a. How many incentive programs did you participate in? (the prizes you received for signing up with the website or for different achievements.)**

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**6b. Did you continue to use the site once the incentive program ended?**

- No
- Yes

**6c. Would you have joined the Resolving Door if an incentive was not offered?**

- No
- Maybe
- Yes

**7. Did you participate in the semester-long Resolving Door class?**

- No
- Yes

**8. What did you like best about resolvingdoor.com?**

**9. What improvements would you make to resolvingdoor.com?**

**10. Would you recommend the Resolving Door website to other students?**

- No
- Maybe
- Yes

**11. During an average week, how many times do you access the Resolving Door website?**

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**12. Each time you visit the Resolving Door website, how much time do you spend?**

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**13. When information is posted to the Resolving Door website, what types of people do you believe to be the most credible?**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Fellow students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Those who run the Resolving Door website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student government leaders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Journalists	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**13a. Are there other sources that you find more credible than those listed when using the Resolving Door website?**

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**14. How often do you find information to be incorrect on the Resolving Door website?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Always

**15. When you see incorrect information on the Resolving Door website, do you correct it?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Always

**16. Information goes by different definitions. Would you define information on the Resolving Door website as....**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Unfamiliar with source
Journalism	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Citizen journalism	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A place to chat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**17.) What sources of information do you consider to be credible?**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Unfamiliar with source
Entertainment Tonight	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Boulder Daily Camera	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Denver Post	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
MSNBC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resolving Door	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The National Enquirer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**18. How credible do you find these types of stories?**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
News Stories	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feature Stories	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports Stories	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opinion Stories	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stories contributed by members of a community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**19. How important is it to you to hear the story first?**

- Not important
- Sometimes important
- Important
- Extremely Important

**20. How important is it to you to have all the facts verified in a TV newscast or newspaper article?**

- Not important
- Sometimes important
- Important
- Extremely important

**21. Are these sources examples of Journalism?**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
CNN	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Denver Post	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Denver Channel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
YahooAnswers.com	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resolvingdoor.com	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google News (news.google.com)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
National Enquirer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**22. What makes good journalism?**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
° It is important that the story is truthful.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
° It is important that the story is accurate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
° It is important that the sources are quoted, but not identified.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
° It is important that the story does not harm anyone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
° It is important that the writer is accountable for the story.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
° It is important who wrote the story.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
° It is important that all information is verified.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
° It is important to get the story quickly, whether information within the story is accurate or not.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
° It is important that people involved in the story are quoted within it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
° It is important that information is immediate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**23. How many hours do you spend online each week?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**24. How much time do you spend searching news media sites each week?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**25. What degree are you seeking?**

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**26. Which school are you seeking a degree in?**

- College of Architecture and Planning
- College of Arts and Sciences
- College of Engineering and Applied Science
- College of Music
- Leeds School of Business
- School of Education
- School of Journalism and Mass Communication
- School of Law

**27.) What year are you in school?**

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**28. What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer

**29. How old were you on your most recent birthday?**

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Or  Prefer not to answer

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**Resolving Door Evaluation**

**30. During the beginning of spring semester, would you be willing to participate in a follow-up 30-minute interview? (An additional drawing will be held for one \$50 Amazon gift card for those students who agree to be interviewed.) If you would be willing to participate, please provide your name and e-mail address below.**

Name:: \_\_\_\_\_

Email:: \_\_\_\_\_

**Enter to win**

**31. If you would like to be included in the raffle for one of four \$50 Amazon gift cards, please leave your email address so that you may be contacted if you win.**

\_\_\_\_\_