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The Perception of Bias by University Students with
Access to an Education in Ethics: A Study of the
University of Arkansas Walter J. Lemke
Department of Journalism and the Center for
Ethics in Journalism

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The Perception of Bias by University Students with Access
to an Education in Ethics: A Study of the University of Arkansas Walter J. Lemke
Department of Journalism and the Center for Ethics in Journalism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Journalism

by

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University of Arkansas
Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, 2014

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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

The perception of media bias by students with an education in journalism and access to an education in journalism ethics was explored by juxtaposing two political articles covering the results of the 2016 Super Tuesday presidential primaries for both major parties and requesting students at different points in their education careers to rank them on six semantic differential items. Data was also gathered about the students' knowledge and use of the Center for Ethics in Journalism. The results did not yield any support for previous research asserting that individuals are more inclined to perceive bias in articles with which they disagree, but it did yield some interesting insights to the awareness—or rather lack thereof—of the Center for Ethics in Journalism. Although the hostile media effect was not specifically supported by this study, many other factors may have been in play and unaccounted for including apathy, reading levels, and a too-homogenous sample.

Keywords: Hostile Media Effect, Bias, Perception of Bias, Ethics, Journalism, Media, Political Journalism, Program Awareness

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This thesis would not be possible without the help I received from each of these heroes, and I would have not been able to complete #operationputKintheHood.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the Center for Ethics in Journalism, the Pearson Educational Foundation, the family of Elizabeth Barnes Messner, and the students in Professor Gerald Jordan's spring 2016 2 p.m. section of News I.

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The Perception of Bias by University of Arkansas Students with Access
to an Education in Ethics: A Study of the University of Arkansas Walter J. Lemke

Department of Journalism and the Center for Ethics in Journalism

In the 2015 edition of the annual “Honestly/Ethics in Professions” Gallup Poll merely 27% of Americans rated the honesty and ethical standards of journalists as high or very high (Gallup, 2015). In a 2000 study the Pew Research Center for People and the Press found that almost nine in ten Americans believe members of the media are influenced by their personal views when covering politics (Pew Research Center, 2000). A decade later the perception of journalism as a profession has continued to degrade. In a 2012 study only 10% of those polled said that the news media were “not at all” inserting political bias into the coverage (Pew Research Center, 2012b). In a study immediately following, 61% of respondents said that the news media had a negative impact on society (Pew Research Center, 2012a). By 2015, that number had increased to 65% (Pew Research Center, 2015). Furthermore, these attitudes toward the news media have a growing hostility. In his 2010 textbook to instruct on journalism ethics, Gene Foreman writes: “In the public’s eyes, news organizations are operating largely to make money and their journalists are primarily motivated by professional ambition and self-interest” (p. 57) Press bias, or coverage that promotes or discredits a certain political agenda, in political reportage has been examined to show that it is manifested in omission of facts, amount of coverage dedicated to a topic by the number of articles or length of articles, or in the framing of the article, which puts information lower in the article or the article deeper inside the paper (Anderson & McLaren, 2012, p. 833). Foreman (2010) lists bias as one of seven primary complaints that feed into hostility toward the media. Because of the subjective nature of journalism – a reporter must choose which facts to list first or last or even omit – it would be impossible to assert that bias doesn’t exist,

Foreman writes, and “much of the bias in supposedly neutral news accounts results from an unconscious failure of the journalist to block out opinions. These opinions sometimes are manifest in word selection” (p.63). Therefore, it is the aim of this study to measure the bias perceived by the readers rather than to measure the actual level of bias. That is not to say that perceived bias is more important than the actual existence of bias, but if the perception of bias prevents readers from striving toward educating themselves on current events, then “this lack of information distorts their ability to translate their preferences into partisan preferences and vote choices” (Fowler & Margolis, 2013, p. 10).

Dave D’Alessio (2003) noted that the audience perception of bias was not as widely studied, and he conducted an experiment to study what causes audience members to designate content as biased (p. 282). In his study, he found that readers designate content as biased when it conflicts with their own views, that the perception of bias is dependent upon the topic, and that quotations were more likely to be viewed as biased as opposed to summary or facts (D’Alessio, 2003, p. 282). He found that the audience’s perception of bias aligned with the hostile media effect. The hostile media effect, which was first introduced in 1985 and has 30 years of supporting studies, explains that audience members perceive content as biased against their sides (Perloff, 2015).

This project expanded on research by D’Alessio (2003) by investigating the possible relationship between the hostile media effect and the factors of education level and journalism background. Surveys were administered to students in entry-level and Senior-level University of Arkansas journalism courses using published articles covering the 2016 presidential primaries. The research was also used to gather data about the program effectiveness of the University of Arkansas Center for Ethics in Journalism and whether those who make most use of the Center are

more or less inclined to fit the hostile media effect. This goal is similar to research done by Babad, Peer, & Hobbs (2012), which found that when students were made to watch one of two interviews in a language they could not understand, relying solely upon nonverbal behavior, the students who had taken a media literacy course were less likely to be influenced by the nonverbal behavior.

Literature Review

Hostile Media Effect

Mende (2008) defines the hostile media effect as the phenomenon that causes individuals to perceive balanced content to be biased against their viewpoints (p. 2). In a traditional hostile media effect study, which took place in a laboratory setting, Mende (2008) found that participants in favor of a bridge—which was the topic of the article—perceived the article to be in opposition to the bridge, whereas participants opposed to the bridge perceived the opposite to a highly significant level, $t(29.79) = 3.55; p < 0.001$.

Ideological-leanings of TV networks cue audiences to perceive bias where there is none, and furthermore the hostile media effect can cause individuals to fail to notice bias because of their own partisan viewpoints (Feldman, 2011, p. 409). Feldman (2011) studied news condition—opinionated in favor of the topic, opinionated against the topic, and non-opinionated news-cast—and found that the relationship between news condition and partisanship, or the individual's own beliefs and partisan views, was not significant, $F(4, 118) = .94, p = .45$. The findings in Feldman (2011) supported the hostile media effect because respondents in favor of the topic viewed the non-opinionated segment as biased against the topic, $F(2, 118) = 3.61, p < .05$. Feldman (2011) suggested that “opinionated may have washed out selective perception among

partisans, whereas non-opinionated news generated a hostile media phenomenon, at least among war supporters” (p. 418). Therefore, future research should examine the hostile media effect in non-opinionated news to see if it supports the suggestion by Feldman (2011) and the degree to which it supports the suggestion.

Bias and the Perception of Bias

Bias is defined by Anderson & McLaren (2012) as giving more attention to the successes or failures of one side and not covering or hiding deep in the paper the successes or failures of another. Entman (2007) defines bias as content that favors one side and doesn’t provide equal treatment (p. 163).

The perception of bias, or when audience members believe content favors or discredits a certain side, is subjective and relativistic, and two individuals may have different perceptions of the same article (D’Alessio, 2003, p. 282). D’Alessio (2003) used constructed articles on the topics of campus housing overcrowding, parking shortage, and President George W. Bush’s performance to two groups of undergraduate students—one cued to expect bias and one that was not. The students completed a questionnaire about attributes of the article, such as bad or good and biased or balanced, and circled portions of the article they saw as bias. D’Alessio (2003) found that subjects in favor of an issue were more likely to mark paragraphs opposing their viewpoint as biased, $t(130) = 2.12, p < .05$. The experiment also found that perception of bias was negatively related to the perception of the article being accurate, $r = .198, p < .01$ (D’Alessio, 2003, p. 287).

D’Alessio (2003) also found that the perception of bias is related to accusations of bias, but not the presence of actual bias, because there was no significant effect on the responses from

the group that was cued to expect bias except that they were more likely to mark that an article was bias but not less likely to describe the article as entirely free from bias, $F(1) = 2.27$, $p = n.s.$ Tan and Weaver (2010) found that more the national media, exemplified by sampling of articles from *The New York Times* from 1952 to 2008, reflected a positive correlation between salience of media liberalism and the liberalism of Congressional policies, $r = .31$, $p = .046$, but there was no correlation between media bias and public opinion (p. 426).

This is a direct contradiction of the assertions made by McCarthy & Dolfsma (2014), who write that simply by reporting the news the media can "actively shape the public's perception of reality" and suggests that the media cannot be seen as neutral but instead is "a powerful explanatory variable"(p. 43, 51). The reasoning put forth by McCarthy & Dolfsma is cyclical and rather flawed because it asserts that there is an alternative reality in which putting anything on A1 of *The New York Times* would not have an impact on the readers. Simply being informed of any given subject changes the reader's reality in that he or she now knows something that was unknown before.

Divisive Political Climate

A recent study by Pew Research Center found that "Republicans and Democrats are further apart ideologically than at any point in recent history" and that "92 percent of Republicans are to the right of the median Democrat, and 94 percent of Democrats are to the left of the median Republican" (Pew Research Center, 2014). The survey found that 39 percent of Americans have an equal number of views that would be designated as conservative and liberal, down 10 percentage points from surveys in 1994 and 2004. The differences between the groups extend past politics to choice of community: opting for a larger living space farther from amenities versus a smaller living space closer to amenities to valuing a community that shares one's religious

believes versus valuing racial and ethnic diversity in community. Even more important to this study and the hostile media effect is the animosity exhibited toward the opposite party:

The share of Republicans who have *very* unfavorable opinions of the Democratic Party has jumped from 17 percent to 43 percent in the last 20 years. Similarly, the share of Democrats with very negative opinions of the Republican Party also has more than doubled, from 16 percent to 38 percent. But these numbers tell only part of the story. Among Republicans and Democrats who have a very unfavorable impression of the other party, the vast majority say the opposing party's policies represent a threat to the nation's well-being (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Program Awareness

Research by Zareva & Fomina (2013) has shown that Russian students studying to teach English as a foreign language made more use of strategies “as a way of honing their communicative skills in English” (p. 81). If journalism students view the Center for Ethics as a strategic way to hone their journalism skills, this may be reflected in the data from this study. Unwin, Kerrigan, Waite, & Grant (2007) found that film festival customers valued direct communication to be made aware of the programs and that those who attended infrequently highly valued word of mouth promotion from frequent attendees. Another study by Nadler & Clark (2010) found that within a university setting, slides shown before classes begin significantly increased the students' familiarity with faculty. In a study by Nadelson, Semmelroth, Martinez, Featherstone, Fuhriman, & Sell (2013), it was found that awareness had a direct impact on the impact of the program:

Significant positive correlations between awareness and influence for each of the listed programs with the highest correlation for awareness occurring with influence of the same program. Thus, our analysis suggests awareness of programs increase so does the influence of the program (p.57).

Furthermore, they found that programs with a wide influence had an impact on students' decisions to attend the university (p. 58).

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Past research by D'Alessio (2003) used university students and reported that they were more likely to designate material that opposed their own views as biased. But studies have not looked at the bias perceived in published articles in the media, but rather used articles fashioned by the researchers for the purpose of their studies. This study seeks to verify the findings of D'Alessio (2003) in regard to existing articles pertaining to political events. This study deviates from past research in that it seeks to ascertain if there is a relationship between perceived bias and knowledge of ethical values and journalistic practices as taught in a university environment.

H1. Students with more awareness of the Center for Ethics in Journalism (indicated by correct answers for the name of the 2015 distinguished visiting professor and the location of the Center) will have a more positive perception of the articles (indicated by an answer coded 1 or 2 for each question asking the student to rate the article).

H2. Students further along in their education (in upper-level courses) will have a more accurate awareness of the Center for Ethics in Journalism (indicated by correct answers for the name of the 2015 distinguished visiting professor and the location of the Center) than students beginning their education (those enrolled in Fundamentals of Journalism).

H3. Students who voted or planned to vote in a presidential primary will perceive more bias in the articles (a coding of 4 or 5).

RQ1. Does the amount of bias perceived in a political article (covering the Democratic and Republican Super Tuesday primary results) change by level of education (student in Fundamentals of Journalism or upper-level courses)?

RQ2. Does the amount of bias perceived in a political article (covering the Democratic and Republican Super Tuesday primary results) change based upon frequency of voting?

RQ3. Does the amount of bias perceived in a political article (covering the Democratic and Republican Super Tuesday primary results) change based upon political party affiliation?

RQ4. Does the amount of bias perceived in a political article (covering the Democratic and Republican Super Tuesday primary results) change based upon participation in the Center for Ethics in Journalism?

RQ5. Is the amount of bias perceived in a political article (covering the Democratic and Republican Super Tuesday primary results) more affected by level of education (Fundamentals of Journalism and upper-level courses) or the knowledge of and participation in the Center for Ethics in Journalism?

RQ6. Do students perceive more bias in one article over the other (covering the Democratic and Republican Super Tuesday primary results)?

Methods

A survey was administered to students in two levels of classes within the University of Arkansas Walter J. Lemke Department of Journalism: Fundamentals of Journalism and the upper-level classes Media Law, History of the Black Press, Ethics, and PR Writing.

Two articles—covering Super Tuesday results for each party—were collected from *The New York Times* website. Each were the articles printed in the national paper the Wednesday, March 2, 2016, following the Super Tuesday primaries. Both articles were printed above the fold on page A1 (see Appendices C and D for the full articles). *The New York Times* was chosen because of the national daily newspapers, it had the highest percentage of millennial readers, ac-

ording to a list compiled from Comcast data (Doctor, “The newsonomics of the millennial moment”).

Unlike D’Alessio (2003), the students were able to complete the survey, not using pencil and paper, but online through the Qualtrics platform using their computers, tablets, or smartphones. To complete the surveys, the students read “Minority Voters Push Hillary Clinton to Victories” (Healy & Chozick, 2016) and ranked it on six semantic differential-type items adopted from the nine used by D’Alessio (2003):

- Bad or Good
- Informative or Uninformative
- Biased or Balanced
- Accurate or Mistaken
- Complete or Lacking detail
- Fair or One-sided

The students then read “Donald Trump Overwhelms G.O.P. Rivals From Alabama to Massachusetts” (Burns & Martin, 2016) and ranked it on the same six semantic differential type items. Finally, the students answered a series of demographic and lifestyle questions similar to the following used by D’Alessio (2003):

- Which do you describe yourself as?
 - a. Conservative
 - b. Moderate
 - c. Liberal
- In the past year, how have you voted?
 - a. For more Republican candidates
 - b. For more Democratic candidates
 - c. About equal numbers of both Republican and Democratic candidates

However, the lifestyle questions expanded beyond those used by D’Alessio (2003) to include questions that also ascertained their use of the Center for Ethics in Journalism (see Appendix B for the full survey). The researcher visited each classroom to proctor the surveys in person.

The data was then coded. To ascertain “accurate awareness of the Center” all students who were able to correctly answer the questions naming David Handschuh the 2015 distinguished visiting professor and locating the Center on the second floor of Kimpel were coded as 1. The remainder were coded as 2. Students were designated as upperclassmen or underclassmen based upon their responses of “Freshman,” “Sophomore,” “Junior,” or “Senior.” Freshmen and Sophomores were grouped as underclassmen and coded as 1. Juniors and Seniors were grouped as upperclassmen and coded as 2.

To distinguish between those who had a positive perception of the articles, students who rated either article with a 1 or 2 on the 1-5 rating of “Good or Bad” were coded as 1, and those who did not were coded as 2. To distinguish between those who perceived a high amount of bias in the articles, students who rated either article with a 4 or 5 on the 1-5 rating of “Balanced or Biased” were coded as 1, and those who did not were coded as 1. To obtain an average perceived bias rating for the Democratic and Republican articles, the mean was obtained for each student’s rating of the two articles coded from 1 to 5 by .5 increments. The newly-coded variables were analyzed using the parametric ANOVA and t-tests like D’Alessio (2003) and nonparametric Chi Square to a .05 significance level.

This study succeeded in increasing the sample size over the 150 subjects used by D’Alessio (2003). Just over 200 surveys were started, according to the Qualtrics platform, but precisely 215 students completed their surveys. Fifteen students who were not journalism majors were not included. Those who were combined and double majors with journalism were included, because they take a significant number of hours in journalism courses. Combined majors must take 24 journalism credit hours, and double majors must take the full load of 34 journalism credit hours (“Undergraduate catalog,” 2016). This resulted in an exact sample size of 200 students.

However, a completed survey does not mean students answered every question, resulting in a few of the analyses relying upon a slightly smaller sample size.

Breakdown of Underclassmen and Upperclassmen in Study

	Number	Percentage
Underclassmen	102	51%
Upperclassmen	98	49%

Figure 1

Results

Despite the previous findings by D'Alessio (2003) and the increased sample size, the results of this study were not consistent with his results, but they did reveal some interesting insights into the Walter J. Lemke Department of Journalism and the Center for Ethics in Journalism.

Proper Knowledge of the Center for Ethics and Voting Habits

To test the hypotheses, chi square analyses were conducted. Of the 200 students surveyed, only 187 answered the questions necessary for this hypothesis. Only 12.8% had an accurate awareness of the Center as indicated by correct answers to the location and the 2015 distinguished visiting professor (see Figure 4 and Figure 5 on page 16 for a breakdown of how students answered on those survey questions). Of those 24 students, 18 (75%) of them had a positive view of the articles compared to 62.6% of the entire sample having a positive view. However, the results revealed no statistical significance, $X^2(1, N = 187) = 1.82, p > .05$, nullifying Hypothesis 1.

A higher number of upperclassmen (16) had an accurate awareness of the Center for Ethics in Journalism than underclassmen (8); however, the results revealed no statistical significance, $X^2(1, N = 187) = 2.59, p > .05$, nullifying Hypothesis 2.

When comparing the students who planned to vote in a presidential primary with the amount of bias they perceived in the articles, the findings did not support Hypothesis 3, which suggested that students who planned to vote would perceive more bias in the articles $X^2(1, N = 187) = 1.90, p > .05$. In total, 55% of the sample saw perceived a low amount of bias.

Level of Education and Perceived Bias

An analysis of variance showed that the level of education had no significant impact on the average balanced/biased rating ($M = 2.85, SD = .0623$) of the two articles, $F(1, 198) = .003, p > .05$. In fact, the means of the upperclassmen and underclassmen were within a couple thousandths of a point from each other ($M = 2.8469, SD = .80; M = 2.8529, SD = .95$). An analysis of variance showed that the level of education had no significant impact on the balanced/biased rating ($M = 2.92, SD = 1.115$) of the Democratic article, $F(1, 198) = .007, p > .05$. An analysis of variance showed that the level of education had no significant impact on the balanced/biased rating ($M = 2.79, SD = 1.071$) of the GOP article, $F(1, 198) = .030, p > .05$.

Voting Habits and Perception of Bias

Despite the wide variations in voting habits – roughly 2 out of 5 had voted recently and another 2 of the five had never voted – (see Figure 2) an analysis of variance showed that the frequency of voting had no significant impact on the average balanced/biased rating ($M = 2.8543, SD = .88127$) of the two articles, $F(4, 194) = 1.834, p > .05$. An analysis of variance showed that the frequency of voting had no significant impact on the balanced/biased rating ($M = 2.91, SD = 1.118$) of the Democratic article, $F(4, 194) = 2.107, p > .05$. An analysis of variance showed that

the frequency of voting had no significant impact on the balanced/biased rating ($M = 2.8$, $SD = 1.066$) of the GOP article, $F(4, 194) = .435$, $p > .05$.

Breakdown of Voting Habits of Students in Study

	Number	Percentage
In the Last 6 Months	74	37.19%
In the Last 1 Year	18	9.05%
In the Last 2 Years	11	5.53%
In the Last 5 Years	15	7.54%
Never Voted	81	40.7%

Figure 2

Political Party Affiliation and Perception of Bias

Analysis of variance tests showed that political party affiliation (see Figure 3) had no significant impact on the average balanced/biased rating of the two articles, $F(3, 196) = .418$, $p > .05$; nor upon the balanced/biased rating of the Democratic article, $F(3, 196) = .313$, $p > .05$; nor upon the balanced/biased rating of the GOP article, $F(3, 195) = .478$, $p > .05$.

Breakdown of Political Party Affiliation

	Number	Percentage
Democratic	63	31.5%
Independent	48	24%
Republican	80	40%
Other	9	4.5%

Figure 3

Attendance at Center of Ethics Events and Perception of Bias

Of the 199 students who responded to questions about attendance, only 20 indicated that they had attended an event sponsored by the Center (10.05%). Analysis of variance tests showed that attendance at Center events had no significant impact on the average balanced/biased rating of the two articles, $F(1,197) = 1.060$, $p > .05$, nor upon balanced/biased rating of the Democratic

article, $F(1,197) = .283, p > .05$, nor upon balanced/biased rating of the GOP article, $F(1,197) = 1.323, p > .05$.

Level of Education, Awareness of Center of Ethics, and Perception of Bias

Of the 200 students, 115 (57.5%) indicated that they had knowledge of the Center for Ethics. A two-way ANOVA was conducted that examined the effect of the level of education and knowledge of the Center for Ethics in Journalism on the average amount of bias perceived in two political articles covering Super Tuesday primary results. There was no statistically significant interaction between the effects of education and knowledge of the Center on the amount of perceived bias, $F(1, 196) = .639, p = > .05$.

Perception of Bias in Democratic and Republican Articles

Results of a t-test did not indicate a higher amount of bias perceived in the Democratic or the Republican articles, $t(198) = 1.466, p > .05$.

Discussion

This study aimed to show a relationship between an education in ethics and the perception of bias; however, the results reveal that other factors must be in play to the ways students respond negatively and detect bias in articles. It is possible that no significant interaction was found between an accurate knowledge of the Center for Ethics in Journalism and a positive perception of the articles and also with the level of education, because the number of students with accurate knowledge of the Center was very low – only 24 (12 percent) correctly answered the questions asking for the name of the 2015 distinguished visiting professor and the location for the Center for Ethics in Journalism (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

Breakdown of Student Answers to Question About 2015 Visiting Professor

	Number	Percentage
David Handschuh (Correct)	54	31.49%
Deborah Potter	43	23.76%
Gene Foreman	38	20.99%
Ray McCaffrey	43	23.76%

Figure 4

Breakdown of Student Answers to Question About Center Location

	Number	Percentage
1st Floor of Kimpel Hall	120	64.17%
1st Floor of Old Main	8	4.28%
2nd Floor of Kimpel Hall (Correct)	52	27.81%
3rd Floor of Administration Building	7	3.74%

Figure 5

To the credit of the students, a majority (31.49%) named the correct 2015 distinguished visiting professor, and nearly 1 in 4 named the Center director, Dr. Ray McCaffrey, which shows that those students are correctly associating him with the Center albeit in the wrong role. In regard to the location of the Center, students about 9 out of 10 students correctly associated the Center with Kimpel Hall, but only 27.81% correctly placed it on the second floor. This is also an understandable answer, as the Journalism Department is located on the second floor of Kimpel Hall, but it does reveal a lack of attention to detail. This skewed perception of the Center by students speaks to a greater concern that students are not retaining information about the Center under the current means of promotion. The Center has a Facebook page, Twitter account, and a website. However, none of these are linked to from the Walter J. Lemke Department of Journalism homepage. The “Center for Ethics in Journalism” link directs the visitor to description of the Center, which has not been updated (as of May 2016) and still refers to Deborah Potter, the 2014 distinguished visiting professor (“Center for Ethics in Journalism,” 2016). Making these current av-

venues of communication more accessible to students may contribute to a solution to increase awareness of the Center. Other changes might just not have enough time to have made an impact upon the students—particularly the upperclassmen—such as improved signs outside of the Center on the second floor of Kimpel.

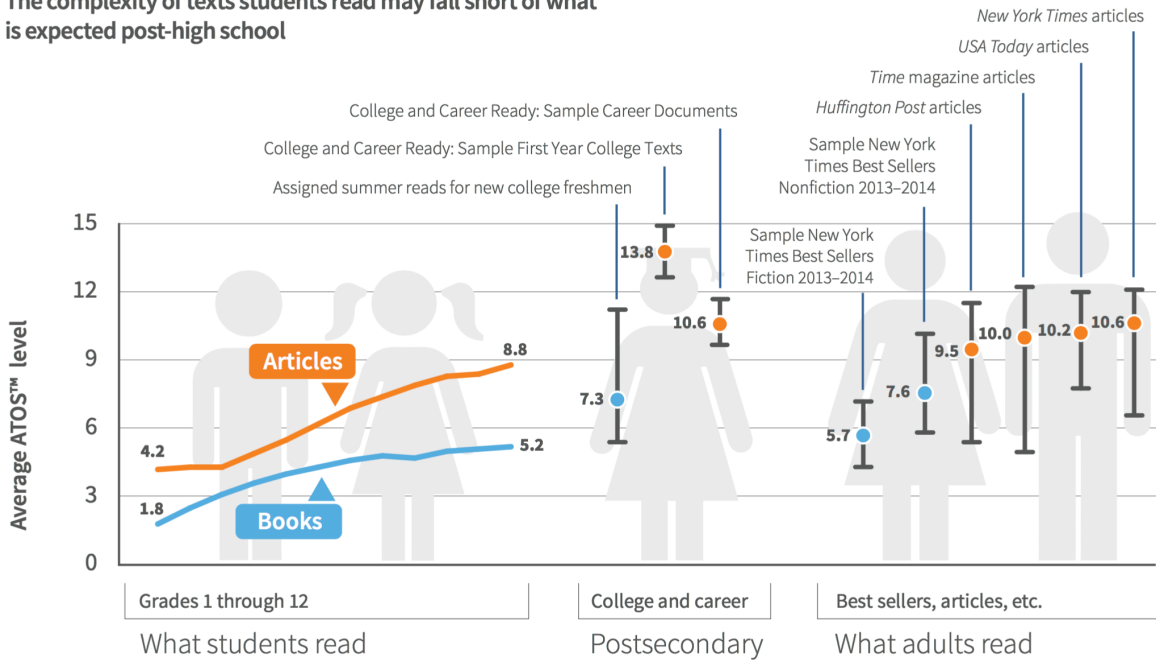
It was an aspect of learning for the researcher that a lack of significance is not always a negative response for the research. Based upon the research, journalism students did not seem to find bias in *The New York Times* articles. This, of course, is what *The Times* would say was its goal all along.

Though there was no significance found in relation to a positive perception or the perceived bias of any of the articles, contrary to past research, indicating that other factors may have been in play. It is possible that the sample was simply too homogenous. The initial proposal was that the survey would be given to students in two different courses: Fundamentals of Journalism, a mandatory prerequisite, introductory course, and Senior Writing, a required capstone course for exiting Seniors. However, the professor leading the Senior Writing course cancelled the weekly class meetings after spring break so that students could work on finishing their research papers. The approval from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix A) was not received until April 4, resulting in the necessity to change the courses to sample for the “upperclassmen” variable. Following the suggestion of Dr. Patsy Watkins, who advised this thesis, substitute classes were found to replace Senior Writing: Media Law, History of the Black Press, Ethics, and PR Writing. Each of these classes are upper-level classes. Media Law and Ethics are required courses for all journalism majors, PR Writing is required for all of those in the Advertising/Public Relations sequence within the journalism major, and History of the Black Press is a special topics course only taught once every two years with a prerequisite Junior standing (“University of Arkansas

Undergraduate Catalog,” 2016). When the survey was proctored in those upper-level courses, there was some overlap in students, so they were asked not to complete the survey twice. Though every attempt was made to maintain the distance between the two groups, the contrast may not be as stark as hoped for because the enrollment of these classes isn’t limited to students with Senior standing, so students could have had as many as four semesters left until graduating, narrowing the divide significantly. It is also possible that the simple nature of the study – to research students studying journalism – created a too homogenous sample in itself. As Babad, Peer, & Hobbs (2012) noted: “Self-selection might have influenced students' decision to take or not take the media literacy course; therefore, the observed interaction effect might have alternatively been caused by students' characteristics and attributes" (p. 104).

Another possible factor is the reading level. According to the Readability Test Tool, the Democratic article was determined to have a 9th grade reading level, and the GOP article a 10th grade reading level. According to the Arkansas Department of Education, 36 percent of high school Juniors who took the Grade 11 Literacy Exam in 2011 scored Basic or Below Basic, falling short of proficiency. By 2013, students who were not proficient dropped 6 percentage points to 30 percent (Arkansas Department of Education, 2013). If these students matriculated at the University of Arkansas and remained on track to graduate in four years, those who took the test in 2011 would be graduating Seniors during the spring 2016 semester. Those who took the test in 2013 would be second semester Sophomores during the spring 2016 semester. Nationally, the articles and books students read in high school have a lower text complexity than what they will be assigned in college and—at times—encounter in the national media (Renaissance Learning, 2016). According to this data, it is possible that the articles exceeded or were at the top of the students' reading levels, which might have interfered with the results.

The complexity of texts students read may fall short of what is expected post-high school



Source: Renaissance Learning™ Accelerated Reader 360™ database, 2014–2015 school year.

Figure 6 (Renaissance Learning, 2016)

Finally, this study did not account for the possibility that the students sampled would not have strong feelings about the content in the articles. Contrary to the assumption made from previous research stating that division between the two major parties is increasing that the students would therefore have opinions about the articles that would support the hostile media effect. However, in an attempt to understand the results, other research was discovered that points toward widespread apathy among Millennials in regard to politics. A 2015 Harvard IOP study found that less than 20 percent of Millennials “considered themselves ‘politically engaged and active’” and only 46 percent said they were following the 2016 presidential campaign “very” or “somewhat” closely (Harvard Institute of Politics, 2015).

It was an oversight to assume that a divisive political climate would be reflected as strong opinions from the students participating in the surveys.

#8: ENGAGEMENT SLIPPING SINCE 2011: 20% OF 18-29 YEAR OLDS SAY THEY'RE POLITICALLY ENGAGED; LESS THAN HALF FOLLOWING CAMPAIGN

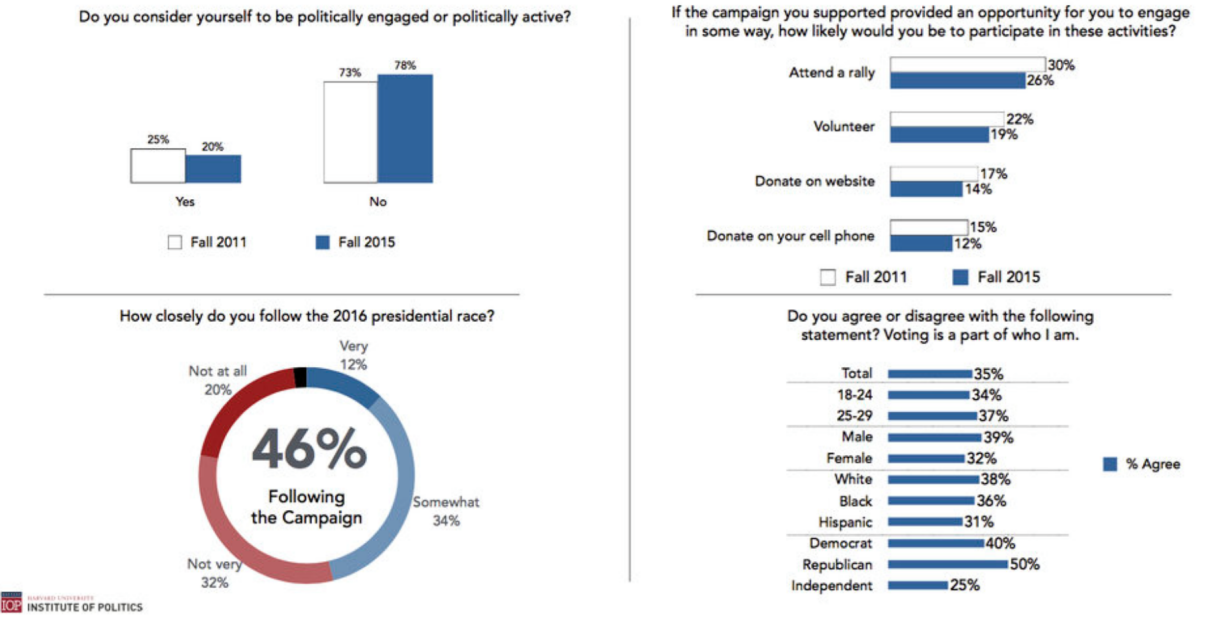


Figure 7 (Harvard Institute of Politics, 2015)

To gather even more information about the Journalism Department, this study would have been improved if it asked the students to indicate which concentration they were enrolled in: Advertising/Public Relations, Broadcast, and News/Editorial. It is also worth noting the gender discrepancy in the sample. Of the 200 respondents, 72.5 percent were female. That discrepancy is an accurate representation of the department as a whole, where 490 (75.4 percent) of the 650 students are female (University of Arkansas Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2016). This study did not factor gender into the hypotheses or research questions, but that may be a point of interest for future studies. Another point of interest would be to compare the perception of bias of journalism students to that of students in other programs of study.

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Appendix A



UNIVERSITY OF
ARKANSAS

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

April 4, 2016

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kristen Coppola
Patsy Watkins

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 16-03-636

Protocol Title: *The Perception of Bias by University Students with Access to an Education in Ethics: A Study of the University of Arkansas Walter J. Lemke Department of Journalism and the Center for Ethics in Journalism*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 04/04/2016 Expiration Date: 04/03/2017

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 260 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

109 MLKG • 1 University of Arkansas • Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201 • (479) 575-2208 • Fax (479) 575-6527 • Email irb@uark.edu

The University of Arkansas is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution.

Appendix B

Perception of Bias Survey

Please rate article A from 1 to 5 with 1 being **GOOD** and 5 being **BAD**.

- .1
- .2
- .3
- .4
- .5

Please rate article A from 1 to 5 with 1 being **INFORMATIVE** and 5 being **UNINFORMATIVE**.

- .1
- .2
- .3
- .4
- .5

Please rate article A from 1 to 5 with 1 being **BALANCED** and 5 being **BIASED**.

- .1
- .2
- .3
- .4
- .5

Please rate article A from 1 to 5 with 1 being **ACCURATE** and 5 being **MISTAKEN**.

- .1
- .2
- .3
- .4
- .5

Please rate article A from 1 to 5 with 1 being **COMPLETE** and 5 being **LACKING DETAIL**.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Please rate article A from 1 to 5 with 1 being **FAIR** and 5 being **ONE-SIDED**. •¹

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Which types of paragraphs do you believe contained bias in article A? (Select all that apply.)

- Analysis
- Quotations
- Summary
- Other: _____

Please rate article B from 1 to 5 with 1 being **GOOD** and 5 being **BAD**.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Please rate article B from 1 to 5 with 1 being **INFORMATIVE** and 5 being **UNINFORMATIVE**.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

Please rate article B from 1 to 5 with 1 being **BALANCED** and 5 being **BIASED**. .¹

- .1
- .2
- .3
- .4
- .5

Please rate article B from 1 to 5 with 1 being **ACCURATE** and 5 being **MISTAKEN**.

- .1
- .2
- .3
- .4
- .5

Please rate article B from 1 to 5 with 1 being **COMPLETE** and 5 being **LACKING DETAIL**.

- .1
- .2
- .3
- .4
- .5

Please rate article B from 1 to 5 with 1 being **FAIR** and 5 being **ONE-SIDED**.

- .1
- .2
- .3
- .4
- .5

Which types of paragraphs do you believe contained bias in article B? (Select all that apply.)

- Analysis
- Quotations
- Summary
- Other: _____

Please indicate your:

Gender:

- Female
- Male
- I prefer not to answer

Ethnicity

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic/Latino
- White
- Two or more ethnicities
- I prefer not to answer

Year at the University of Arkansas:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Major

- Journalism
- Other _____

Political party preference:

- Democrat
- Independent
- Republican
- Other: _____

Which do you describe yourself as?

- Conservative
- Liberal
- Moderate

In the past year, how have you voted?

- For more Democratic candidates
- For more Republican candidates
- About equal numbers of both Democratic and Republican candidates

When did you last vote in a political election?

- In the last six months
- In the last year
- In the last two years
- In the last five years
- Never

What levels of elections have you voted in? Select all that apply?

- City
- County
- State
- National

Which level of election do you consider most important?

- City
- County
- State
- National

Did you or do you plan to vote in a presidential primary?

- Yes
- No

Do you plan to vote in the 2016 presidential election?

- Yes
- No

Are you aware of the University of Arkansas's Center for Ethics in Journalism?

- Yes
- No

Who was the 2015 distinguished visiting professor?

- David Handschuh
- Deborah Potter
- Gene Foreman
- Raymond McCaffrey

Where is the Center for Ethics in Journalism located?

- First floor of Kimpel
- First floor of Old Main
- Second floor of Kimpel
- Third floor of the Administration building

Have you attended any events offered by the Center for Ethics in Journalism?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please name the event: _____

If yes, why did you attend? (Select all that apply.)

- Encouraged by a professor
- Interested in the material
- My peers were going
- Offered bonus points
- Other: _____

If no, why didn't you attend?

- Interferes with class schedule
- Material isn't interesting
- My peers weren't going
- Unaware of the events
- Other: _____

Appendix C

Minority Voters Push Hillary Clinton to Victories

by Patrick Healy & Amy Chozick

Full text can be found at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/02/us/politics/democratic-primary-results.html? r=0>.

Appendix D

Donald Trump Overwhelms G.O.P. Rivals From Alabama to Massachusetts

by Alexander Burns & Jonathan Martin

Full text can be found at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/02/us/politics/republican-primary-results.html? r=0>.