



Into the Breach: Should Student Journalists Save Local Political Reporting?

Epilogue

At the November 2009 steering committee meeting, Beth Barnes, director of the School of Journalism and Telecommunications at the University of Kentucky (UK), laid out the case for Kentucky State University (KSU) to fund the proposed student news bureau. The members were enthusiastic. Longtime journalist and educator Richard Wilson, however, raised several concerns: the students' work would need significant editing before it could be sent out to participating papers; the program must train them in the workings of the legislature; and KSU would need to provide housing. The first step, everyone agreed, was to hire an experienced director. In December 2009, members of the steering committee informally approached Joe Biesk, an Associated Press reporter who had been laid off, to measure his interest. Biesk was compelled by the project, but unfortunately had already accepted another job.

After that disappointment, momentum slowed. The steering committee was not scheduled to meet again for several months. Barnes decided to inject new energy into the process by enlisting the rest of the state's journalism schools at the Kentucky Press Association's (KPA) annual conference in January 2010.

As Barnes prepared for the January 22nd KPA meeting, her colleague Al Cross continued to press for UK to take control of the project. However, Barnes still did not see how the department could afford to do so. Moreover, the schools she hoped to enlist at the KPA meeting—most notably Western Kentucky University—were UK's competitors, and she suspected they would not contribute to the bureau if they suspected it was designed to burnish UK's reputation. KSU, on the other hand, was not considered to be a competitive threat. Accordingly, she invited Erin Gilles— newly hired by KSU into its journalism department—to attend the meeting and asked her to present the bureau as KSU's idea. But Gilles did not show up. So Barnes introduced the project on KSU's behalf and encouraged the other schools to contact Kentucky State if they were interested in participating in the bureau. Several expressed interest, but none followed up.

Meanwhile, KSU Provost James Chapman continued to support the project. But as of June 2010, no new steps had been taken to implement it.