

Visiting professor focuses on social media and journalism

Charlotte Observer editor explores the intersection of communications and social media

Josephine Cannell

Staff Writer

The Twitter bio of Rick Thames, executive editor of the Charlotte Observer and James K. Batten Professor of Public Policy, reads “Business is good. We are in the truth-telling business. And there is no shortage of people who want the truth.”

Increasingly, this truth is revealed through varying platforms of social media, which has become so pervasive in our society, and which a general knowledge of is useful in any field.

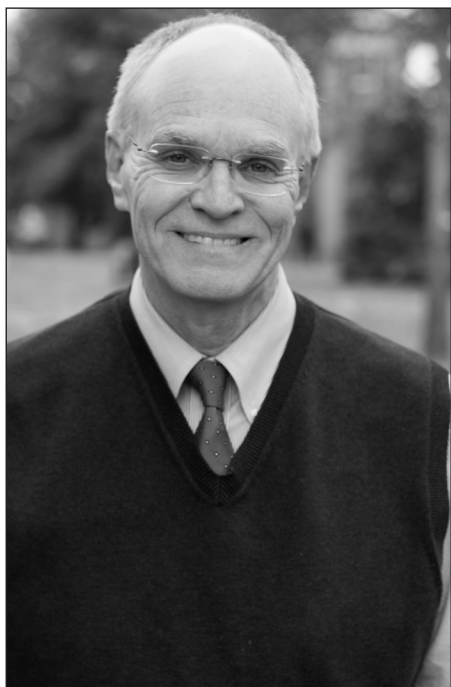
For this reason, Davidson reached out to have Thames teach a Communications seminar this spring called “The Impact of Social Media on Society.”

For Thames, who earned his graduate’s degree in Communications, teaching this course is an “opportunity to revisit what [he’s] learned over the years about communication, communication theory and to learn how that applies to social media.”

The class draws students from a vast array of majors, all on very different career paths, because there is a general understanding that social media is a way that we, as a society, communicate.

Thames hopes that through the course, he can help his students think through how they are able to use social media, regardless of their field.

Thames urges students to view social media and its popularity in a historical context. “The oldest and most trusted form of communication is word of mouth, you talking to someone else and them talking to you,” he said.



Rick Thames, executive editor of the Charlotte Observer, brings his expertise in the merging of social media and journalism to the College. Photo by Denton Baird

“And the most pervasive form of communication is mass media, but social media has characteristics of them both. Social media is word of mouth at the speed of light.”

Thames recognizes the importance of good social media usage from his work with the Charlotte Observer, with five percent of the paper’s stories viewed online because of a recommendation via Facebook, Twitter and other social media.

Among the staff members of the Charlotte Observer, there are over 70 Twitter accounts. Since Thames took over as the editor of the paper almost 10 years ago, the paper can now be read via nine different platforms.

Although journalism has certainly changed in that time, the purpose of journalism—researching and reporting for the good of a community—is still the same.

When asked if Thames has any advice for aspiring journalists, he again mentions social media, and says to take full advantage of it, since “it is a great new avenue.”

Having the knowledge and skills to use social media wisely is increasingly important for those in any field because social media offers near instant connection with one’s

readers that previously took time.

Thames encourages using social media connection as a means to receive feedback, and also as a way to hear about important stories in the community.

For example, Charlotte law enforcement is beginning to use their Twitter feed as a way to get tips and to help with the crime solving process.

Thames lives in Charlotte with his wife and three children and can be found on Twitter @rthames.

CRIME LOG: 01/20 TO 01/27

CLASSIFICATION	TIME	LOCATION	DISPOSITION
Injury to Personal Property	01/20/14 1357 hrs	Satellite Lot	Further Investigation
Larceny - Misdemeanor	01/20/14 1453 hrs	New Dorm	Further Investigation
Suicide Threat	01/21/14 0015 hrs	Little Dorm	Closed / Clear
Larceny of Property	01/21/14 0035 hrs	Duke	Further Investigation
Miscellaneous Suspicious E-mail	01/23/14 1822 hrs	Report Originated off campus	Further Investigation
Underage Consumption	01/24/14 2251 hrs	Glasgow Street	Dean Referral
Possible Missing Person	01/25/14 0153 hrs	Chambers	Located Person
Underage Consumption	01/25/14 0115 hrs	Armfield	Dean Referral
Found Property	01/25/14 2122 hrs	Baker	Returned to Owner
Underage Consumption	01/25/14 2326 hrs	Outside KA	Dean Referral
Miscellaneous Suspicious Vehicle	01/26/14 0820 hrs	Erwin Lodge	Prosecution Declined
Public Urination	01/25/14 0031 hrs	Armfield	Dean Referral
Underage Consumption	01/24/14 1045 hrs	Warner Hall	Dean Referral
MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS		NUMBER OF REPORTS	
Fire Calls		1	
Noise Complaints		1	
911 Hang Ups		4	
Suspicious Vehicle		1	
Escorts		1	
Disturbance		0	
Assist Fire/Medic		1	
Alarms		3	
Other		5	

Flags and related LGBTQIA issues discussed at Talkback

Continued from page 1

does not make us better, more thoughtful students. “I am confident in a student not falling out of a window,” Wiley said. “What we are dealing with here is a fear of controversy. We need a whole lot more controversial, challenging conversations. Instead of saying, put that [flag] away. We should ask, ‘What does this mean?’”

Spring-boarding off of Wiley’s argument, Pablo Zevallos ’16 commented on the “general culture of politeness that stifles controversial conversations” on Davidson’s campus. Several other students chimed in and attacked Davidson’s fear of controversy, but did not offer combative solutions to the phenomenon.

To keep the conversation moving forward, Dylan Goodman ’16 expressed his concern with the obsession and distraction of the focus on the physical flag. “It appears that Davidson students have misappropriated the meaning of the rainbow flag as a sign

of protest or rebellion against ‘The Man’ on rather than an expression of coming together and support for the LGBTQIA community,” Goodman said.

So how do we increase LGBTQIA visibility on campus? After all, this was the main mission of the talkback. John-Michael Murphy ’16, a member of the CCRL and president of YANASH, asked the group, “Other than the flags, say the policy does not get overturned, how do we support this community and increase their visibility?”

A few students responded with the idea of incorporating a physical object or piece

of art into the campus landscape. Another student stressed that the object ought to be visible to tour groups and the majority

of people who walk the campus. Several students advocated for Pride parades on campus. The idea that seemed to gain the most traction involved creating a sanctioned space for the LGBTQIA community. Goodman however summarized his peers’ ideas, “We need to make sexual diversity a part of Davidson’s identity.” Yet, the solutions lacked

a commitment of volunteers and manpower needed to make these projects a reality.

President Carol Quillen then extended

her aide. She asked how the administration could help “unblock the paths so that students who feel marginalized can participate, speak, and act in their community.” She stressed that the students are the answer to the problem. “In the end one decision or act by the administration will not change the minds of intolerant individuals,” Quillen said. So we must challenge our peers to support, encourage, and celebrate our fellow students.

The night concluded on the call for a change in culture. It seems like the Davidson community represented at Forum for our Flags recognizes that the campus environment will only get better if the culture changes. One ruling on flags or one administrative act may help, but it will not eradicate the permeating poison of heteronormativity.

“What we are dealing with here is a fear of controversy. We need a whole lot more controversial, challenging conversations.”

-Ben Wiley '15