Convergence and Multimedia: Practical Applications

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Anna McCleary

Thesis advisor:
Larry Daily

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2004
The target of my thesis is journalists who are considering moving towards newsroom convergence and students who would like further information and practical advice on the subject. The purpose is to explore the process of convergence and multimedia storytelling in order to both improve my storytelling skills and learn to take a leadership role in creating features by combining experts in different media.

The days of separate broadcast, print, and web journalism are nearing an end. The field of journalism is moving away from maintaining separate newsrooms staffed with reporters who specialize in that media only. The new trend is towards media convergence where different media formats come together to “tell the story” in different and creative new ways to appeal to a range of readers.

My primary interest in the field of journalism has been writing for the Web, which is slowly eclipsing print in readership. More and more newspaper readers are turning to sites like Yahoo for news updates rather than their local paper. Yet writing for the web presents challenges that many newsrooms don’t understand or fully accept. This causes many of the difficulties in converging newsrooms.

During the course of this project I took the role of the reporter in a “converged” newsroom. I was in charge of researching and writing several news pieces (approximately one every two weeks) and either designing, delegating and overseeing or personally handling the creation of multimedia to accent and further develop the news item. All stories were researched and written by myself and are of a publishable quality. All multimedia aspects are my responsibility and were be overseen or created by myself.

In addition to these stories I completed a researched and reflective piece on the application of convergence in the newsroom based on philosophy, current application models, and my own experience throughout the course of the project.
I would like to thank Larry Dailey for advising me and helping me to grow, not only through the course of this project, but over all of the last two years. His "hands-off" approach led me to find my own solutions to complex problems and has truly helped the entire organization flourish.

I would also like to thank Lori Demo for pushing and shoving and ultimately forcing me to evolve and grow as a writer, even against my most vehement protestations. I credit her for every advance I have made as a writer and a reporter.

Thank you to Mark Miller, who has been my cheerleader all semester and helped me push through even when I thought I wouldn't make it.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents. They have always been my most adoring fans and discerning critics. I love you both, and I hope I make you proud.
It’s one of the irrefutable laws of modern journalism. Set a handful of reporters from any journalistic discipline down at a table and it won’t take long before one word surfaces: convergence.

Everyone seems to have heard the word; the problem is that no one seems to know what it means. The word encompasses a wide range of collaborative strategies, all trying to bring different media together to create a better, and in some cases cheaper, newsroom. This confusion about the proper definitions and application of convergence led the industry to embrace non-functional convergence models and cling to them as the wave of the future, even as they drown under the inevitable difficulties. As Ulrik Haagerup, an award-winning newspaper journalist put it at a 2002 professional journalist conference in South Carolina, “media convergence is like teenage sex. Everybody thinks everybody else is doing it. The few who are actually doing it aren’t very good at it.”

At its earliest introduction the word “convergence” was synonymous with “synergy” in the corporate world. According to “The Meanings and Implications of Convergence” by Rich Gordon, the chair of the new media program at Northwestern University, convergence initially referred to a horizontal integration among media conglomerates in order to improve efficiency and share resources between corporately held media outlets.

This kind of convergence seemed to be good business as FCC restrictions allowed corporations to own media outlets across platforms in single markets. More recently, however, convergence theory has grown to include everything from cross-platform marketing efforts to news storytelling techniques that embrace the strengths of multiple media platforms. Universally, the word evokes visions of the future of
journalism in newsrooms, media companies and journalism classrooms.

The first incarnations of convergent newsrooms were generally cross-promotional ventures between newspapers and broadcast newsrooms in the same market, a business plan Gorden refers to as “tactical convergence.” The theory was that by plugging each other’s content a symbiotic promotional relationship would develop where each organization would drive readers to the content of the others, expanding the audience for both.

The biggest obstacles to this kind of relationship were cultural differences between newsrooms. Broadcast journalists saw print reporters as frumpy, hostile and unable to appreciate the work that goes into nightly news broadcasts. Print journalists saw broadcasters as shallow and more concerned with image than deep and thoughtful journalism. The deeply ingrained stereotypes of each group led to dissent and discontentment between newsrooms that should be working as a cohesive group.

Another problem is that it limits the voices in a given area and allows media consumers only one choice for news coverage. Henry Jenkins, director of the Program in Comparative Media Studies at MIT, in his essay “Digital Cinema, Media Convergence and Participatory Culture,” explained that “the strength of this new style of popular culture is that it enables multiple points of entry into the consumption process; the vulnerability is that if audiences fail to engage with the particular content on offer, then that choice has a ripple effect across all of the divisions of the media conglomerate” Basically, if the viewer doesn’t like what’s on TV, they can no longer turn to the newspaper or the web for a different angle on events. It’s the same coverage, offered three different ways. Alienate a consumer for one, you’ve lost that consumer for all three.
Proponents of these mergers, such as Forrest Carr, head of the Media General convergence effort in Tampa, contend that the benefit to the reader and ultimately to the organizations is worth working through these difficulties.

Even in these converged newsrooms, however, the Internet is often overlooked because it is not as profitable as the broadcast or print incarnations. A lack of staffing and resources leaves many organizations barely able to maintain a "shovel-ware" site, in which print and broadcast content is put directly onto the Web with no attention paid to the special capabilities of the Internet or its storytelling strengths.

At Ball State, the journalism and telecommunications departments have pushed for this kind of convergence through the partnership of the Ball State Daily News and Newslink Indiana. While these two organizations promote each other's content and share tips about breaking news between newsrooms, they are having trouble mitigating long-standing biases between the departments. The general feeling amongst the Daily News staff is that Newslink sends them tips they don't want, and gives nothing in return. The feeling is mutual at Newslink.

A major shortcoming in their coverage is the neglecting of Web reporting by both organizations. They each maintain separate news sites that offer no additional coverage not found in the print and broadcast products of each, mostly because of a lack of staff dedicated to web coverage. Many organizations merely turned to "shovelware," programs which allowed newsrooms to "shovel" content directly from their newspapers onto a web page, with no attention paid to writing or creating content specifically for the Web.

It was this niche, neglected by each organization, that Ball Bearings has attempted to fill by offering a promotional partnership and shared content with the
Daily News. The prevailing attitude in the Daily News has been, “we could do that.” Our response has been, “but you don’t, and we can do it for you, and do it well.”

In our coverage of the first weekend of heightened police vigilance on campus, we undertook a joint venture to ride along with police officers and document the crackdown first hand through words, sound and photos. In the end, Ball Bearings produced an audio experience based on interviews with a campus police officer on duty, and the Daily News offered more traditional coverage of events. Each story linked to the other and supported each other’s coverage through individual strengths.

The problem with this kind of convergence, we quickly learned was that each medium expected to work together on the story on every aspect. We requested audio gathering and feature photos from traditional news reporters and they expected print product from our multimedia personnel. By the end of the project both groups had learned that the most effective reporting is done when each organization works in its own strengths to create separate products, but shares in the information gathering process and presents the product as a package.

Unfortunately, many journalism programs, including Ball State’s, are leaning towards what Gordon refers to as “structural convergence.” In this approach, journalists are taught disciplines across a variety of platforms. Print journalists are taught to create broadcast packages and multimedia specialists are taught to write about school board meetings. In this push to create Renaissance journalists, capable of doing anything, the school is, instead, turning out reporters who can’t do much of anything at a professional level.

On a limited scale, this kind of instruction is worthwhile in that it teaches a respect for each discipline. It allows reporters to make realistic demands of
photographers and broadcasters, and vice-versa. Each knows the abilities and limitations of the other disciplines and can work with practitioners of each to create a cohesive whole.

However, when taught as an alternative to traditional departmentalized instruction, it turns journalists into “jacks of all trades, and masters of none.” Despite the best teaching, a traditional print writer will never produce the same quality of video as a skilled broadcaster. A photographer may produce award-winning photos, but never write at a publishable level.

By teaching to individual strengths while giving an overview of all disciplines, journalism schools can prepare students for what is commonly referred to as “backpack” journalism. This convergence philosophy aids converged newsrooms by limiting the number of staff members required to cover a single event across disciplines. Basically, backpack journalism is sending one journalist out to a specific event to gather audio, video and pictures and to write a story on the entire event, rather than sending a crew of specifically trained individuals at additional expense to the newsroom.

This approach to structural convergence has proven invaluable during wartime coverage or Olympic coverage where available journalists are at a premium because of newsroom budgets. For traditional newsrooms, however, regular use of this kind of coverage leads to unnecessarily sub-par photography, audio or video by inexperienced print reporters.

Ball State’s journalism and telecommunication departments recently added convergence courses to the regular curricula. In these courses, prospective print and broadcast journalists learn the basics of different media. While this is beneficial
because it gives students an understanding of other media storytelling techniques, many of the professors in charge are teaching students that convergence means they will have to be able to competently do every job in both print and broadcast newsrooms.

The idea that everyone must do everything, and do it well, is exactly the attitude that threatens to destroy convergence even before it is widely accepted and in common use. The secret to effective and workable convergence plans is to let groups focus on what they do well, sharing resources and information, and creating a package that tells the story through the strengths of each discipline as effectively as possible. Having experts in each medium working in their comfort zones and with a thorough knowledge of the craft yields a consistently better outcome.

While working with the Daily News on our first major convergence project, one of the major hurdles we faced was because of ignorance about the different media and the differences in how stories are created for print and the Web. On the first night of ride-alongs, the Daily News sent their photographers. While I had tried to impress on them the importance of gathering what might seem like an excessively large number of photos and a focus on illustrating the statements the police officer made during the interviews, the photographers returned with only a handful of front page-quality photos.

The first step to eliminating this problem in the future is to better educate the photographers about the demands of the medium. By going over some photo stories from our files and stressing the types of photos we were looking for and their eventual use, the photographers would have been better prepared to gather usable images.

Even this, however, isn’t enough. The photographers, expressing an altogether
too common frustration among traditional print journalists, saw the more feature-like focus of Ball Bearings as shallow or less important than a hard-news angle on events.

For the second night of photos, we sent our own photographer – one who was better versed in the medium and understood the mission we were trying to accomplish. She returned with a much more suitable product because she understood the concept and the medium.

In a real newsroom, this same theory applies. Sending a reporter with a camera to get a mug shot may be acceptable, but to get high quality video coverage of an event it is best to send a properly trained crew, if possible.

Simply working for a multimedia organization is like looking at a microcosm of convergence. It is bringing together designers and software specialists with traditional writers and reporters, photographers and broadcasters to create a product that fully utilizes the strengths of the Web – that is, unlimited space, the ability to use photos, audio and video simultaneously, and the ability to create a truly interactive product.

Internally, a media organization must bring all of the aspects of broadcast, print and radio journalism, as well as programmers and photographers, together to create a cohesive product. We overcame one major obstacle to achieving this cohesiveness at Ball Bearings by stepping away from the “structural convergence” model.

Initially, we asked reporters to write, take photos, gather audio, create multimedia presentations and build Web pages individually. This caused a lot of stress and unnecessary trouble as we struggled to force photographers to write coherent copy and writers to build Flash presentations.

While we still adhere to this model somewhat because of staffing shortages,
the addition of a photo editor to assign photographers to each writer’s story allowed both writer and photographer greater freedom to do what each does best. We are continuing this trend with the addition of a new Flash programmer and page editor who will take over many of the duties our writers are currently carrying out and leaving more staff able to concentrate on their particular strengths.

We have also attempted to recruit more technical people to create interactive content. In its first semester, Ball Bearings tottered on the brink of becoming just another print publication posting large text stories on the Web. Recently, we have struggled to promote an increased emphasis on interactive media content over large print stories, and we are succeeding surprisingly well as our reporters begin to learn different ways to present their research.

Fully using the medium to its greatest advantage has been a struggle for many burgeoning Web organizations. Like with any new media, it is hard for groups who are used to a certain structure and news gathering strategy to approach a new form of storytelling which would more fully meet the enormous potential of the Internet. When television was introduced, early broadcasters did little more than read traditional newspaper articles out loud to readers. The equivalent is currently happening as papers do little more than plug print content into form pages day after day.

One cause of this failure to embrace digital media is a sense among existing media outlets that the Web threatens their own existence. As the youth market – a desirable and difficult to attract demographic – moves towards digital media for their coverage, some organizations feared that traditional journalism was being supplanted by new, cocky, Web-savvy youth.
Now, however, as journalists are discovering the storytelling power of narrated photo slideshows and interactive quizzes and polls they are expanding their horizons and their coverage. Wider audiences are also looking at these pieces as Internet connections become more and more common and connection speeds continue to increase. During 9/11, Internet multimedia was some of the most viewed coverage of the day’s events.

The truth is, digital media seems to attract wide segments of the population, not only because its malleable and constantly changing look and feel are appealing to a young, hip and easily distracted audience, but because interactivity by its very nature appeals to a variety of individuals rather than to a specific demographic.

In his “Reflections on Interactivity,” Luis Arata, the chairperson of the Department of Fine Arts, Languages, and Philosophy at Quinnipiac University, points out that “interactivity is best suited to deal with multiple perspectives, it invites emergence, offers a broader sense of play, and has a pragmatic outlook. In other words, an interactive view celebrates a constructive flexibility well suited for navigating in open, changing, or unknown environments.”

Kevin Kawamoto, author of “Digital Journalism” and the technology studies manager at The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, sees this developing medium as an increasingly vital part of the news-reporting field.

“As digital media continue to grow as venues for the news and information needs of the public, the traditional news media and their digital media offshoots will need to see themselves as essential to each other’s long-term survival,” Kawamoto said.
These are the multimedia and print stories I completed in the course of this project. I believe they show a strong, steady improvement in both my writing and my grasp of multimedia storytelling.

These stories also chronicle the development of a working and mutually beneficial relationship between Ball Bearings and the Ball State Daily News as we attempted to put convergence theories to work in a working newsroom environment.

In order to preserve the look and feel of the Ball Bearings Web site and to prevent confusion, each story loads in a separate page. This page will contain commentary and additional links to add context and background to the project and the work that went into creating it.

These stories, when explored from left to right, form a timeline of creative development from the earliest to the latest, beginning in the fall of 2003 and ending in early May of 2004.
This story was inspired by a Ball Bearings staff member who, every Tuesday night, would sit on the edge of her seat and run out the door at the end of our weekly staff meeting to get home in time to watch American Idol. Never having watched it myself, I couldn’t help but wonder what all the fuss was about.

As it turns out, it was bigger than I thought.

After completing my research I realized that every source I spoke to named Idol judge Simon Cowell as one of the main factors in the show’s overwhelming success. I decided to capitalize on how much people enjoy his sarcasm and put-downs and create something fun and interactive that would match the lighthearted tone of the story.

As my second attempt at interactive Flash content I think it turned out well. Visually it is very basic, and the random number generation it relies on to come up with random insults is a little unreliable, leading to the same phrase being used many times in a row, but I think it’s effective, and reader response has been positive.

One concern that arose as I was building this was whether or not it would be considered fair use to appropriate Simon Cowell’s name. While the site is not commercial and makes no profit and the use was clearly for parody, I decided to play it safe and use only his first name. It works just as well, although I don’t like that it might be confused with the game “Simon.”
The American Idol
Phenomenon

story and multimedia by Anna
McCleary
photos by Jennifer. Cecil

Take a skin tight silver vinyl pant suit, add a few annoying vocal embellishments and maybe a dash of real talent. Stir in some Bette Midler tunes and at least one rude British judge. Embellish with shoddy production values and a generic computer-generated introduction. Serve on consecutive nights with Ryan Seacrest.

Somehow, that has become the formula for a new television smash hit. Fox’s “American Idol” is not only changing network television’s competitive landscape -- it’s also the latest subject of water-cooler gossip and Ball State student fanaticism, becoming a new kind of interactive competitive sport and national pastime.

When Idol was introduced in the summer of 2001, it quickly grew to be the most talked about television show of the season, thanks in part to the sharp tongue of judge Simon Cowell, who seemed to relish his job of putting mediocre talents in their place with quips like, “You sound like someone who should be singing on a cruise ship. And then halfway through the song, I imagined the ship sinking.” His cut downs, along with a general fascination with seeing pop-star hopefuls succeed or fail, made the show a subject of contentious, if harmless, national gossip.

The talent competition turned new-age freak show proved to be enough to captivate nearly 30 million viewers in its third season. The show is a Tuesday and Wednesday night ratings juggernaut, drawing more viewers during its 8 p.m. timeslot than all 5 other major networks combined.

The draw of Idol brought higher ratings to shows in adjacent time slots as well. “Bernie Mac,” “24” and “Wanda at Large” received major ratings boosts after the premier of Idol. Bush’s State of the Union address on Fox also drew a record number of viewers in its post-Idol timeslot, actually beating ABC in total number of viewers.

Idol scored some of its biggest numbers in the coveted 18-24 demographic. During the 2002 finale, the battle between Kelly Clarkson and Justin Guarini drew Fox’s highest ever ratings among young adults for a non-sports night.

Ball State is no
exception to this trend. Across campus students hunker down in dorm rooms and study lounges on Tuesday and Wednesday nights to watch contestants vie for America's vote and Cowell's approval.

In LaFollett's Breyton-Clevenger residence hall, students place bets informally at the beginning of the season for the contestants they would like to see win. 

American Idol is a weekly prime-time staple for some students

Off campus, local bars turn their big screen televisions to idol on Tuesdays and Wednesdays to appease the customers and occasionally even the bartenders. At the End Zone, a Muncie sports bar, Idol plays on at least one big screen every Tuesday. At Buffalo Wild Wings in the Village the show is by request only - except for the premiere - but the bartenders agree that it is requested more than any other non-sports show.

Some students extend their love of the show to the Internet where hundreds of fan Web sites and chat rooms are dedicated to all things Idol. Ball State freshman Britny Tewell, who claims to have only missed one episode of Idol in all three seasons, maintains a website dedicated in part to the show. She says she enjoys discussing each night's competitors with other fans online because they "really know what they are talking about and they like it almost as much as I do."

One reason for Idol's popularity with students is because of the control the audience has in choosing a winner, said Mary Spillman, who teaches a media analysis and criticism course at Ball State. Feeling control over the outcome gives viewers a sense of being part of the show.

Consequently, viewers show up night after night and cast their votes almost religiously. Last season's finale was based on 24 million votes, although about 200 million votes were lost because of jammed circuits.

Another reason for Idol's fan following is the show's competitive nature. For some, Idol fills the same niche as competitive sports. Fans get wrapped up in following a certain contestant in much the same way sports enthusiasts follow certain teams.

Jeff Fry, an associate professor of psychology at Ball State, is an expert on the psychology of sports. He says there are many parallels between the way people watch American Idol and the way they watch traditional sporting events, including associating with certain players or contestants for a vicarious thrill.

Spillman said that American Idol is a new kind of national pastime for its audience. "It's like the super bowl," said Spillman. "You have your favorite team."

Like many sports, Idol has become "appointment television," Spillman said. Some viewers plan their evenings around the pop competition in the same way that football fans devote Sundays to watching a game.

Some fans put more than their evenings on the line. Betting on Idol proved profitable for some followers of the show. During last season's finale, Intertops.com, an online gaming site, listed Ruben Studdard as a 10-to-13 bet and Clay Aiken as 10-to-11. That means a bet on Studdard would cost $13 for the chance to in $10 and a bet on Aiken would cost only $11 for the same $10 won. This year gamblers are offered the chance to vote on the sex of the winner as well.
For the rest of Idol’s fan following just watching the contestants put on ridiculous outfits and get shot down by Cowell provides enough of a thrill to keep them coming back.
I included this story, despite the fact that it has no multimedia as a foil to my other stories. It serves to highlight how much interactive content would improve what would otherwise be a very basic print package.

When I began at Ball Bearings I was a writer. Nothing more. I was used to creating work that would be displayed on paper and I worked around those limitations. I grew complacent, and when finally faced with a media that had so many other possibilities I did what many well-meaning Web news sites do - limit myself to what can be done on paper.

This was my first major feature on Ball Bearings, and the one that - pardon the pun - I get the most crap about. I was inspired to do it at first by a really clean bathroom I discovered while in the very back of the stacks at Bracken. My first thought was, “I wish I had known about this before.” My second was, “this would make a great story.”

Chances are I would never have actually written this story if it hadn’t been for a disparaging mark made about the idea by a professor. I was assured that, while it was a good idea, it would be too edgy to talk about poop.

I took the challenge.

I knew from the beginning that I wanted to do reviews, but in retrospect it would have made sense to allow users to give a separate review as well. That way, it isn’t just this one reporter’s opinion - it would reflect the feelings of our readership as a whole.

This story would also have benefited from a way to plug in the appropriate values into the poop equation to get a real answer - a simple task in retrospect, but far beyond my capabilities at that point. I was so unused to the media that I never even
thought to assign the project to someone who could.

I think the story is still edgy, funny and interesting. However, it seems obvious now that it was severely limited by the imaginary restrictions that my print writing training put onto my writing.
"Honestly, toilet seats get a pretty bad rap," said infectious-disease expert Dr. Richard Olds.

While no one would suggest taking your meals at one, the public restroom toilet isn't nearly the disease-laden germ-fest that your mother would have you believe. In fact, very few diseases are able to live on the seat surface. Specifically, HIV and hepatitis B or C have not been shown to be transmittable through contact with a seat.

But that hasn't stopped the demand for toilet seat covers and ready-at-hand disinfecting sprays. Some women still attempt an awkward squat over the seat, trying to avoid contact with the surface.

The International Sanitary Supply Association reports that money spent on paper toilet-seat liners and trash bags for public bathrooms around the world has increased from $1.2 billion in 1995, to $1.4 billion in 1998 and $2 billion in 2001.

Dirty toilets aren't the problem said Olds, an expert on parasitic infections and infectious diseases. "The two major problems... are no paper, and no opportunity to wash your hands" after using the toilet.

"You probably run a bigger risk of getting a disease from the doorknob of a bathroom," he added, because people's hands — not backsides — transmit many germs.

Toilet seats are not a vector for — that is, a means of transmitting — sexually transmitted diseases either. Genital herpes, the most common STD in America is transmitted only through direct contact between mucous membranes.
Unfortunately, public toilets are transmitters of pubic lice, also known as crabs. Don’t worry too much about that, however. Because crabs are visible to the naked eye, you can tell what seats to avoid. There are also a few bacteria and viruses that could possibly be transmitted, such as strep (streptococcus) and staph (staphylococcus) bacteria which are commonly found on the skin.

The Norwalk viruses, the most common source of gastroenteritis, can also occasionally be found on seats, but the viruses are most often spread through contaminated food rather than skin to mouth contact.

Just remember; even at their worst, American public toilet seats are lush compared to those in many foreign countries. It’s not uncommon for foreign toilets to have no seat at all – merely a hole in the floor to squat above.

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
The scoop on poop

story by Anna McCleary

Ladies – are you tired of your boyfriends/brothers/fathers clogging your toilet after a long night eating head-sized burritos? Gentlemen – have you ever gone into the bathroom after your girlfriends/mothers/sisters and found a coiler the size of a trout?

According to a study done by the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Americans between the ages of 18 and 80 years old squeezed out between 19 and 278 grams of dookie per day over a seven-day study. That’s anywhere from 4/100ths of a pound to over a half a pound of waste in a day – and in Africa and Asia that figure can more than double.

That surprisingly large amount of poop is caused by the fiber in your diet. The average turd is up to 75 percent water. The approximately 25 percent solid matter is comprised mostly of indigestible material like gum and corn kernel skins (33 percent), dead bacteria (50 percent) and mucus and bile secretions which give it color. It’s the indigestible fiber that holds the majority of the water. Ergo, the more fiber, the more water and therefore the more poop.

A recent article on NewScientist.com gave the equation for the weight of poop as:

\[ \text{fecal weight} = W_f (1+H_f) + W_b (1+H_b) + W_m (1+H_m) \]

where \( W_f \) is the dry weight of fiber in the colon, \( W_b \) is the weight of the bacteria in the colon, and \( W_m \) is the metabolites and other substances in the colon that can affect the amount of water held by the fecal matter. \( H_f \), \( H_b \) and \( H_m \) are the respective waterholding abilities of each.

But who wants to do all of that measuring? The rule of thumb to remember for poop weight is that for every gram of fiber consumed, there will be an increase of three to five grams in overall weight.

Looking to beef up your poop volume? According to Metamucil.com, the dosage for its dietary fiber supplement is equivalent to 3.4 grams of fiber and can be taken up to three times a day for a limited time. That equates to 3.4 x 3 x ((3+5)/2), or roughly 40.8 grams more poop per day – only about a tenth of a pound. But combine that with
a couple of ears of corn on the cob, a large salad, and cereal and you’re ready to wreak some havok.

Happy pooping.
The clock ticks over to 9:46 as you race along the cowpath towards class. As you slam your way through the crowd of oblivious students in front of you, the feeling suddenly strikes – the call of nature. You’ve got to stop somewhere before class, but where? You don’t have time to take any chances with dirty, overcrowded bathrooms. How do you know where to stop?

At Ball Bearings, we know the pain of stepping into a rancid, crowded bathroom and realizing that you just can’t squeeze a drop under those conditions. That’s why we’ve compiled a list of the best (and worst) bathrooms on campus to aid you in your search for the ideal place to drop the Browns off at the pool.

We’ve visited restrooms across campus and rated each based on the overall hygiene, the smell, the convenience, and the all-important fart factor, which rates the chance that any unflattering noises or smells will go unnoticed or can be blamed on the exchange student in the stall next to you.

For your convenience we’ve rated bathrooms on the first floor of each building nearest to the main doors. Or, when that’s impossible, we’ve opted to go down the stairs in search of potty nirvana – no one should have to work to pee.

Ball Bearings would also like to point out that these ratings are entirely subjective and are based solely on comparisons between bathrooms on campus. Just for the record, every bathroom reviewed was markedly cleaner than the author’s personal bathroom. We applaud and support the hardworking men and women who keep the campus bathrooms so clean (and crab-free).
If you've never been inside of this building before, you're not alone. Be the first of your friends to say "I've seen the giant model of campus." It's guaranteed to make you popular.

Hygiene

Students almost never use these bathrooms – and it shows. They are well maintained, but more than that – they aren’t abused. In all, it’s a fairly pleasant place to go, and spend some quality time recycling your fiber.

Smell

A perfect score – as shocking as this may sound, it smelled really good in this bathroom. Enough to make one reporter stop, sniff, and say “Man, it smells good in here. If there were bonus points to give in this category, the administration building would qualify.

Fart Factor

These bathrooms are in hallways that are nearly empty most of the day, and the only people you are likely to see are office workers and important officials that you will most likely never see again. So go ahead, let one rip.

Convenience

The reason that these bathrooms are still so nice is that no student ever goes there. And there’s a reason for that. There’s no reason to ever go in, unless you work there or you need to use the copy center. But if you’re on that side of campus anyway, it’s
worth the short trip.

Overall Rating ★★★★★

Smelling is believing. A very high quality bathroom experience.

Options

Once you’ve tried the downstairs bathrooms, you might even try venturing upstairs for other, differently decorated but equally nice restrooms. Don’t worry – there’s an elevator.

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
The newest completed building on campus, AJ is home to the newest bathrooms as well. And while new might not mean clean, gosh darn it they are pretty. Sophomore Emily Krauser recommends checking out the unique toilet seats. "They make me laugh," she said of the super-short seats.

Perhaps it's only because they're shiny and new, but the bathrooms in AJ are worth a look. Large, spacious, and surprisingly attractive, AJ offers what may be the best large bathrooms on campus. The boys bathrooms, however, seem to have taken a beating, with paint peeled off the walls, graffiti, and even a mysterious gouge in one of the walls.

There is very little noticeable smell on most days. The high volume of traffic from the Atrium (and let's remember the kind of greasy, gut-busting food they sell down there) makes the discovery of something unpleasant a fairly likely event.

There is a bit of an echo factor in most AJ bathrooms. However, because they are located off of high-traffic thoroughfares, the chances of anyone hearing your mistake are fairly limited. In peak times there may be a problem in the number of people around inside the bathroom.
Convenience

Despite the whole building being in the center of campus life at Ball State, the bathroom is off the beaten path. In normal trips through the building the bathroom would not be on the way; instead, reaching the john would take a slight detour.

Overall Rating

Not perfect, but pretty darn close. Just be sure to take the time to admire the freshness of your surroundings. Subsequent classes of BSU students won’t have that luxury.

Options

Going upstairs in AJ won’t make much of a difference, but be warned: the upstairs bathrooms can be tricky to find because they’re not located at the same place on each floor.

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
Bracken Library

story by Anna McCleary :: photos by Nick Larson

In the four or so years most of us will be at Ball State chances are that at least one heavily-caffeinated, sleepless night will be spent futilely wandering the stacks in Bracken. On those nights it’s critically important to know where to put that fourth extra tall mocha latte you washed down your no-doze with at 3 a.m.

Hygiene

Dismal. Not only was the bathroom dirty, half of it was broken. Apparently despite being in a bastion of higher learning, many BSU students have not mastered the art of flushing. The smell was fairly atrocious due to the vast quantities of unflushed waste.

Smell

Did I mention the unflushed waste?

Fart Factor

A steady flow of traffic and the lingering smell of decay could fairly well hide any embarrassing toots. On the other side of the door, however, is half of the student body. It could be a recipe for disaster.

Convenience

When you're pulling a late night session on WebCat trying to find just the right book on Henry James you can't afford to wander around in search of relief. It's a quick in and out and back to studying. Hey – we never said convenience was a good thing.

**Overall Rating**

There are too many alternatives in the building to settle for this kind of filth. Step away from your studies and take the bathroom break you deserve. Just don't fall asleep in there.

**Options**

At the farthest southwest corner of each floor, in the very back of the stacks are bathrooms that are almost never used. These are prime real estate. Savor them. Your bathroom at home will never be that clean. (See editor's pick).

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
College of Architecture and Planning

story by Anna McCleary :::: photos by Nick Larson

Architecture students have been known to live in this building for semesters on end. It raises the question of how you takes a bath in a sink.

Hygiene

Senior architecture major Brianne Bergeman, who has spent the majority of her time over the last 4 years in the CAP building says that the architecture bathrooms are actually very clean.

"Someone is psycho about disease," said Bergeman. "They are always fumigating in there. There's disinfecting spray in several of them."

At first glance, however, the first floor bathroom seems gloomy and fairly messy, from standing water on the countertops to trash everywhere.

Smell

The prevailing smell in bathroom was that of disinfecting spray, which begged the question of what needed that much disinfecting. But it was bearable, and not as unpleasant as the alternative

Fart Factor

Chances are that you'll be alone in the architecture bathrooms except around 5 p.m. when studios let out, and the double doors make for a soundproof environment. But keep in mind, leaving something truly nasty is just rude, especially because this building is like a second home to most students.

Convenience

Unless you’re an architecture major, chances are there’s no reason for you to ever use one of these bathrooms. But I’m sure anyone who has spent more than 18 hours bent over a project will tell you that they’re invaluable.

Overall Rating

Overall, these are pretty average places to poo. Nothing worth seeing for anyone except archies.

Options

In the architecture building you would think that the architects would have put some thought into the layout of the bathrooms on each floor. Not so, says Bergeman.

“Architecture’s (bathrooms) are dumb, because there’s only one gender per floor or they rotate position. Its kinda weird.” Bergeman does admit that the first floor bathrooms seem to be the best in the building, however.

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
Cooper Science

story by Anna McCleary :: photos by Nick Larson

For a building full of people who study virulent diseases, bacteria, treating infectious disease and chemicals, Cooper Science offers very little in the way of clean-bathroom technology. Shoebox is the only way to describe the bathrooms—and that’s if you can find them.

Hygiene

Sophomore Nicole Nemore, called the first floor CS bathrooms ‘pretty small and pretty rank.” She was right on. When classes let out there is often a line of students waiting to let go of their morning coffee. And that many students mean overused facilities. There appeared to be something growing on the faucets, and the fact that there were only three toilets in the room brought to mind the sheer number of naked butt-cheeks that each one must have seen since the building opened in 1967.

Smell

There was no noticeable smell, at least to the ladies bathroom. How likely it is to stay that way, however, is anyone’s guess.

Fart Factor

With the enormous crowds looking for a place to go, don’t even think about taking the time to make a grunt sculpture.

Convenience

Although it's the only first floor bathroom and its fairly centrally located, you have to know where to look to find this bathroom. And the boy's side is hidden even better. That's bad news when you've got a wee turtle's head poking out.

Overall Rating

Tiny, overcrowded and hard to find. But we've got a sneaking suspicion that a bacterium knows better than to show its face in CS.

Options

Nemore, who spends a lot of time in CS, recommends going upstairs to the nursing hallways for better bathrooms.

"Nurses have the best bathrooms," she said.

We can only hope.
Robert Bell

story by Anna McCleary :::
photos by Nick Larson

The Robert Bell Building is home to what may be the most heavily and disgustingly used bathrooms on campus. Not only is there nearly always a wait to get a stall, but on the girls' side there's a competition for mirror space as well.

Hygiene

Keep in mind that RB houses not only liberal-arts students, but computer science as well. Neither is well known for solid hygiene skills. These bathrooms are littered with tiny scraps of toilet paper from goodness knows where and occasionally even a stray box of tampons. These don't even come with an applicator - keep that in mind when shaking hands with your English professor.

Smell

The bathrooms in RB have a faint, untraceable odor that, well, is better left untraced. It's almost as though there's a ghost of poo past, and your presence is making it very angry.

Fart Factor

While there is almost always going to be another person within hearing range in this bathroom, the sheer crowds of people there during class changes makes singling one person out as the perpetrator nearly impossible.

Convenience

Although it's in a five star location, the inevitable line of students waiting to pee at

class change drops this bathroom a star.

**Overall Rating**

Despite being the most convenient bathroom in the building, the general state of cleanliness and the number of other students competing for toilet time makes this bathroom nearly unusable.

**Options**

Other floors in the building seem to be in the same condition, so try the TCOM building next door. End of the first hall.

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
The old timers like to speak of days long ago when the student center was – get this – the center of student life. Now, all but abandoned, SC is a great place to go when you want to get away. From everything.

**Hygiene**

There wasn’t very much noticeable dirt, but the atmosphere was so dismal that there was a distinct feeling that dirt was lurking somewhere nearby, waiting and watching for its chance to take over.

**Smell**

In both the male and female restrooms there was a mild but definite stink. And judging from the neatly placed newspaper in the men’s restroom, someone comes here quite often to cook a meat loaf in the porcelain saucepan. And that’s not something you want to walk in on.

**Fart Factor**

Because the bathroom is - like so many others on campus - the size of a closet, and there seems to be a tendency for things to echo inside of the cinder-block walls, any questionable noises will not only be noticed by anyone else in the room, they will actually be amplified.

**Convenience**

No, really – when was the last time you went into the student center on purpose? If you’re like most students, it was orientation.
Overall Rating

That last half a plunger is out of pity. This is probably a very lonely bathroom.

Options

Junior Holly Lawson recommends the bathrooms across from the Tally. "They’re always cleaning them," she said. "They’re better than the ones across from the information desk."

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
Bathroom sanitation  The scoop on poop

Ball Communication
story by Anna McCleary :: photos by Nick Larson

The Robert Bell Building is home to what may be the most heavily and disgustingly used bathrooms on campus. Not only is there nearly always a wait to get a stall, but on the girls’ side there’s a competition for mirror space as well.

Hygiene

Though clean in comparison to its nearest rival, RB, the closet-like space of this bathroom means that if anyone has left a mess in the last 24 hours, there are no toilet or sink options to turn to. The faucets and door handle needed a good cleaning, and there was a rather disturbing blob of something on the trash can, but even at the end of the day the toilets looked to be in good condition.

Smell

Although the size of the bathroom is a factor here again, there isn’t an offensive smell, although it begs the question of how dangerous is it to breathe disinfectant fumes for an extended period of time.

Fart Factor

Because there are only 2 stalls and the bathroom is in a heavily traveled location, there will be no doubt in anyone’s mind where the toots are coming from. Also, crowds of students congregate just outside of these restrooms, which means that if you decide to launch a butt shuttle, everyone in the hallway will probably notice. And stare at you as you leave.

Convenience

If you're on your way to a class in TCOM, AJ, RB or any combination of the three you're sure to pass by.

Overall Rating

This bathroom is an acceptable destination if you're desperate or in a real hurry, but it might be worth it to pinch it back if you can make it somewhere a bit less busy and a little more spacious.

Options

At the end of the hall, past the Tcom main office and hidden from the throngs of people on their way from AJ to RB is another set of bathrooms with the same layout and fixtures but on a larger scale. But along with the same fixtures come the same suspicious stains. Still, if you need a bathroom in the area this alternative will give you a little more elbow room as well as privacy.

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
This is a story about how colleges across the nation are cracking down on college drinking and how well the crackdowns have worked. I wrote it in response to the overwhelming reaction to Ball State’s “Police Yourself” policy, which was instated after the alcohol-related deaths of Karl Harford and Michael McKinney this year. The policy is intended to inform and educate students about the consequences of drinking, and the response by the student body has been overwhelmingly negative.

It is accompanied by a quiz on students’ rights and drinking laws, which I built in Flash. It was my most complex bit of programming to date, and I was very pleased with how well it turned out. We also decided to accompany this story with a game about the effects and consequences of drinking that was submitted last semester and was waiting in our story bank for an appropriate tie-in.

The most difficult aspect of this story was deciding how to present the quiz questions. Legal matters are full of loopholes and can be extraordinarily complex. I tried to keep the questions as lighthearted and interesting as possible, but providing justification proved difficult. The law is fairly dry, and doesn’t appeal to most readers.

If I were to re-create this package, I would condense and lighten the tone of the explanatory paragraphs and perhaps replace them with video clips of an officer explaining why these things are illegal or not. This would eliminate the need for so much text and add an interesting visual element.
This is another example of how online stories can really benefit from interactive elements. This story, because it is almost entirely words, is less interesting than many of my others.

If I were to re-do this story, I would include more of an interactive graphic to deal with the statistics cited in the article. This would be more visually interesting to the reader than the current static box.
Losing our Greeks

story and infographic by Anna McCleary; photos by Jennifer Cecil

Students going to college in the hopes of finding “Animal House” may soon find no house at all.

In the 1978 John Landis film, “it was the Deltas against the rules ... and the rules lost.” Today, universities are cracking down on fraternities and, this time around, the fraternities seem to be losing.

Membership rates at Ball State University fraternities have declined 38 percent over the last 10 years, mirroring a 42 percent decline in fraternity enrollment nationwide. Although some at Ball State blame the university’s new housing plan for the drop in recruitment, studies show that the drop reflects a fundamental shift in perception of fraternity life. Not only has Greek life lost the sense of honor and prestige it held during its peak years in the 1970s and 1980s, but many parents and administrators are working to protect college men from the “beer bash, vandalism and theft” mentality that has plagued fraternities for years.

“The early 90s was the end of a boom period, when lawsuits really started to take a toll,” said Rob Turning, the assistant director of Student Organizations and Activities at Ball State. “It was the end of the 80’s big party atmosphere when people still put up with ‘boys will be boys.’ Most of it is people are finally holding fraternities accountable for what they were founded to be. The Animal House mentality killed it.”

At Ball State, fraternities have found themselves being held accountable at a steadily increasing rate. In the past five years, Ball State fraternities have been placed on probation, suspension or
been disbanded 18 times, compared with six suspensions in the five years before that. Three fraternities have disbanded since June 2002, two of which were because the fraternities defaulted on loans, leaving Ball State to assume payments.

Some fraternity members blame the defaulted loans on the Housing and Residence Life Premium Plan that was instituted in 2000 by Ball State, which is keeping many sophomores in the dorms rather than in the fraternity houses.

Turning, however, places the blame for the defaulted loans on fraternities being unwilling to hold senior members accountable for agreements to live in the house. According to Turning, before the Premium Plan, chapters relied on sophomores and their housing fees to make rent. Now they are being faced with making the seniors pay up or losing their houses altogether.

Sophomore Sig Ep member Corey Krause said he knows students who can’t join fraternities because of concerned parents who don’t understand the truth about Greek life. “Shows on MT give fraternities a bad name,” said Krause. “People think it’s just one big party.”

Studies have shown that that at least some of the perception is true. Although several fraternities, such as Phi Delta Theta and Sigma Nu have chosen to go dry nationally, there is still a problem with alcohol abuse at many fraternities. The 2001 Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS), a national study of college drinking, found that fraternity members were much more likely to drink heavily than their non-fraternity peers. (75.1 percent versus 48.6 percent).

Drinking isn’t the only problem, however. In 1999, the Core Institute reported that about half of students living in a fraternity of sorority house did poorly on a test or project and about 70 percent missed a class – twice the average of all other students.

In order to combat the alcohol and truancy problems common to fraternities, many schools across the country are choosing to remove fraternities and sororities altogether. a move that has already happened at schools like Williams College, Bowdoin college, Colby College and Alfred University in New York.

Public universities like Ball State, however, can’t remove the Greek system as a whole, said John Connor of University Legal Services at Ball State. Public Universities cannot discriminate against certain groups of students and therefore remove only groups that break the law or university policy.

At the rate it is currently declining, however, Ball State won’t have to remove the fraternities at all – they’ll disappear on their own. At the current rate of decline, Ball State’s fraternity system has only about 20 years left.
This was the most important, and at the same time most difficult, story to produce. Weeks of negotiation and discussion of staffing and strategies for this collaboration went into preparing to try intra-departmental convergence on this scale, and I think in the end it was a success for almost everyone involved.

It was most certainly not without problems, however. The sheer number of difficulties really proved that converging newsrooms, especially between such different organizations with different office politics, is much more difficult than it looks. On the Friday afternoon before the ride-along, I had to leave town to deal with paperwork in Indianapolis, and I missed the final meeting before the photographers and reporters left. When I returned at around 9:00, there was a note left for me that our editor was going out of town until 4:00 pm Saturday afternoon, leaving me to deal with anything that might come up on Saturday and to begin editing whatever assets the DN brought back.

Unfortunately, nothing was brought back. The DN staff misunderstood our requests that they get us the assets as soon as possible, and despite repeated requests to deliver, didn’t give us anything until 6pm.

This is where the biggest controversy. We requested several hundred photos from the photographers, with 60 set as the bare minimum. They returned with about 5. Because of that, we were forced to wait for a second day’s product before we could begin work on the multimedia.

To compound problems, the photographers, frustrated with an uneventful ride along on Friday, pulled out of going on Saturday night, leaving us in a lurch with no assets and no way to get more.

We frantically began calling our own staff of photographers, some of which
had agreed to be on call, and got someone to go on the ride along at the last minute.

We picked up her photos and audio on Sunday morning at 8am and discovered that while the audio was outstanding, the photos were still not at the level we required for a really strong photo show. As I sat editing the audio, and desperately trying to think up ways to use it and fulfill our part of the collaboration, I came up with the idea of streaming the audio as part of a “Q&A” session with a cop. The final project turned out well, considering the circumstances, but there were plenty of snags along the way.

There was also a bit of controversy about the audio. When we dropped our replacement photographer off at the police station, we stayed to make sure she got the audio equipment hooked up well. We had planned to wire the car for sound, but the officer insisted that we wire him instead. Not knowing that there was a problem, we complied. When the DN found out, however, there were some who were very upset. Apparently their chief reporter had made an agreement with the police chief that the officers would not be directly wired.

In response, we defended our decision based on the circumstances, but apologized for undermining their agreement and assured them that had we known, we would have insisted that the microphone stay in the car.

This incident just highlighted the fact that we are going to need better communication between newsrooms about agreements like that in the future.

In the end, I think the project was worth the hassles and conflicts because in the end we’ve begun what could be a really lucrative relationship. At the moment, we’re negotiating further projects and the idea of becoming a “partner” to the Daily News’ 72 Hours weekly section has us very excited. We’re exploring ways to offer streaming audio of different campus bands to accompany their reviews and concert
coverage, as well as specific story supplements.

This was a rocky beginning to a real convergence relationship mostly because of misconceptions of what convergence really means and how it could be realistically used to produce a product that makes both organizations look good without tears or blood being shed. We did learn, however, that the smoothest course is to let each organization handle their own production aspects. Let the writers write and the programmers programs; teaching an entire staff new tricks only causes resentment and excessive anxiety.
Who are you?
Why did you become a police officer?
What's your best piece of advice for students?
What's one thing you would like every student to know about UPD?
What is your biggest pet peeve about students?
Do you feel that students are "policing themselves?"
How have things changed since the "Police Yourself" campaign began?
Do you think the publicity made a difference?
How does this year compare to past years?
How long will the "Police Yourself" campaign last?
Which departments are involved in the campaign?
How do you feel about Muncie Ball State relations?
How do you feel about the media coverage of the McKinney incident?
Do you feel that Officer Robert Duplain had enough training?

photos and audio by Ashley Powell :: assembled by Anna McCleary and Mike Sayre

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
87 cited at Lambda Chi

ALCOHOL: SGA vice president ticketed for minor consumption Sunday morning

Olufunmbi Elemo, 19, denies being confronted by police

Lowndes police officers said the vice president of the Student Government Association was cited for underage drinking at a weekend fraternity party, however, the strongly denied being cited.

He reportedly showed officers his fraternity badge, but police said there was no臤rade identifyingElemo.

Elemo denied the ticket, saying he was not at the Logan Circle fraternity house on Friday night. In addition to the alcohol violation, Muncie police issued 87 citations in the area.

Inside

Online

Learn more in the U.P.S.-officer view on current events, and the Muncie police department's website.

GREEK WEEK

Marathon raises $7,000

Money collected will be donated to Riley Hospital for Children

Eric Paff, a U.P.S.-officer, said after collecting thousands of donations, the group was able to raise $7,000 for Riley Hospital.

Inside

DINNER NEWS

Learning

Greek Week

Marathon raises $7,000

Money collected will be donated to Riley Hospital for Children

Eric Paff, a U.P.S.-officer, said after collecting thousands of donations, the group was able to raise $7,000 for Riley Hospital.

Inside

DINNER NEWS

Learning

Greek Week

Marathon raises $7,000

Money collected will be donated to Riley Hospital for Children

Eric Paff, a U.P.S.-officer, said after collecting thousands of donations, the group was able to raise $7,000 for Riley Hospital.

Inside

DINNER NEWS

Learning

Greek Week

Marathon raises $7,000

Money collected will be donated to Riley Hospital for Children

Eric Paff, a U.P.S.-officer, said after collecting thousands of donations, the group was able to raise $7,000 for Riley Hospital.
This story was one of the most ambitious projects I’ve ever taken on. Not only is there an incredible amount of information to cover in order to give a really helpful overview of the law, but the subject matter, while important, is dreadfully boring.

Unfortunately, at the time I couldn’t think of any better way to present the majority of the information so it ended up as text. However, I did want to give fair time to a landlord to help balance my story and eliminate as much bias as possible.

I decided to allow the landlord to speak for himself by putting together a photo story overlaid with the audio of my interview with him. We had other, similar multimedia presentations on the site already and I wanted to create something similarly compelling.

I quickly learned that it was more difficult than it looked. Editing the sound down to the point that it was short enough to keep the viewer’s attention was tough because I had nearly an hour of good material to start with. Deciding what was important took a lot of time and heartache.

When it came time to add photos, even after several days of shooting by my photographer and me we still didn’t have what I would consider enough photos. Not all the shots were compelling or told a story the way I would have liked. I think the overall package came out well, but there is room for vast improvement. I have learned that these stories should be massively over-shot by the photographer to ensure as many usable photos as possible. Audio should also be gathered early and the photographer should know what he is trying to illustrate from the interview.
So you’re ready for your first off-campus apartment. Moving out of the dorms means finally having the freedom to sing in the shower, never having to take your keys to the bathroom, and perhaps even finally having a fully-stocked liquor cabinet or being able to smoke without your fingers going numb from the cold. You can live with your best friends, even if they’re the opposite sex, and you’ll finally always have privacy to spend time with your special someone.

But with all of these new freedoms comes the responsibility of making rent payments and cleaning your own bathroom. If you forget to make payments you could find yourself in court, rather than in the bursar’s office. And what about all those horror stories about Muncie slumlords?

It’s important to be prepared. That’s why Ball Bearings created this online guide to finding and keeping your new apartment. Once you know your rights (and your responsibilities) you will be able to protect yourself from anything a bad landlord can throw your way.

Before signing anything, however, be sure to make an appointment with John Connor, the Student Legal Services attorney, to look over any prospective leases and take preventative measures to protect your rights as a tenant.
Finding an apartment

Finding a first apartment can be daunting, especially when looking alone. Talking to friends who already live off campus and touring their homes and apartments can be a good way to decide what features are important to you, what to watch out for, and the approximate amount of rent you should expect to pay for a similar living space.

The easiest and most readily obtainable source of information on available housing is the newspaper. The Ball State Daily News classified section always has a few solid leads, but check out the Muncie Star and bulletin boards around campus. With bulletin boards you run the risk of calling about vacancies that were posted six months ago, but it also affords the opportunity to pick and choose roommates based on similar majors. If there is a bulletin board in your major’s department, you can find people with similar interests who you may be able to share books with in the coming semesters.

Another approach is to drive through the neighborhoods where you would like to live and look for “apartment for rent signs.” Be ready for disappointment however; some landlords leave signs up year-round, even when there are no apartments available. Apartments can be either furnished or unfurnished. While unfurnished apartments are cheaper, they require purchasing your own furniture and moving it in and out at the beginning and end of your tenancy. Unfurnished apartments generally only include a stove, a refrigerator, and perhaps draperies.

Apartments can also be divided into apartment complexes or subdivided houses. Apartment complexes are generally corporately owned and operated, so there is usually a handyman on call. Subdivided houses are usually privately owned, which means the landlords are less likely to keep them up to code, but there may also be more room for bargaining about rent.

If you decide to share a house or an apartment, keep in mind that you will also have to share the cleaning responsibilities. Don’t be afraid to set house rules; if you can’t compromise, consider finding a one-bedroom place.

Connor says that the most common disputes he sees are between roommates. Signing a roommate’s agreement before signing a lease can prevent these disputes. A roommate’s agreement is basically a formal, written contract which details how rent, security deposits and late fees will be handled, how utilities will be divided and who will be responsible for damage to the apartment. This agreement will be very important if a roommate decides to move out or becomes impossible to live with.

DISCLAIMER: This article and the guidelines contained herein are intended only to provide helpful information and do not replace qualified advice from an attorney. For information about making an appointment at Student Legal Services, contact:

Ball State Student Legal Services
Student Center, Room L-17
Muncie IN 47306
(765) 285-1888

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
The lease

story by Anna McCleary
photo illustrations by Jennifer C. Cecil

The most important thing to remember when it comes to the lease is to read it thoroughly and negotiate all of the terms. The lease is your only real protection under the law, and signing it should be taken very seriously.

"So many students sign the lease without the thought I would give to signing a cocktail napkin," said Connor. "You can't just walk away from a lease. Any lawyer who would tell you that a lease you signed is unenforceable in my opinion is committing malpractice."

Around Ball State's campus, you will generally only find yearlong leases. These are written contracts in which you and your prospective landlord will decide on the rent and payment terms for the year you will be leasing.

Remember – read your lease very carefully, and don’t be afraid to argue over anything you feel is unfair. The landlord should specify all rules and fees that he plans to impose.

"The best piece of advice I can give students is before you sign the lease have it reviewed," said Connor. "We can explain what you might be agreeing to."

One thing you are agreeing to pay a certain amount of money over the course of a year, whether or not you are actually living in the apartment. Make sure you are getting your money’s worth.

Be sure to fully inspect the apartment and the premises. Have the landlord show you how things work and where all of the outlets and light switches are. Find out how the heat is controlled and who will pay the bills. Test all of the lights, switches, outlets and plumbing.

If you have signed a lease but the apartment is occupied or in an uninhabitable state when you arrive to move in be sure to document the problem with dated photos and notify the landlord. If he agrees to have the apartment fixed or have the current tenants move out by a certain date, be sure to get that in writing. If the problem persists, contact the housing department. If the landlord still fails to correct the problem you can sue him to get out of the lease. With documentation of the problem and your efforts to have it corrected you should be able to walk away from the lease.

If you have agreed to make any structural or cosmetic changes to the apartment, be sure to include a list of the changes and rent deductions for those changes in the lease. If you decide to paint or put down new carpet without permission, the landlord can require you to change it back before you move out, or have the cost of the work deducted from the security deposit. Basically, even if you spend thousands of dollars to put in hardwood floors, unless you have an agreement, the landlord can charge you for putting back the lime green shag the apartment had when you moved in.

Most leases contain a "Indemnify and Hold Harmless" provision which is an
attempt by the landlord to keep you from suing him if he damages the apartment or your property or you have an accident or injury caused by his negligence. Demand that this clause be removed.

DISCLAIMER: This article and the guidelines contained herein are intended only to provide helpful information and do not replace qualified advice from an attorney.

For information about making an appointment at Student Legal Services, contact:
Ball State Student Legal Services
Student Center, Room L-17
Muncie IN 47306
(765) 285-1888

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
The deposit

story by Anna McCleary

photo illustrations by Jennifer C. Cecil

Many landlords require a security deposit, which consists of any money that the landlord holds to protect him from unpaid rent or damage to the apartment. The tenant may not, however, use the deposit as the last months rent. Make sure to get a receipt for the deposit, and have it written into the lease.

Getting back a security deposit can depend as much on the landlord as the actual condition of the apartment. Carefully reading the lease will help protect against losing a deposit over dusty curtains or peeling linoleum.

"Believe me-- our students have caught landlords engaged in fraudulent activities with deposits," said Connor. "The courts are enraged when they see evidence of that. If students follow some basic instructions they can get the upper hand on landlords who do this."

To improve the chances of getting the entire deposit back, ask to join your landlord as he inspects the condition of the apartment at both move-in and move out. Taking pictures – as many as possible – will ensure that the landlord can’t simply “forget” about existing problems, such as mildew or chipping paint. Bringing along a witness or two and have them sign statements about the apartment’s condition. The statements will be important evidence if the matter ever goes to court.

When moving out, clean the whole apartment as thoroughly as possible, including all appliances, floors, existing furniture, and even the mini-blinds. Don’t forget to check the inside of the oven or inside the cabinets. If the carpet is excessively dirty, it may be cheaper to hire a carpet cleaner or rent one from a hardware store and clean the carpets. If the landlord has to hire the cleaners, they may charge more -- and the landlord will therefore withhold more of your deposit -- than if you hired them yourself. Make sure to keep documentation of the cleaning, so you can’t be charged if he has the carpets cleaned a second time.

Some renters believe that it is generally worth losing a security deposit to avoid a post-move-out cleanup. However, the landlord is legally allowed to ask, and even to sue, for more money if the deposit doesn’t completely cover the cost of the cleanup.

Deposits must be refunded within 45 days at the end of the tenancy unless the landlord needs it as compensation for his damages. This time begins when he receives written notification of a forwarding address. If the landlord does not return the deposit or give notice of why he is keeping the deposit, the only recourse for tenants may be to take the landlord to court.

When subleasing from a housemate, be sure to get a receipt for your share of
The landlord is only obligated to return the deposit to the signer of the lease, so you will have to get your money back from your housemate.

DISCLAIMER: This article and the guidelines contained herein are intended only to provide helpful information and do not replace qualified advice from an attorney. For information about making an appointment at Student Legal Services, contact:
Ball State Student Legal Services
Student Center, Room L-17
Muncie IN 47306
(765) 285-1888

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
The rent

story by Anna McCleary
photo illustrations by Jennifer C. Cecil

The rent money is the main reason your landlord is letting you live on his property. If you know you won't be able to make a rent payment, you must notify your landlord as soon as possible to try and work out a payment schedule.

Your landlord has a right to charge penalties for late payments, but they can’t be "unconscionable," which means shockingly or obscenely high. Even if the landlord hasn’t charged late payment penalties in the past, he can start charging them without reasonable notice.

The tenant(s) who signed the lease is primarily liable for any rent payments. However, in some cases, a tenant who has never signed a lease can be held responsible as well.

To improve the chances of getting the entire deposit back, ask to join yo inspects the condition of the apartment at both move-in and move out. Tal as possible - will ensure that the landlord can’t simply "forget" about exis mildew or chipping paint. Bringing along a witness or two and have them the apartment’s condition. The statements will be important evidence if th court.

When moving out, clean the whole apartment as thoroughly as possible, appliances, floors, existing furniture, and even the mini-blinds. Don’t forg the oven or inside the cabinets. If the carpet is excessively dirty, it may be cheaper to hire a carpet cleaner from hardware store and clean the carpets. If the landlord has to hire the cleane more -- and the landlord will therefore withhold more of your deposit -- th yourself. Make sure to keep documentation of the cleaning, so you can’t b carpets cleaned a second time.

Some renters believe that it is generally worth losing a security deposit to out cleanup. However, the landlord is legally allowed to ask, and even to the deposit doesn’t completely cover the cost of the cleanup.

Deposits must be refunded within 45 days at the end of the tenancy unle as compensation for his damages. This time begins when he receives writ forwarding address. If the landlord does not return the deposit or give noti the deposit, the only recourse for tenants may be to take the landlord to cc

When subleasing from a housemate, be sure to get a receipt for your sha The landlord is only obligated to return the deposit to the signer of the lea get your money back from your housemate

DISCLAIMER: This article and the guidelines contained herein are inte
helpful information and do not replace qualified advice from an att.
about making an appointment at Student Legal Services,
Ball State Student Legal Services
Student Center, Room L-17
Muncie IN 47306
(765) 285-1888

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
Landlord’s duties

When you sign a lease, you are basically signing a statement of the landlord’s responsibilities and your own obligations. This is why it is so important to read the lease and have it reviewed before signing. Don’t sign away your rights as a tenant.

Your landlord must make sure that your apartment meets all local health and housing codes. For some repairs, however, the landlord has no duties to fix anything unless agreed to in the lease. Never sign a lease which says “tenant shall be responsible for all repairs.” A clause like that means that if the furnace breaks down in the middle of the winter or pipes burst in the building you will be responsible for having it fixed and paying for the repair.

If the landlord has agreed to make an essential repair but fails to make the repair within a reasonable time period, you have the right to have them completed yourself. You may be required to pay for the repairs, however.

You have a right to peacefully enjoy your apartment and the landlord must not disturb you unnecessarily. If you ask him to leave, he should leave. Most leases include a clause that demands the landlord give reasonable notice to enter the apartment. It is a good idea to have that clause changed to 24 hours’ notice, especially for women tenants. This should keep the landlord from entering the apartment while you are changing or sleeping. In an emergency he has the right to immediate access.

The landlord may not shut off your utilities unless the lease has been breached and the utilities are in the landlord’s name. He may not, for any reason, lock you out of the apartment. If you are illegally locked out or the utilities are in your name and the landlord has them shut off, you may be entitled to punitive damages against the landlord which means the court will award you money in order to “punish” the landlord for being a slumlord.

The landlord may not hold your personal possessions as security for unpaid rent unless the court has ordered that the property is abandoned, or gives the landlord the right to sell the property to reclaim the unpaid rent. If your landlord tries to take your personal possessions against your will to recoup unpaid rent, it constitutes theft.
If you leave possessions behind after moving out and don’t claim them in a reasonable amount of time, the landlord can seek a court order that will allow him to move your possessions to a warehouse storage unit. You will have to pay the cost of the storage in order to retrieve your property.

If you leave your apartment before the end of the lease, the landlord can collect rent, but he must mitigate the damages. This means that he must do his best to make his damages as small as possible by re-renting the apartment as soon as he can.

If possible, find your own replacement and sign a novation. A novation is basically an agreement in which the new tenant agrees to take on the lease. Unlike a sublease where you collect rent from the sub-lessee and pay your landlord, in a novation the new tenant legally assumes all of the responsibilities you had under the lease. For example, in a novation the new tenant is required to pay all rent — you cannot be sued because of his failure to pay. If you just sublease, you are still legally required to pay the landlord month, even if the sub-lessee never pays you.

Your landlord should inform you of any hidden dangers and known defects before you sign the lease. If a handrail breaks in the course of normal use, you may be entitled to damages. If you decide to go bungee jumping off of a balcony, the landlord cannot be held liable if the handrail breaks.

Your landlord is responsible for any negligence on his part while doing work in your apartment, unless you have agreed to an Indemnity and Hold Harmless clause in the lease. If he tracks in mud he cannot take the cost of carpet cleaning out of your deposit. If he leaves a burning cigarette on your coffee table, he must reimburse you for the cost of repairing any damage.

In some cases, your landlord may be liable for crimes committed against you by strangers if the crime was reasonably foreseeable and the landlord’s negligence allowed the crime to happen. For example, if the landlord had agreed to fix a broken lock on the front door but waited a week to complete the repair, he may possibly be held liable if your apartment is broken into.

If a fire, a flood or some other unavoidable disaster makes it impossible for you to use your apartment, you may not be able to end the lease, but you should have to pay rent until you can live in the apartment again.

DISCLAIMER: This article and the guidelines contained herein are intended only to provide helpful information and do not replace qualified advice from an attorney. For information about making an appointment at Student Services, contact:
Ball State Student Legal Services
Student Center, Room L-17
Muncie IN 47306
(765) 285-1888

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
You can be evicted for not paying rent, but the landlord must give you notice that you will be evicted and may not force you out by removing your possessions. The notice may be mailed or left at your apartment and it must state the amount due and the deadline for paying.

You can also be evicted for breaching the lease, such as getting a pet in the apartment that doesn’t allow them. In those situations generally the landlord will give you notice to fix it – in this case, getting rid of the pet. In more serious cases of breach of lease, such as intentional misuse of the property (like running a meth lab in the kitchen) the landlord will most likely give you notice of eviction.

Your defenses against eviction include paying past-due rent, proving that you were also in breach of the lease or that you are being wrongfully accused of the lease, or proving that you are being evicted because of discrimination.

Your friends are also your responsibility. You can be held liable for the property your guests while they are in your apartment. If they damage the property not the landlord’s – responsibility to repair the damage.

DISCLAIMER: This article and the guidelines contained herein are intended to provide helpful information and do not replace qualified advice from qualified professionals. For information about making an appointment at Student Legal Services, please contact Ball State Student Legal Services at Student Center, Room L-17, Muncie IN 47306, (765) 285-1888.
If it goes to court...

A small claims case is a legal action filed in county court to settle a dispute between parties for the amount of $5000 or less.

Any person 18 years of age or older may file a small claims case. This is done at the clerk’s office in your county court.

A lawyer is not required for small claims court, the clerk’s office personnel will provide you with the appropriate forms for filing a small claims case.

Fees for filing in small claims court vary according to the dollar amount of the claim and the type of action.

After the case is filed each person or business sued must be served with notice to appear in court for a pretrial conference. Parties should be prepared to have their cases on this date.

Mediation may be ordered to try and settle the dispute at the pretrial conference. If the dispute cannot be settled through mediation a trial date will be set. Parties will present their cases, documentation and documentation and witnesses.

If mediation results in a settlement between the parties, the person who agrees to settle the case must notify the clerk’s office, in writing, of the settlement.

What to bring to small claims court

1. The receipt showing that you paid your deposit.

2. A copy of your rental agreement.

3. The damage report which you made upon moving in, including any pictures.

4. Any signed statement by your landlord and/or a witness concerning the property upon moving out.

5. Your landlord's notice explaining how he is holding the security deposit.
6. Your notice of lease termination, and notice of forwarding address.

7. The landlord's notice of intent to claim the deposit.

8. Your objection to the landlord's claims, and your request for a detailed list of your objections.

9. A copy of the check for any refund which you did receive.

10. A copy of any authorization by a co-tenant for you to receive his or her portion of the deposit.

11. Any certified mail receipts.

12. Any other applicable documents – basically anything you have sent from your landlord.

DISCLAIMER: This article and the guidelines contained herein are intended to provide helpful information and do not replace qualified advice from a qualified attorney. For information about making an appointment at Ball State Student Legal Services, please contact Ball State Student Legal Services, Student Center, Room L-17, Muncie IN 47306, (765) 285-1888.

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
Downloads

- Roommates agreement
- Sublease agreement
- Release form
- Inspection form
- Example request for return of deposit
- Ball State's Tenant Handbook

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
**Student running for office**

Dolton Good  campaigning for county commissioner seat

**Local Politics**

**Student running for office**

Dolton Good campaigning for county commissioner seat.

---

**Big Band**

Students bring blankets, lawn chairs to spend afternoon listening to music by the Ball State's concert band.

---

**Locals want student understanding**

Residents understand BSU's importance, want respect in return.

---

**Dance**

Outlet proud of its effort

Group successfully completed audition in Daytona Beach.

---

**Most students don't make post-BSU plans in Muncie**

Students move away for amenities offered in other communities.

---

**Local Politics**

Dolton Good campaigning for county commissioner seat.

---

**Big Band**

Students bring blankets, lawn chairs to spend afternoon listening to music by the Ball State's concert band.

---

**Locals want student understanding**

Residents understand BSU's importance, want respect in return.

---

**Dance**

Outlet proud of its effort

Group successfully completed audition in Daytona Beach.

---

**Most students don't make post-BSU plans in Muncie**

Students move away for amenities offered in other communities.

---

**Local Politics**

Dolton Good campaigning for county commissioner seat.

---

**Big Band**

Students bring blankets, lawn chairs to spend afternoon listening to music by the Ball State's concert band.

---

**Locals want student understanding**

Residents understand BSU's importance, want respect in return.

---

**Dance**

Outlet proud of its effort

Group successfully completed audition in Daytona Beach.

---

**Most students don't make post-BSU plans in Muncie**

Students move away for amenities offered in other communities.
As a final project, my J413 class developed and conducted a poll of Ball State students to gauge their attitudes towards Muncie and Ball State University as a whole. The results of this survey were tabulated and from that data the class wrote a series of stories about prevailing trends. I chose to tackle the data using multimedia to break it down and make it accessible to readers who might have trouble understanding a written story about statistics. The idea was to introduce the reader to the poll, quantify the results we received and give the students a chance to find out how they measure up to the respondents.

The resulting stories and my multimedia ran together as a convergence product in the Daily News and on Ball Bearings. They really epitomized what convergence should be. The writers created long stories for print, and my Ball Bearings package only tackled the things that are best done on the web and didn’t include long writing passages. They were simply the things that the DN couldn’t have done themselves so they really supplemented the package without stepping on toes.

The biggest problem with this package is that it was thrown together at the last minute and careful consideration wasn’t given to cross-promotion and how readers would learn that this was all part of one major story. We used the same graphics to design both the print and Web pages, but the refers didn’t meet expectations. Our referral to the Daily News was large and on both the front and inside pages. Their referral to us was in the smallest print on the page and crushed in among other items in the footer. In the future, more negotiation about these issues would prevent misunderstandings like this from going to press.

What I learned from this story and the complements I received on it was the power that interactivity has to quantify otherwise confusing statistical data and make
the reader feel like they are a part of the story. This was my first project on Ball Bearings without any significant written portion. By leaving that to the DN we really let our potential for new, innovative and different storytelling techniques shine.
This spring a Journalism 413 class decided to explore the relationship between Ball State students and the Muncie community. The result of their research was the "Students Speak" survey which was sent to 1,000 randomly selected students and resulted in over 150 responses.

These are the stories that resulted from the survey and what the results appear to say about the relationship between university and university town in the aftermath of a tragic year.
The rivalry, whether imagined, seems to typify the University itself. Both and Muncie residents say about each other.

**Town = Muncie**

**Gown = Students**

How do you really feel about Muncie?

How do you really feel about Ball State?

Word on the interviews by Anna McCleary.
The Students Speak survey
by Anna McCleary

The survey has been taken and the points have been tallied, but that's no reason that you can't take it yourself. See how you measure up to other students and find out if you agree with the survey results.

This semester Jc a survey to a ra group of studen Ball State studen about Muncie. chose you. Ma Here's your cha how well your e those of other s wheth or not heard.

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
Being heard: comments from the survey
by Anna McCleary

The Students Speak survey included an area for students to leave comments. Here they are - unabridged - so be prepared for anything.
I wrote this story in two different versions. The first was for Nuvo, an entertainment newsweekly in Indianapolis. That incarnation of the story was intended for a 20-something crowd in the Indianapolis area, and didn’t fit our mission statement. Having done the research already, however, and knowing this affected many college students as well, I decided to do a version for Ball Bearings.

I wanted some kind of interactive multimedia element to the story, but had no idea how to approach it until I began researching drink recipes for sidebars. It seemed like all of the low- or no-carb drinks were just different combinations of the same ingredients, so I built my first interactive Flash graphic, which basically just selects two random items to mix, effectively creating a recipe.

This was a really basic little program, but it taught me the skills I would need later to build some of my bigger projects and got me to focus on creating at least one interactive element for every story I wrote.
Sam Phomsavanh isn't ready to give up on rice.

As a student at Ball State University, Phomsavanh depends on the carb-heavy grains to supplement almost every meal, a habit she has had since childhood.

Now, however, Phomsavanh is trying to shed weight in time for Spring Break by following the South Beach diet, a new take on the controversial low-carb dieting trend which promises quick results with minimal effort. When it comes to giving up on cheap and easy meals, however, the diet has proven too much for Phomsavanh, who admits to cheating on almost a weekly basis.

Like others on the diet, Phomsavanh is slowly learning how to juggle the different demands of the college lifestyle, from budget to beer, while still trying to maximize the effects of low-carb dieting, which is based on restricting carbohydrates and eating high-protein foods force the body to metabolize stored fat. More and more companies are catering to these customers, but for a price. The problem, according to dieticians, is that dieters want to lose the weight without losing the lifestyle – and one eventually has to give.

Kent W. Bullis, medical director of Ball State's student health center, says that the number of students who try fad dieting to get into shape doubles between Christmas and Spring Break. For many students fad dieting means eventual failure as sacrificing dietary staples becomes too hard or too expensive for students unwilling to make a permanent lifestyle change.

One restriction for student dieters is budget. For Phomsavanh, grocery bills skyrocketed as she substituted additional meat and vegetables for rice. For students like
Lynne McNutt, a Ball State senior, low-carb dieting meant the end of sandwiches and pasta.

While dropping breads and grains from a healthy diet goes against most commonly held ideas about good nutrition, the introduction of the Atkins diet had nutritionists debating convention. Atkins is a company started by the late Robert Atkins, a dietician who introduced the world to the first commonly-accepted low-carb diet plan. The company has released a line of low-carb breads, pastas and cereals to help dieters deal with cravings for carbohydrate-rich foods without breaking their diets. For many students, however, low-carb products are budget-breakers. A 16-ounce box of dried pasta from the Atkins Web site is $5.99 plus $7.95 in shipping. A similar box from Wal-Mart, with nearly four times the carbs, sells for less than $1 on sale.

Recent marketing campaigns by major brewing companies focused towards a young crowd of dieters have just perpetuated the idea that dieting doesn’t mean sacrifice. Michelob has been extremely successful marketing its low-carb Michelob Ultra to the young, in-shape dieter with the claim that it’s not necessary to sacrifice beer for a toned physique. Rolling Rock has followed suit with Rolling Rock Green Light and Diageo has begun a campaign to market its Smirnoff Vodka as no-carb.

Students are responding to these campaigns well. Scott Wise, founder of Scotty’s Brewhouse in the Village said sales of Michelob Ultra are very high, and he has introduced a new “Body by Scotty’s” section of the menu to keep up with the demands of the low-carb crowd.

Bullis, however, says he worries about anyone who wants to lose weight but can’t give up the college party lifestyle. He said that if students aren’t ready to make a real change in the way they eat and socialize, they aren’t ready to take on the potential health risks associated with an unproven diet like Atkins.

“I could put 50 doctors in this room and no two of them would agree completely on Atkins,” Bullis said. “I know I’ve seen people before who went on a fad diet 20 years ago and their metabolism has never been the same since. It’s a lot to wager for one spring break.”

In the end, the fear of beer, bar food and balancing carbs, forces many dieters like Phomsavanh off of the diet. She has already begun a search for the next diet trend.

“I heard about this one where you don’t eat anything but cabbage,” Phomsavanh said with a grin. “Or maybe not.”
This is another example of how online stories can really benefit from interactive elements. This story, because it is almost entirely words, is less interesting than many of my others.

If I were to re-do this story, I would include more of an interactive graphic to deal with the statistics cited in the article. This would be more visually interesting to the reader than the current static box.
Losing our Greeks

story and infographic by Anna McCleary: photos by Jennifer Cecil

Students going to college in the hopes of finding "Animal House" may soon find no house at all.

In the 1978 John Landis film, "it was the Deltas against the rules ... and the rules lost." Today, universities are cracking down on fraternities and, this time around, the fraternities seem to be losing.

Membership rates at Ball State University fraternities have declined 38 percent over the last 10 years, mirroring a 42 percent decline in fraternity enrollment nationwide. Although some at Ball State blame the university's new housing plan for the drop in recruitment, studies show that the drop reflects a fundamental shift in perception of fraternity life. Not only has Greek life lost the sense of honor and prestige it held during its peak years in the 1970s and 1980s, but many parents and administrators are working to protect college men from the "beer bash, vandalism and theft" mentality that has plagued fraternities for years.

"The early 90s was the end of a boom period, when lawsuits really started to take a toll," said Rob Turning, the assistant director of Student Organizations and Activities at Ball State. "It was the end of the 80s' big party atmosphere when people still put up with 'boys will be boys.' Most of it is people are finally holding fraternities accountable for what they were founded to be. The Animal House mentality killed it."

(story continued below)
At Ball State, fraternities have found themselves being held accountable at a steadily increasing rate. In the past five years, Ball State fraternities have been placed on probation, suspension or been disbanded 18 times, compared with six suspensions in the five years before that. Three fraternities have disbanded since June 2002, two of which were because the fraternities defaulted on loans, leaving Ball State to assume payments.

Some fraternity members blame the defaulted loans on the Housing and Residence Life Premium Plan that was instituted in 2000 by Ball State, which is keeping many sophomores in the dorms rather than in the fraternity houses.

Turning, however, places the blame for defaulted loans on fraternities being unwilling to hold members accountable for agreements to live in the house. According to Turning, before the Premium Plan, chapters relied on sophomores' housing fees to make rent. Now they are being faced with more prominent problems.

Sophomore Sig Ep member Corey Krause said he knows students who can’t join fraternities because of concerned parents who don’t understand the truth about Greek life. “Shows on M TV have given fraternities a bad name,” said Krause. “People think it’s just one big party.”

Studies have shown that that at least some of the perception is true. Although several fraternities such as Phi Delta Theta and Sigma Nu have chosen to go dry nationally, there is still a problem with alcohol abuse at many fraternities. The 2001 Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study (CAS), a national study of college drinking, found that fraternity members were much more likely to drink heavily than their non-fraternity peers. (75.1 percent versus 48.6 percent).

Drinking isn’t the only problem, however. In 1999, the Core Institute reported that about 10 percent of students living in a fraternity or sorority house did poorly on a test or project and about 70 percent missed a class – twice the average of all other students.

In order to combat the alcohol and truancy problems common to fraternities, many schools across the country are choosing to remove fraternities and sororities altogether, a move that has already happened at schools like Williams College, Bowdoin college, Colby College and Alfred University in New York.
Inside the Phi Sigma Kappa fraternity house.

Public universities like Ball State, however, can’t remove the Greek system as a whole, said John Connor of University Legal Services at Ball State. Public Universities cannot discriminate against certain groups of students and therefore remove only groups that break the law or university policy.

At the rate it is currently declining, however, Ball State won’t have to remove the fraternities at all – they’ll disappear on their own. At the current rate of decline, Ball State’s fraternity system has only about 20 years left.

All content copyright Ball Bearings 2004
Introduction and statement of principles
Copy
Use of multiple sources
Official/unofficial sources
Unnamed/anonymous sources
Citing sources from published interviews
Using Internet sources
Use of first person
Plagiarism
Photography
Manipulation of digital images
Photo illustrations
Product placement in photography
Re-creating news events
Plagiarism
Audio
Obtaining audio
Cropping
General
Diversity issues
Advertising
“Undercover” reporting
Avoiding conflicts of interest
Correcting mistakes
Allowing public comment
The Ball Bearings code of ethics
version 1.0

Mission statement:

The mission of Ball Bearings is to provide the Ball State community with a compelling source of locally oriented information and entertainment. We will help foster personal and social growth in our target audience, the students of Ball State. Through use of journalistic content, multimedia and interactivity we will encourage the growth of an online and offline community. We will create an experience that is mentally engaging, user focused and content driven.

Introduction:

We acknowledge the responsibilities that accompany the freedoms granted to us by the first amendment. In this light we strive to always place the needs of our audience, the Ball State community, before our own. Our ethical policies are based on the Deontological, or duty-based, ethical philosophy, which holds our duties to the reader foremost in the decisions we make as a publication.

We strive to cover every event as impartially as possible and to fairly consider and report on all sides of each issue. Our goal is to produce news features and entertainment that rivals any traditional publication for accuracy, fairness and overall journalistic value.

This said, ethical decisions are always discretionary. Based on the circumstances of a given situation, the guidelines offered here might not be appropriate. This guide should be seen as a "jumping off point" for ethical decision making rather than an inflexible rulebook.
The Ball Bearings code of ethics

version 1.0
last modified April 14, 2004

Use of multiple sources

Because we strive for fair and balanced coverage of each issue, we ask that our reporters make an attempt to interview at least two sources (and when possible, more) for every story written in order to get a fair and balanced look at the topic. If possible, these sources should take different stances on the issue at hand.

While not all stories are controversial, and therefore don’t have “sides” per se, interviewing additional sources for all stories will increase the likelihood of adding depth and perspective to what would otherwise be one person’s view of a situation. This promotes stronger reporting and provides our readers with better content, thus fulfilling our mission statement.

Even if all interviews are not directly used in the final article, they can offer vital background information and a greater understanding of the topic. We request that the names of interviewed sources be available to editors upon request, and entered into a log with contact information for future reference.

Minimum interviews by story type

1. Features – at least three sources, one must be official
2. FUTO/Muncie nights/12x16 – at least two sources, one must be official
3. Ultimate dorms – must talk to the room owners and get at least one student reaction (preferably someone who has not seen the room before.

Official / unofficial sources

While unofficial sources, such as man-on-the-street interviewing and student reaction help to add depth to a story and give our readers a sense of involvement in the issue, they do not tell the whole story. In most cases, at least one interview with an official source is necessary to give legitimacy to the reporting.

Official sources: professors, event organizers, doctors, professional practitioners in the appropriate fields, psychiatrists, sociologists, official studies by reputable organizations, statistical information from reputable sources such as the US government census
Official / unofficial sources (cont.)

Unofficial sources: students unconnected to the event, bystanders, general surveys, personal reaction

Unnamed/anonymous sources

The use of unnamed sources became a major source of controversy in recent months due to the fabrication of stories and quotes by prestigious reporters at major media outlets, including Jayson Blair, Stephen Glass, and Jack Kerry. These incidents have severely damaged the reputation of the news media with its audience.

In order to prevent similar reputation damage and to promote reader trust, the use of unnamed sources should be avoided as much as possible. If sources are reluctant to give information that can be attributed, the reporter should attempt to find another reputable source or independently verify the information rather than promise anonymity.

It is our policy that only editors have the power to grant anonymity to a source. The promises granted by reporters have no bearing on the editorial decision making process and reporters should keep that in mind during the interview process and clearly explain it to the interviewee.

The only acceptable anonymous sources are those who have vital information that can not possibly be obtained in any other way and who have a valid excuse for anonymity such as potential litigation. Even in these circumstances, editors have final say over who can be promised anonymity.

If anonymity is granted, we still request that the interview and the person's name go on record as an audio recording that will remain confidential but which serves as proof that statements were in fact taken and that the source does exist. By strictly adhering to these standards, our readers can fully trust that our content is as accurate and truthful as we can possibly make it, fulfilling our duty to them.
Citing sources from published interviews

Published interviews have a way of being inaccurate. The source may have been misquoted or an unscrupulous reporter may have fabricated the interview altogether.

Because of this, If possible, the interviewee should be contacted personally and re-interviewed. This allows the interviewee to not only verify his statements, but to add new information and give the reporter additional understanding of the topic.

If the interviewee cannot be contacted by any means and the information is crucial to the story, it is important to attribute the quote to both to the interviewee and to the publication in which the quote was found. The publication should be contacted to get the most updated version of the interview with any corrections or retractions.

These standards will protect the writer, the source and the reader from the mistakes of other organizations in reporting.

Using Internet sources

As a Web organization we rely on the availability and freedom of expression that the Internet provides. An incredible amount of information is there on every topic imaginable. Yet it should be understood by all reporters that the unregulated nature of the Internet means that not all of the information found there is accurate or truthful.

A clear distinction should be made between valid, trusted sources of information such as government Web sites and the official Web sites of media organizations like CNN.com and more spurious sites like theonion.com and personal home pages.

If reporters are in doubt of whether a source is valid, they should not use the source. Under absolutely no circumstances should all of the information for any story come exclusively from Internet sources.

Because our publication is also on the Web, any sources that can be found online should be directly linked to in the story to make them available to the reader. That way the readers are able to judge for themselves if the source is valid and accurate or not.
Use of first person

First person stories can be powerful. When written well and used correctly, personal accounts can grip the reader and tell a more intimate story than a second hand account ever could.

At the same time, however, first person narratives are often used to compensate for a lack of reporting or the inability to find compelling alternate sources. They are also more difficult to write because they require a unique and compelling insight into the situation, which comes with maturity. Quite often reporters who take this “easy way out” cheat the reader and offer an inferior product to a well-researched traditional article.

To prevent this temptation and keep writers reporting to the best of their ability, we will not accept any articles written in the first person without specific consent by the editor in chief and without a compelling reason for the use of first person narration. Examples of situations in which these narratives will be allowed include truly unique and irreproducible events and situations such as extraordinarily rare diseases or “once in a lifetime” experiences.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the most unforgivable crime of any writer. It is defined as copying at attempting to pass off the work of another as original work. It also includes the fabrication of quotes or the knowing misattribution of information.

These acts constitute a fundamental breach of trust both for the reader and for the organization and will always, and without debate, lead to the immediate dismissal of the reporter and full disclosure of the incident by the publication. No excuses will be accepted for any reason.
Manipulation of digital images

When readers see a photograph, they assume that it is an accurate depiction of events as they actually occurred and that the photo is a moment in time during that event. With the advent of digital image manipulation, however, photographers have the ability to alter the appearance of reality in an image, which can potentially mislead viewers.

While it is acknowledged that many images require a bit of adjustment to make the photograph clearer, such as cropping, contrast adjustment brightness levels, no fundamental changes should be made to the image if possible. If adjusting brightness or contrast fundamentally alters the viewer’s perception of the subject or the event, ideally the change should not be made. If it is made, the photo must be labeled as an illustration.

If a change is to be made for a concrete and important reason, the photographer should ask these three questions:

1. How is the photo presented?
2. Is it still an accurate portrayal of events or of reality?
3. Does it deceive the reader?

The answers to these questions should be brought to the photo editor for final approval before publication.

If a photo is received from any source outside the organization it may not be altered in any way outside of minor cropping or resizing without the express permission of the photographer so as to preserve the original message of the photo. Photos that have been significantly altered by the photographer will not be accepted.

Our intent is not to prevent creative expression through photography, but rather to protect the integrity of the message the photo intends to send and to maintain the trust of the viewer.

Photo illustrations

The difference between an actual news photo and a photo illustration is subtle; therefore we must assume that the subtlety will be lost on some of our readers. In an effort to keep that confusion to a minimum, if photography is used to illustrate an abstract concept, it should clearly convey that and be labeled appropriately.
The Ball Bearings code of ethics

version 1.0

Photo illustrations (cont.)

Photographers should avoid illustrations that appear to be depictions of actual events or that could mislead the reader into thinking that it is an accurate depiction of reality.

Altering a news photo digitally in such a way that the overall effect and message is changed should not be considered a photo illustration and will not be tolerated. This includes cropping to remove a subject from context or changing brightness or contrast to change the overall mood of the image. This kind of alteration constitutes a visual lie, which could potentially mislead our readers and damage our credibility and which will be dealt with in the same manner as fabricated quotes.

Product placement in photography

The inclusion of products and brand symbols into a published photograph can give the impression that the product is endorsed by the subject or by the publication. Care should be taken that product names and brand symbols should be avoided in all studio shots. Recreated labels or shots from unbranded sides of a commercial product are preferable.

In news shots, if the inclusion of brand names is avoidable, these shots are preferred. In situations where the brand symbols are a part of the story, such as a Pepsi-sponsored sporting event, their presence is acceptable.

By avoiding the appearance of intentional product placement, we become more creditable to our audience and do not look as if we have been “bought” by any commercial company.

Re-creating news events

Readers assume that any photographs of events came from the actual events. Re-creating those events, then, is effectively lying to the reader. It is to say that your recreation was, in fact, the original.

If an event occurs and the photos of that event are unusable, a substitute must be found -- but not at the expense of the integrity of the publication. If another similar event is scheduled before the publication date and is photographed, those photos should not be passed off as the original event, even if they are identical in every way. To pass off a photo of one thing as a
photo of another is lying, which will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is as much a crime for photographers as it is for writers. Photographic plagiarism is when photographer passes off the work of another as his own, or intentionally recreates a substantially similar photograph and takes credit for the idea.

As with written plagiarism, these acts constitute a fundamental breach of trust both for the reader and for the organization and will always, and without debate, lead to the immediate dismissal of the reporter and full disclosure of the incident by the publication. No excuses will be accepted for any reason.
The Ball Bearings code of ethics

version 1.0

Obtaining audio

Under no circumstances should subjects be recorded without their express knowledge and consent. To record surreptitiously tarnishes our reputation and may make future interviews more difficult to get.

Cropping

Cropping audio is similar to writing a quote; if you edit too much, you take the statement out of context and potentially alter its meaning. When editing an interview to a manageable length for download or use in a photo story, it is tempting to edit out anything and everything that is not particularly vital to the message the editor would like to extract.

In general, it is fine to edit down long pauses in conversation and filler words like “um” or “uh.” The challenge for the editor is in deciding how much to take out. For instance, if the interviewee was taking a long time to choose words and was very hesitant in responding, cutting out those silences would alter the overall meaning of the response. The hesitation can communicate as much to the listener as the answer. On the other hand, if pauses are excessively drawn out the listener will lose interest and the message will be lost altogether.

The key to editing is to ask these basic questions:

1. Does this particular quote agree with the overall message the interviewee was trying to present?
2. Does this edit change the fundamental meaning of the sentence?
3. Does this edit mislead the audience about what the subject was commenting on?

If the change is controversial or the decision to edit is particularly tricky, a second person should be asked to listen to the audio clip and sum up what the person is saying. If this summary is true to what the speaker intended, the edit is fine. If there is still any doubt, contact an editor for guidance.
Diversity issues

Despite common perception, diversity is not just a politically correct salve to ease racial tension and to make a media organization look better in the eyes of the reading public. Rather, diversity is an attempt by serious journalists to more fairly and accurately report on topics that affect different demographics.

Though racial diversity is the most commonly thought of (and vehemently preached) aspect, newsroom diversity encompasses a variety of different aspects of humanity beyond ethnicity. It also includes:

1. socio-economic background
2. religion
3. education
4. income
5. sex
6. sexual preference
7. age

(This is by no means a complete list, but each of these aspects should be taken into account when choosing and interviewing sources)

The importance of diversity is clear – it would be ludicrous to discuss abortion issues without speaking to any women. At the same time, the reporter should interview men to add a different perspective on the issue because they have different biases and perceptions than women. Another example would be writing an article on the loss of factory jobs without speaking to anyone who works in or around factories, or speaking only to factory workers. Each group is specifically biased on the issue because of background and in order to present a truly fair and balanced look at the issue both sides should be explored.

By offering readers more equality in coverage and preventing biased reporting, the overall package is stronger and more informative. If any group is ignored, whether purposefully or not, the publication’s integrity is damaged and the coverage, no matter how impartial, will be viewed by the reader as hopelessly one-sided.

The coverage of an issue should appeal to our entire audience, not just those who match the staff.
The Ball Bearings code of ethics

version 1.0

Advising

Because Ball Bearings is a student organization which receives funding through the university, we do not currently accept advertising of any kind on our site. Until we reach a level of visibility and respectability in the community we serve, we prefer to remain funded by the journalism department.

If at any time, however, the administration of the journalism department threatens to deny funding to compel compliance with a policy which does not reflect the values of our organization, we reserve the right to secede from the department and seek funding through other avenues in order to protect and serve our audience in accordance with our own ethical and journalistic standards.

Currently, we strive to provide readers with unbiased and non-commercial journalistic content. In order to avoid the appearance of commercialism, we no longer accept reviews of commercial establishments around campus. This will continue until the quantity and quality of our content more adequately balances the commercialistic appearance of such reviews.

Undercover reporting

As journalists, Ball bearings staff members should be deeply and undividedly devoted to the pursuit of truth. In the pursuit of such truth, however, no journalist should deliberately lie and mislead the source or the reader.

While some stories might benefit in the end from subversive reporting techniques, the ends do not justify dragging the publication’s reputation for honesty through the proverbial mud.

In dealing with any source the reporters should be honest about their identity and intentions. If in doubt of how to approach a difficult or uncooperative source, reporters should discuss the situation with an editor or advisor in order to reach a solution that accomplishes the goals set while not sacrificing integrity.

Avoiding conflicts of interest

The credibility of even the most honest and dedicated of reporters can be compromised, not only by a misdeed on the reporter’s part, but by the mere appearance of impropriety.
Avoiding conflicts of interest (cont.)

Because of this, reporters must work hard to avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest in order to build and keep the trust of their audience.

To promote this goal, we feel that no reporter should accept anything that could be perceived as a gift or a service from any person related to a story being pursued. This includes food, drink or any kind of material item with real or perceived value. If it is necessary, in the course of pursuing a story, to obtain a product or service from the individual or business being covered, fair compensation should be given, even if the subject tries to decline payment.

Reporters should also avoid sources with whom they have a personal relationship. These sources, while easy to find, interview and quote, give the impression that the reporter has not ventured far outside of the office to find the story. It also makes it seem as though the reporter had reasons for doing the story outside of journalistic intent.

Correcting mistakes

Although we strive for accuracy, truth and fairness in all of our content, there will occasionally be mistakes made inadvertently. In the event such mistakes are made, Ball Bearings will make a full disclosure of the mistake, alter the article, and run a link to the correction and an apology off of the main page. No story with noted errors will run uncorrected. By admitting our faults and doing our best to rectify them, we build trust with the reader as well as provide a more perfect product.

Allowing public comment

It is pretentious of any journalistic organization to say that it truly speaks for the people and adequately covers all relevant editorial comment. Therefore, Ball bearings allows for submitted editorial comment which furthers the goals of the organization by elaborating on or clarifying coverage of stories.

We will not, however, accept statements which do not adhere to the same standards of truth, honesty and journalistic integrity as the rest of our content. This is a matter for editorial discretion.