

Gerald Waite

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(Gerald Waite) My name is Gerald Waite I'm fifty two and the date is the thirtieth of March nineteen ninety five. I'm a professor in the English department and the journal I've been responsible for the journalism curriculum since I came here in in 1976. Journalism courses have been taught here for years before I got here but the journalism minor curriculum was set up in 1975 I believe, just before I got here and in fact my coming here was essentially to begin the teaching most of the courses in the journalism minor. Um we do not have a major curriculum at this time although we may in the future and I'll talk about that later. So the journalism curriculum as a minor at any rate was begun by the English department in a major revision of curriculum that occurred during the mid-seventies. Involvement in the journalism program originally was limited to really very few people and that's still the case, the advisor of the student newspaper originally as well as an instructor in journalism um was one Tom Rishika (Spelled Phonetically) who is still with the department. However, he is not a trained journalism and was happy to see me come here to teaching journalism courses and to take *The North Wind* advising off his back. Before that, there were a number of people teaching what was a very limited one or two courses of curriculum. We had for a number of years previous to 1975 we had a couple of journalism courses, an introductory course which amounted to News Writing and a secondary course which was called News Management which was similar to our News Editing. So both of those courses had been taught usually by the same person for a number of years who was more or less qualified to do so. With the new curriculum there are some courses, the new curriculum that is as of 1975 there are some courses that can be taught by others such as 302 which is the Nonfiction Writing course originally called... Advanced Writing-Journalism I believe a 302 course. Now it is called Nonfiction Writing but that was and is frequently taught by others such as Paul Lemburg (spelled phonetically) for instance for many years taught that in the department. I have taught most of the core courses especially 207 News Writing and 306 News Editing almost invariably since 1976 as I say when I came here. The 406 course was originally called let me see... it was called... oh what was it called... Investigative Reporting, yeah it was originally called Investigative Reporting and I taught it under that title for a number of years. Even though I had you know relatively no investigative little or no investigative news writing experience and it seemed to me and that was ultimately changed oh maybe five or six years ago to Public Affairs Reporting. My feeling being that investigative reporting was a pretty rare pursuit especially in a program which had so few courses. And what people really needed was familiarly with public affairs and how to handle public affairs reporting. Um another changed that instituted imminently upon me coming here was to propose and have approved two practical orientated courses, the Journalism Practicum and the Journalism Internship. Because I believe that a small program like this in particular needs to focus pretty strictly on performance, on doing what journalist do, training people to be journalist. Um for those reasons, I felt it was important for students to get as much writing experience as possible and through the Practicum, they are able

to write actively through for *The North Wind* as a student newspaper and to be rewarded for that. To get academic credit for it, that seems entirely appropriate especially for such curriculum or for any kind of writing curriculum. The internship was added at the same time, I drew on experience that I had elsewhere in internships, I had....I helped set internships up at my previous college at Slippery Rock State College in Pennsylvania. The internship that we set up in our department were among the first at the university, today I think probably half the departments in the university have internships as one kind or another. But I think at the time the only real internship was political science internship and ours. We set up a rather strict internship, this was a time in fact when the university as far I knew had no guidelines at all for an internship. And I drew on what was done at other schools and we set up an internship requiring fifty hours of work for each credit, each academic credit. Since then the university has a norm of forty hours of work minimum however, we've maintained fifty credits. Which in my original research I've found was typical for journalism internships around the country. So the main part of the journalism curriculum, the 206 Survey course, the 207 course, News Writing, the 306 News Editing, the 406 at that time Investigative Reporting, those courses were all in effect. Or really just launched when I arrived here as well as the 302 I think might have been around for a long time. The two other courses were added, another course that is available in the curriculum was included it's making the minor really interdepartmental and that's a broadcasting course BC 270. My own background is... in journalism comes from two different newspapers after I graduated in 1966 from University of Notre Dame where I have an English degree and had done some writing but had no journalism minor even, in fact the university did not have one. I went to work um with very little experience on a small daily just outside of South Bend, it was called *Mishawaka Times* and this little paper was at that time was a daily. It was started up by a local publisher, the publisher of the Elkhart Truth in order to try and compete with the South Bend Tribune. That was...

(Interview) Do you know by chance know how to spell Mishawaka?

(G)M-i-s-h-a-w-a-k-a. *Mishawaka Times*. Just like the *New York Times* except it was in Mishawaka. Mishawaka is a little industrial town, pretty good size city really just outside of South Bend, Indiana. I got quite the education there because it was a small paper I did a lot of things, mostly I worked as what is called as a wire editor or a telegraph editor in which I was responsible for taking stories from the wires, editing them and also designing or laying them out on the page. Taking photos from the wire photo machine and deciding how those will be used, cropping those photos. I worked very closely with the back shop I was the last editor in the shop, I put my stuff together last it was a morning newspaper so I was there usually until about 2:30 in the morning working with the printers and making sure everything fit and all the headlines were spelled reasonably correctly. Anyway, it taught me a lot about the business and after about a year there, I wrote to a number of other papers looking for work in particular in Milwaukee because my family lived in Milwaukee, my wife's family was in Milwaukee. Then the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* gave me an interview and I went to work there principally as a copy editor, I

was responsible for editing copy writing headlines. I also worked intermittingly in different positions for example with the editorial pages, with the weekend features department but for the most part, I worked on the copy desk. I worked there full time for about a year and then went to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee again in English, studying English literature. I got my Masters, ultimately my PH.D from UW Milwaukee and graduated with distinction with a Ph.D. Wrote a dissertation on Jonathan Swift's verse, which had nothing particularly to do with journalism at all. When I, as I was finishing and actually before I finished my dissertation but I had finished my course work and my preliminary examinations I looked for work in academe. I had been working after that one year of fully time with the *Seminal* in worked part time, which amounted to half time for at least five years while I was a graduate student I worked generally Fridays and Sundays, weekends. I would work every vacation period, I would work all summer long, they were happy to have that kind of help that could fill in during vacation times and give people time off during holidays and so on. So that experience really turned out to be much more profitable in the long run that I would have ever expected. I was working with the *Seminal* to try and keep my family alive but as a graduate student and it was a great opportunity for me. But upon graduating I found, upon finishing my doctorate work I should say I found myself in a tough market where this background gave me a little extra... well a little extra... ammunition or background for employment. I ended up writing to schools and interviewing with schools that were looking for people who, in English departments, who can help with a modest journalism programs. There are a fair number of schools around the country that have one or two or three or perhaps a minor, one or two or three courses or perhaps a minor in journalism and they are housed within English departments. Frequently they work the student newspapers as well and I found that of I think about a dozen people who were finishing their graduate work in English about the same time I did, only two of us were hired. The fact of my journalism experience certainly had a lot to do with that. I was intent then with my wife and young family in finding a school that would... in a community that would be supportive of families that would allow my children to grow up and perhaps to have some experience some nature at the same time. I was attracted to small communities, I ended up going to Slipper Rock which is a community only or was about 2000 people in northwestern Pennsylvania, about fifty miles from Pittsburg. Um I was there four years, we enjoyed our time there it was a good program, I worked as an advisor with the student newspaper and taught, they had just two courses in journalism and I taught both of those as well as a little literature and writing.

(I) What years?

(W) That would have been 1972- 1976, through the spring of 76'. We decided my wife and I mutually that we didn't want to be buried in Pennsylvania, we didn't feel like easterners.

(Chuckles). And so we went looking in the upper Midwest trying to return to the area of our roots and I had several offers including one from Wynona State in Minnesota and here at Northern and we decided on Northern. We liked the program, we like the place very much and we ended up here because it was just the kind of program we liked. It was a new program, it would offer

me an opportunity to shape it pretty much myself and we liked the lay of the land, we liked the landscape, we liked the place. We've always felt that sense of place is important to people and to families. The curriculum since I have been here as I suggested earlier, hasn't really changed very much. We added within a couple of years at least we were able to get approved the practicum and the internship. We have changed the name of the En406 course to Public Affairs Reporting. The curriculum numbers, enrollment and so on has been going up and down modestly. Right in the time I came here in the late 70s and I think one of the motivations for creating the curriculum in first place was an increased and wide spread interest in journalism. In part as a reaction to the Watergate investigations which had become a book and a movie and quite notorious. So there was a lot of interest in that sort of thing, investigative reporting and so on. Numbers would decrease and increase and decrease over the years, we saw the need to have some help with the program, for my sake for one thing. But as far as I am concerned more so for the students sake because I have to teach generally three or four of the courses at least pretty regularly we felt in our department that students deserved another voice, another source in the curriculum other than just the lets say the options in available in non-fiction writing. Somebody with journalism experience who can teach some of these courses and we hired three different people over the years to help with the curriculum, none of them really... none was here more than three years. Let me think about the dates here... the first must have been in the oh about 1984 when we hired a young man who I think had a doctorate in English and who had a tenure appointment but after three years was let go. He taught generally the 206 Survey class every year as well as courses in Compensation and occasionally Literature. As I say I think his background was pretty strictly literature, he had a pretty modest background in newspapers. After that we hired a young women who was with us just a year and then took a position elsewhere, she again had somewhat limited newsroom experience. Finally we hired a third women, a third person a women who had some couple years' experience in news business had also done some public relations work who was primarily a journalism historian and she was also, she left after three years. All these were tenure track positions we had authorization we hire somebody else but that position was combined the year before last with a... no excuse me last year the position was combined with a fiction writing position. We were unable to find anybody who combined well enough those two specialties to hire anybody. The journalism position is well, we have no authorization at this time to hire but I really feel that would be important to our student to do so, I think that it is unfortunate that our students have to so few voices available to them in this curriculum. There are some students who take who end up taking as many as four courses from me and that's not especially healthy as brilliant as I am. Let's see other directions of the curriculum...

(I) Well how would you say the curriculum matches up with other English journalism curriculum just around the country? Is there a certain trend this has been following or does this have uniqueness?

(G) As far as courses are concerned?

(I) Enrollments... yeah everything if you know.

(G) Well...

(I) Were you following in the development of the courses? Were you aware of what was going on around the country and...?

(G) Yeah um no two courses are... no two programs are quite the same but I think a lot of minor programs, modest programs like ours are not too dissimilar. The core courses which I like to insist students take are the News Writing and the Editing and those are the same everywhere, most schools um whether they have major or minor will have some kind of introductory or history course. Some schools have a course they call History of Journalism which is a requirement, we call ours Survey because its only half history and I like to incorporate some other things in that course then history. Many schools of course have majors in journalism but even majors in journalism tend to be somewhat limited, there may be more course offerings available at large schools, there will be a number of different options for the journalism student to take and included under journalism could be journalism print, journalism broadcasting, even journalism public relations. Journalism is adverting in some schools while we of course have a fairly modest program and print journalism for the most part all we can offer. For schools that just have minors in journalism and I suppose there aren't all that many but our programs not unique in particular. I think what one of the advantages that we have, one of the things that makes our program singular and strong is the fact that students have a good opportunity to practice their craft. They have...many graduates have gone on to immediately to work in the newspaper field and a large part of that success is due to the student newspaper. Frequently editors who look at perspective employees in news business are going to be much more concerned over what students have done, what news stories they've written more concerned about those than they are about a major or a minor curriculum or a grade point average for that matter. If a students can show what he has done than that's the chief interest. So we have always, I've always tried to make a point to perspective students to, students coming here as part of the campus visit program as high school seniors for instance and I see many of those students. I try to make sure they understand that what we can offer here is some real good experience, the kind of experience that they can't always get at larger schools, and students transfer here from schools like Michigan for instance, who complain that their chances of doing any work, very much work for the student newspaper were limited. They just weren't likely to get a position, to get a job. Whereas here directly because of the small size of the program um there are plenty of opportunities for students to work for the student newspaper and to get the experience that they need. The curriculum has some connection too at the student newspaper through the practicum; the practicum means that students write for publication for the student paper, that's all they do. No tests, no quizzes, no textbooks. The course is one that insists on writing and writing well for publication under the supervision of an editor and a faculty member who looks at ones copy. Yeah if anything I guess that's what makes our program special and unique and it's not radically unique because many schools have practicums of some kind or another. In fact at some larger schools where there are so many students the department of journalism itself may set up a

newspaper, sometimes supervised by faculty in order... simply in order or largely in order to make sure students gets some experience. The future of our little curriculum is not too clear, though it has been off and on there has been some moves to try and expand into a journalism major. Frankly, I've never been a strong proponent of that which may seem odd but I don't feel that journalist necessarily need a degree in journalism and I'm not alone in that actually. Half the journalist in the country do not have a journalism degrees. Many editors feel they would rather see a student with a major in something that they could write about than a major in journalism, that is perhaps a major in business some business field or economics and political science. We've had majors in home economics, be interested in writing about say fashion I guess and I think that makes sense. Journalism as a curriculum is a fairly new thing anyways and this , well anywhere it's only been early this century that first journalism programs were set up in this country at the University of Missouri originally. Um but there has been some move to create a major and if it can be done carefully I think it might work, as matter of fact I am meeting right now with... had several meetings with people within the CAPS department, that's the communication and performance studies department. The dean is supporting our setting up a joint broadcasting print journalism major and this major would require a fairly minimal requirement press, thirty two credits certainly no more than thirty six, it would expect students to have some background in news writing print as well as in broad casting. We could be able to set that sort of program up without too considerable expansion because the broadcasting already exists so we wouldn't have to add a lot of journalism course nor faculty. But that's not going to happen we all seem to agree unless we can get authorization to hire someone which again not going to happen very soon but I can see our departments probably working out a joint broadcasting print journalism minor perhaps fairly soon. Getting that up and running may take a little longer. Does that cover the ground?

(I) Yeah that's...

(G) Can't think of any other questions?

End of Interview