

# College newspapers continue to report amid pandemic

As classes began for the fall semester of 2020, student newspapers are working to maintain their typical coverage despite many students living off-campus and most classes being held virtually.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit back in March, shutting down universities all over the country, it left plenty of college newspapers with unanswered questions on how they would proceed for the remainder of the spring semester.

“The first two weeks I think we still put out a physical newspaper because there were still some people living on or around campus,” said Abby Schnable, sports editor of [The Loyola Phoenix in Chicago](#). “And then after that it kind of became all online content.”



*Student journalists Giana Longo, Celia Hegarty, Tayler Washington and Riley Frain gather for Monday night production of the weekly edition of The Hawk at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. The newsroom is limited to eight students, who must wear masks and stay six feet apart. Other editors are spread out in the hallway or the business office, and some work from home. (Photo by Mitchell Shields)*

[The Daily Northwestern](#), [The DePaulia](#) and [The Daily Illini](#) all took a similar route, going full digital within the first week or so of classes being moved online.

JJ Kim, editor-in-chief of The Daily Illini at the University of Illinois, said the biggest priority is keeping staff safe and healthy. Much of a reporter's job involves being on the scene, whether to gather interviews or snap photos, but current times have been making those tasks difficult.

"In the middle of a global pandemic, safety is the number one concern," Kim said. "We do meet in person sometimes, but we try to limit the amount of people that are in the office at one time. Meetings that require more than five or six people

at a time, we do ... over Zoom.”

[Illinois](#) has had a strenuous time attempting to slow the spread of COVID-19. As of early October, the state had more than 300,000 cases and more than 8,000 deaths. In response, the University of Illinois, Loyola, DePaul, Northwestern and many other Illinois universities are holding their classes almost entirely online for the fall semester.

Despite the ongoing pandemic, many editors expressed the need to avoid altering their coverage in significant ways.

“We’re trying not to make it any different than past years,” Kim said. “Just because the pandemic’s going on doesn’t mean news doesn’t happen, or if anything there’s more news to cover. So we’re trying to emulate the same reporting practices that we’ve been using in years past, but obviously trying to be more safe about it, wearing a mask, social distancing and sanitizing.”

At Southern Illinois University in Carbondale the Daily Egyptian has continued to publish a print edition and has broken news online about the university’s mishandling of the Covid crisis. The paper disclosed that the university was misinterpreting federal privacy laws in refusing to release the number of students and faculty with Covid. That forced the university to change the policy and begin releasing the numbers. In addition the newspaper disclosed that resident assistants were told to keep quiet about Covid issues and threatened with losing their jobs.

“It’s a little different because it’s not like we can be super close and on the scene for some things, but I know everything’s

functioning as similar as possible to normal," Schnable said. "Interviews are going to be mostly over the phone with the exception of maybe on-the-scene protests going on on campus right now. I know we had reporters on the scene, being socially distanced, wearing masks, being safe, but mostly everything's online."

While student journalists are facing major changes in the production of their publications, they're also having to cope with the crises of losing out on college experiences. Marissa Martinez, a Northwestern senior and editor-in-chief of The Daily Northwestern, said she's saddened that this year will not be the same as years past.

"It is my last quarter on campus, so it's a little disappointing that it's not going to have all the elements that it used to have," Martinez said. "I think it's going to be challenging to kind of keep it together as students and as journalists."

Fellow senior Kim expressed similar feelings.

"As a student, obviously [the pandemic] took away a lot of the college experience in terms of being in class and being with my peers, and being able to experience the little things like walking to class and seeing the morning rush of students walking past me," Kim said. "Or at nighttime, having fun and going out to parties, having a social life."

Loss of an anticipated college experience can be a devastating blow to a young student, whether they're an incoming freshman or a senior hoping to make a few last memories.

Print managing editor of The DePaulia, Ella Lee, said she's impressed with the way her fellow student reporters and editors have withstood the circumstances of the past several months, and she's sure they'll continue to do so.

"It's easy to forget, but everybody is still in college," Lee said. "Taking classes while reporting meaningful stories about the times while keeping on administrators to be more transparent while editing stories for copy while trying to keep it all together personally – living through an actual pandemic – is an incredible feat."

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