

So You're The New Yearbook Adviser

It's not unusual for a new teacher with little or no background in journalism to be appointed adviser of the yearbook.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Laurie Cox Gifford is a senior journalism student at North Texas State University in Denton, Tex., who hopes to teach journalism on the secondary school level. She also hopes to be the yearbook adviser and has been preparing herself to avoid the pitfalls and traumas endured by many new and inexperienced yearbook advisers.*

By Laurie Cox Gifford

A newly-certified teacher, just out of college, finally received the phone call she had been waiting for — a firm offer of a teaching job.

"By the way," the superintendent said disarmingly, "if you take the job, the yearbook goes with it."

"I don't know the first thing about yearbooks," the teacher said.

"That's all right," she was assured. "Neither have any of our previous advisers."

Yearbook advisers say this is a common method of "recruiting" new yearbook sponsors.

"From what I can see, most advisers are people who have had the yearbook dumped on them," says Carol Narsutis, yearbook adviser and journalism teacher at Denton High School in Denton, Tex. Narsutis is advising her tenth yearbook this year.

Even though Narsutis had a bachelor's degree in journalism from Baylor University, she didn't feel prepared to advise her first yearbook. Her journalism background made learning about yearbook production easier though, she says.

"It helps you very basically — with basic vocabulary. You can understand a lot right off. If you say the word 'copy' to someone who has never been in journalism, he says, 'Copy what?' And when your yearbook publisher's representative starts talking about point sizes, you're not lost," she explains.

"But your first year of advising will teach you more about advising yearbooks than four years of college will, I'll guarantee you."

How can new yearbook advisers prepare themselves to produce a yearbook? Narsutis gives several suggestions.

"The number one thing I would recommend for a new adviser is to attend a summer workshop. Spend the money and go. It will force those yearbook staff kids to sit down and work and plan the whole book in the summer. So when you hit the door in the fall, you're not worrying about that, too."

She also suggests reading the publications yearbook publishing companies provide. TAYLOR TALK, she says, is a "great magazine" to read about yearbook production and advising.





New advisers should also look through award-winning yearbooks, she said.

"Plus, you've got to have the kids to work with. I can't afford to have anything but top quality. Ten to 11 top-notch kids, which is what I have, can produce any size book."

Linda Tutt, yearbook adviser at Sanger High School in Sanger, Tex., also had no yearbook experience before she produced her first yearbook. She had no journalism background either. Her teaching fields are business and English.

"When I was interviewed for my first job," she says, "the principal literally cleared his throat and said, 'When we hire a business teacher, we hire an annual staff sponsor. And when we hire an annual staff sponsor, we get a business teacher. You have to take the annual or you don't get the job.'"

Tutt is advising her second yearbook at Sanger after advising six yearbooks for Coppell High School in Coppell, Tex.

"The teachers I know," Tutt says, "were just like me when they took the yearbook: They knew nothing about it."

Tutt says she learned how to produce a yearbook by doing it — with a lot of help from her yearbook publisher's representative. "He held me by the hand the first nine or ten months," she claims.

Tutt, like Narsutis, stresses the importance of workshops for new advisers.

"If I had any suspicion that I was about to be a sponsor," she states, "I would attend a workshop somewhere."

She adds, "New advisers ought to be painfully honest with their representatives. Yearbook representatives will literally save your life if you'll be honest and say, 'I don't have any idea how to do a layout; I don't know what you mean by one pica; what do you mean by Gothic type?' If you don't know those, you're lost."

Having a realistic view of a teacher's job will help new advisers, too, Tutt claims. "High school is not just the classroom. It is the drill team and the cheerleaders and the band and the annual . . . and nobody prepares anybody for this. As fast as you can say it, you can rattle off what we have to do."

She points to a cluttered corner of her classroom. "You run concession stands; that garbage over there in the corner is Thursday night concession stand supplies. It has to be stored in my room," she explains.

Even some of the nation's best yearbook advisers often began with no yearbook experience and little or no journalism background. The late Martha Hankins was

a prime example. Hankins' 34 years advising Paris High School's OWL, in Paris, Tex., brought in 21 consecutive state championships, 19 All-American ratings from the National Scholastic Press Association and, in 1968, a national championship. The 1977 OWL was the last yearbook she advised.

In an interview three years ago, Hankins said that when she got her first adviser's job she had taken only six hours of college journalism. Her teaching fields were English, Latin, history and government.

"Training in college for advising a yearbook is usually poor and unenlightened," she said. "In other words, college is not where it is."

Hankins said she learned to produce a yearbook from: summer workshops; scholastic journalism magazines such as **Scholastic Editor** and **Photolith**; and Columbia Scholastic Press Association at Columbia University and Texas High School Press Association at Texas Woman's University. She also learned from producing her first yearbooks, she said.


Hankins, like Narsutis, suggested that new advisers look at other yearbooks and recruit "hard-working" students for their staffs.

Advisers can also learn from magazines and newspapers, Hankins said. "Today's yearbook needs to use an awful lot of newspaper ideas."

Hankins said the advice and critiques from "outstanding national yearbook judges" will help new advisers, too. She named Col. Charles "Chuck" Savedge and James F. Paschal as the top yearbook judges in the nation. Savedge is the publications adviser at Augusta Military Academy in Virginia and is an editor of CSPA's **Yearbook Fundamentals**. Paschal is the executive director of Oklahoma Interscholastic Press Association.

Although Narsutis and Tutt tell listeners that their first years as yearbook advisers were often frustrating, they also make sure people know they truly enjoy their jobs.

Narsutis says, "That first year was wild." But she adds, "I'd hate it if they took the yearbook away from me. I wouldn't like teaching anything else. You are not bored in this job."

Tutt says, "If I had started my first year and known what it would be like, I probably would have been scared to ever try it. In spite of all that, I wouldn't do anything else. I will go right back to it tomorrow and just beam from ear to ear because I love every second of it." 

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