

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EAST LANSING

COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION ARTS · DIVISION OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

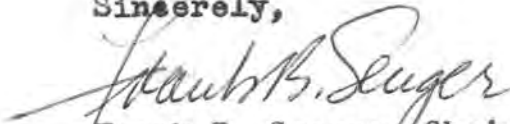
May 5, 1966

President John A. Hannah
319 Administration
Campus

Dear President Hannah:

In line with your request for suggestions from the faculty in re the Ramparts affair, I am enclosing the attached list of suggestions submitted to me by John Murray of the journalism faculty. Some of them seem to have merit, but I leave it to you to make whatever use of them you wish.

Sincerely,




Frank B. Senger, Chairman
School of Journalism

RECEIVED

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM • JOURNALISM BUILDING

April 28, 1966

TO: Frank Senger

FROM: John Murray 

Some suggestions in relation to MSU, Ramparts and public relations.

1. Underlying the whole episode is the role of the University in relation to government, in relation to the community of the general public, in relation to specialized general communities, and in relation to scholars and the academic world.

It seems to me that this University can summarize its basic thrust in three words:

Scholarship and Service.

Using that as the Christmas tree on which the public relations ornaments are to be hung, the Ramparts episode might be used as the basis for several countermoves.

- A. Use the Ramparts article as a springboard to solicit an appearance on Meet the Press and/or Face the Nation.

The question: What is the proper role of a University in modern society? What was the University doing in Viet Nam approached affirmatively. This could be a vehicle to present a positive point of view around the note of scholarship and service. President Hannah does very well on television, and it might be worth the effort to use the Ramparts incident as an excuse to turn the whole thing around.

- B. Print an attractive booklet containing President Hannah's press conference, but going beyond that with an introductory essay asserting the values in the scholarship and service theme. The distribution of this should be to leaders in education and opinion leaders generally nationwide.
- C. Ask Congressman Chamberlain or Senator Hart to insert the press conference in the Congressional Record with attached remarks dealing with the scholarship and service role.
- D. Cover the press conference, again with the broader affirmation attached, in the alumni publications.

2. These random moves do not deal in long-range public relations. This, of course, requires a never-ceasing effort to keep the story of the university flowing to all media. Public relations is much broader than press relations, but press relations are fundamental to public relations since the general public to a great extent gains its overall and generalized impression from the news media. Is it a great university doing a great job or an acceptable university doing an acceptable job -- comes through by the repetition of endless news items about what the university is doing. The long-range impressions in the scholarship community come through other channels, but even the scholarship community is influenced by what it reads in leading newspapers and magazines or sees and hears over the better news programs.

The university has the product in both scholarship and service, and there is no substitute in public relations for performance of quality to be publicized. Having that to start with is to be half-way or more to the goal line (overlook the shifting metaphors, please).

Since newspapers nationally, or even regionally, do not cover Michigan State first-hand, and since geographically Lansing is on a kind of wire service spur, I suspect (but I don't know) that the flow of news from here to the media nationally is episodic. This can be remedied only by direct servicing. The story of the research project here which affects the western Michigan fruit belt might also affect the California fruit grower, but the story is not going to be printed there unless it is translated into news peg for California media. As I indicated, I don't know how far this is done or what manpower is available to do it, but it doesn't do itself. And it's expensive. (The mimeo press release must now occasionally be supplemented by the TV news clip release).

In addition to the directing the news flow by translation into regional and national news markets, there is the creation of news by activities which are of such stature and significance that the press from a distance will come to cover. This means a periodic effort to bring about campus events of national or international significance. (I'm not implying that we don't have them already. I'm saying that in their planning thought must be given to the news aspects which might attract significant press coverage).

3. Since communications is so important in today's world, the very existence, role, and importance of the College of Communication Arts should be publicized to the media and opinion leaders. We have moved into a time when returning to school to update one's knowledge is becoming an attractive proposition to business and industry. Perhaps it could be made attractive to news media people as well with MSU taking leadership to develop this relationship. I don't know how to do this, but I never assume that something can't be done simply because I don't know how to do it. I'm thinking of a year on campus (the Nieman Fellowship idea) for editors, publishers, news executives, and not confined to

Michigan.

4. In the press relations aspect of public relations, no one "wins" every skirmish. That, of course, is what a free press is all about. An institution of this importance will be criticized, sometimes fairly, often unfairly. Presidents, Governors, labor unions, and similar prominent persons and organizations count it off as part of the overhead while maintaining a persistent effort to tell their story affirmatively. It is a time-and-a-half assignment, but usually it gets embroiled in many other assignments. Generally speaking, the university should be very selective on which criticism to answer. The Ramparts issue, I think, required an answer so that there would be a statement of record to refer to in the future. In such circumstances speed of response is vitally important because the formal answer tends to eliminate from the press the quick quote answers from several sources. There should be no attempt to censor the multiple voices but the press usually will give the play to the answer from the highest source.

Ramparts
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May 17, 1966

Dear Professor Senger:

Thank you very much for your letter of May 5 enclosing John Murray's letter to you dated April 28. I have read it with real interest.

Sincerely,

President

Professor Frank B. Senger
School of Journalism
Campus

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cc: John Murray

(Dictated by President Hannah; signed in his absence.)