

Northern Herald

Special Bemidji State University (BSU) Extra!

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A special interim edition, with information of particular relevance to BSU students and faculty

The Mengelkoch Files

The Importance of *The Source*

by Adam Steele, C.P.A. and Editor, Northern Herald

Whenever information is a factor, whether professionally, instructionally, or just in our day-to-day lives, the credibility of the source of that information must be weighed.

When, for instance, an accountant learns auditing, he's taught that one of the first things he must do, in conducting an audit, is to evaluate *control risk*, or simply put, the credibility of the sources of the data to be audited. The old rule of *garbage in-garbage out* applies, and the independent auditor knows that if the company's Controller is a crook, then more substantive testing of his data will be required, before accepting it as correct.

This principle is important in journalism, too, whether one is writing it, or reading it. Some writers are highly conscientious about the accuracy of what they write. Even when doing a major story, they're careful to report all of the pertinent facts and nothing more.

Some publications insist upon this kind of no-nonsense performance by their writers. This results in the reader being able to have a greater reliance upon the information found in those publications. Think about it: Don't you have more confidence in what you read in *The Wall Street Journal* than in a colour tabloid picked up by the supermarket checkout? This is the credibility factor of any publication.

At *Northern Herald*, we take this very seriously. That's why, since 1995, we've been involved in bringing not one, but two, corrupt local police chiefs to justice and letting the public know what actually happened. In the most recent incident (Bruce Preece), the other local paper whitewashed the story. If one wanted to see the actual words the judge used, like "fraud" and "ponzi scheme" they had to read them in the *Northern Herald*.

Bemidji corruption is blatant enough that it's not necessary to embellish the story, to have a headline.

In the Grand Rapids area, *Northern Herald* has been credited for an investigation that eventually got an innocent man out of the prison at Lino Lakes.

And, in 2004, when three BSU students were charged with rape, (and on campus, they were already considered tried, convicted, and hung, so to speak) *Northern Herald* was the only paper that initially

brought readers, both BSU students and others, the full report from the police interrogation documents which tended to cast doubt on the validity of the rape accusation; and later, the follow-up when it was determined by authorities that the rape accusation was false; that it was made by a young woman who voluntarily attended and participated in a group tramping party, but, apparently, had second thoughts the day after and decided to make some trouble for the guys involved.

In our next regular issue, *Northern Herald* will explain how and why BSU students may end up paying for the new proposed Bemidji Events Center in higher tuition and "fees". This cost could be as high as \$600 per student.

Thoroughly investigating each story takes time, which is why *Northern Herald* is less frequent than some papers. If there is question as to the credibility of a story source, one of the tools *Northern Herald* uses is Voice Stress Analysis (a kind of lie detector) to assess the control risk in deciding whether the story should be further pursued. And, unlike some papers, we don't publish the story until we're sure of it. We're sometimes slow and behind schedule, but we won't release each issue until it's something worth reading. If one can't publish *the facts*, there's no point in publishing at all.

At BSU, aspiring journalism students are taught by an instructor known as **Louise Mengelkoch**. (We cannot be sure of her true legal name. She claims to be married to a Mr. Kent Nerburn, but continues to use *Mengelkoch*.) She is a professor, and head of the Mass Comm. Dept., notwithstanding that she has no degree in *journalism*. In 1999, she was involved in a pay equity dispute with the University, and that may have something to do with her current position.

Mrs. Mengelkoch's highest degree is an M.L.S. (Master of Library Science - a librarian's degree), and she also has a Master's in English. Impressive, but not as credentials to teach *journalism*.

A few years back, Mengelkoch published an article entitled "All The News That's Not Fit To Print". The article contained many false statements about the *Northern Herald* and its editor, Adam Steele.

Notified of the facts, the publication which had carried the

article, the online edition of Minnesota Law & Politics, removed it from their site. And Steele filed a libel suit (Beltrami Co. Case No. C3-06-1870) against Mengelkoch, and others connected to the incident.

Credibility. Although the matter has not yet come to trial, preliminary documents have already disclosed Mengelkoch's lack of credibility, actually willful falsifications, in writing the article.

As an example, Mengelkoch wrote in the article, referring to Steele,

"One of my young female students answered his ad for a part-time assistant, worked a day, and then filed a restraining order against him."

As there was no record to be found of any such application for a restraining order, in interrogatories, Steele demanded that Mengelkoch identify the alleged "student" involved in that alleged matter. Mengelkoch answered, under oath:

"The young woman was not a student of Professor Mengelkoch She did not file a restraining order."

Mengelkoch was asked if she ever checked the court records. She responded, "Yes."

Also in the case, a former student disclosed that in one of her regular courses, each year, Mengelkoch would devote a full class session to her libelous article. It was shown in class on an electronic projector and was part of her regular curriculum outline. And at each such class, she offered to provide copies of the article to students.

But when asked whether she had ever exposed students to said article, Mengelkoch answered, again under oath:

"Defendant Mengelkoch does not recall who, if anyone, she suggested read the article"

She was asked if she ever otherwise made the damaging and false representations - accusations of rape, threatening someone with a firearm, and, again, the bogus restraining order - contained in the article, to anyone. Mengelkoch answered:

"Defendant Mengelkoch does not recall"

Apparently Mrs. Mengelkoch doesn't recall these things that she made part of her class outline, and to which she devoted a full day each time the class was taught, as recently as fall 2006. We question whether someone with such a poor memory should be teaching at all. She might not, after all, remember the assignments she'd handed out

the day before.

The student's affidavit also speaks of Mengelkoch's boasting to her class of having published, in a newsmagazine, as fact, another article which she then told the class she'd just "made up" (i.e. fabricated), including the direct quotations therein.

At *Northern Herald*, we do not believe that this is the way that responsible journalism should be done, and it is particularly not how it should be taught. It is an insult to us as journalists, and also to the readers.

So we are making an effort to notify BSU administration and MNSCU trustees of the unfitness of this instructor, in hopes that they may decide that her specific type of teachings would be better suited at a different, more appropriate campus. If there is an institution of higher learning in Hell, that might serve the office.

For now, students in Mrs. Mengelkoch's classes should be aware of her credibility, or lack thereof, as a source of information.

Reckless writing is nothing new. It has been around since the time of Franklin. But we don't believe that it's something that today's journalists should be taught to emulate. It violates the public trust in the media, and in so doing, it damages the credibility of the industry as a whole. In today's fast paced world, more than ever, people need the straight news that they can depend on.

We are informed that many Mass Comm. majors at BSU have abandoned that major there, and expect that, until faculty changes are made, more will likely do so, and with good reason.

Look for the next regular issue of Northern Herald by the Information Desk at the Hobson Union, probably mid-December, or otherwise after the holiday break.

We, at Northern Herald, are always interested in dependable part-time help - either free lance writers, people who want to do commissioned display ad sales, or part-time in-office classified ad clerks (evening work - about 30 hours every 8 weeks). If interested in being a part of the paper that more people in Northern Minnesota turn to for the straight news, call Northern Herald at 218-759-1162

Students who have other specific complaints regarding Mrs. Mengelkoch's practices, and want them brought to the attention of BSU administration or MNSCU are also encouraged to contact Northern Herald at the number above.

This Extra, as well as back issues of Northern Herald, may be found at <http://northernherald.com>