

Columbia Conference: The Gateway to Success

By Logan Ratick, THS Class of 2013

It has become a Trumbull High School tradition for the journalism class to go to the Columbia Scholastic Press Association Journalism Conference. Joining the journalism class this year were members of the *Eagle's Eye* (newspaper) and *Trillium* (yearbook) clubs. In total, twenty one students from Trumbull High School and over a thousand other high school journalists from the New York Metropolitan Area gathered at the prestigious Columbia University on November 1 to sharpen their journalistic skills. Without the generous grant support of the Trumbull Business/Education Initiative (BEI) and the Trumbull Academic Challenge for Excellence (ACE) Foundation, students would have missed out of this exciting opportunity.

Students could pick what they wanted to study, whether it was designing a newspaper or yearbook spread or hearing about the everyday lives of journalists and their paths to successful careers. Advisors from Trumbull High and other schools had their own workshops, which focused on creating motivated staffs and finding ways to make everyone submit articles by their deadlines. During their lunch break, students got to explore Upper Manhattan and dine at trendy restaurants before returning to the campus for more sessions.

"I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of a college student when I attended the Columbia conference," said sophomore journalism student and *Eagle's Eye* staff writer Mary Perrino. "I attended sessions led by professionals in many different areas of journalism." Another journalism student, sophomore Jessica Dib gave her opinion of the trip as well: "The classes were very informative and I had a very good time at the conference." All of the students who attended raved about their time on the trip.

The Trumbull High students learned valuable tips and strategies to becoming better journalists and yearbook editors. "It was an amazing experience for all of the students," said *Eagle's Eye* Adviser, Lisa Acerbo. Aside from the beneficial courses, the students got a glimpse at life on the Columbia University college campus, an internationally recognized university.

The conference also opened the eyes of some of the *Eagle's Eye* editors. "Every year I attend the conference, I come back with new and better ideas for our paper," said Managing Editor of the *Eagle's Eye*, Elizabeth Gillis. *Eagle's Eye* Editor-and-Chief Brett Rosen, a fellow senior, weighed in with, "Our trip to the Columbia conference is an invaluable experience for our [entire] staff. The programs provide numerous ideas and strategies for becoming productive members of the media industry."

With the backdrop of Manhattan and the important skills being conveyed by successful journalists and educators, the 2010 Columbia Scholastic Press Association Fall Conference will be fondly be remembered by the students for the rest of our lives, especially with the diversity of interesting classes offered.

One class consisted of a Q&A with Houston Chronicle sportswriter Jenny Dial, who is a beat writer for the Houston Texans and Houston Astros. Since Texas is known for nationally ranked high school football teams, she also covers the marquee Friday night matchups. Students asked Ms. Dial about her path to journalism and the turning points of her young career. When she was a child, she attended San Antonio Spurs games with her father and took notes in her Hello Kitty notebook, which showed her interest in sports journalism at a very young age.

She attended the University of Oklahoma and got her start with a local newspaper. Fortunately for her, a natural disaster formed her career. When Hurricane Katrina devastated the Houston area, she interviewed high school athletes about how the natural disaster would impact them getting recruited by top NCAA universities. The Chronicle was so impressed that they hired her to be a sportswriter, and this is her first season as the beat writer for the Texans. She has become friendly with star players like Matt Schaub and Arian Foster. During the Roger Clemens steroid scandal, she had the chance to interview him about the allegations of his performance-enhancing drug use. According to her, it was “one of the most unique experiences of [her] career.” For many of the students there, Ms. Dial told us the facts and truths about getting into the industry.

Another intriguing workshop was led by Ray Westbrook, the head of a newspaper at St. Marks School in Dallas, Texas. Their newspaper, the ReMarker, is among the most highly praised high school publications in the United States. One example of their success Mr. Westbrook gave us: One of his students interviewed the mayor of Dallas on a prominent city issue, while the Dallas Morning News could not even meet with him. The Morning News ended up using the boy’s article in their newspaper.

“We try to cover national and community-wide events by connecting them with issues close to home,” said Mr. Westbrook. “For example, one of boys who used to go to our school was a roommate with one of the men tried in the Duke [University] lacrosse case and he was on the team as well. He contributed to one of our articles by saying how his life was affected in a negative way due to his association with the team.” The style his school writes their paper in connects large issues to the situations their community encounters. Westbrook concluded by saying, “If y’all connect issues to topics that are prevalent in your community, your articles will be highly read and praised.”

