

College Yearbooks on the Decline

Contributed by Sheneka Quinitchette -- Black College Wire
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Social networking, lack of interest contribute to loss of a tradition

College yearbooks have been in decline since the 1960s, but the last few years have been the toughest. Yearbooks at one college after another are going the way of the Model T.

Today, about 1,000 colleges print yearbooks, down from 2,400 just 15 years ago, according to a representative of Jostens, a yearbook publisher.

The list of colleges that have stopped printing their yearbooks is endless – Purdue University, Virginia Wesleyan College, the University of Virginia, the University of Missouri and DePauw University. At Townsend University in Maryland about two dozen students out of 20,000 bought their yearbooks. At N.C. Central University the problem is not getting students to buy their yearbook. The cost of the "The Eagle" – about \$13 per copy – is built into student activity fees.

"The biggest problem that The Eagle faces is the participation of students and finding dedicated students to create the publication," said Chantal Winston, a public communication specialist with NCCU's Office of Public Relations.

"The staff numbers have dwindled as the semesters go by," said Winston. "And the turnout for yearbook photos are below our expectations."

While a visual communication major at NCCU, Winston was a student editor of The Eagle from 2004 to 2006. She has now assumed the role of adviser from Melvin Carver, Chair of the Art Department. Carver has advised The Eagle for the last 10 years.

Carver agrees that the biggest challenges facing the yearbook have been student participation, both building a staff to produce the yearbook and getting students to show up to have their pictures taken.

According to Winston, only 82 seniors and 56 freshmen, sophomores and juniors had their photos taken in the October photo session.

In NCCU's 2009-2010 yearbook a total of 181 seniors and 209 underclassmen had their photos taken. According to Carver, 2,500 copies of that edition of The Eagle were printed.

Many commentators on the decline of yearbooks across the country say the phenomenon is best described by the arrival of online social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace.

"With social networks linking hundreds of friends and offering digital photographs and videos the traditional yearbook looks like a bit of a dinosaur," writes a commentator in The Economist.

But many students say they want a traditional printed version of The Eagle. In a recent survey conducted by Winston, over 85 percent of students replied that they want to keep a traditional yearbook at NCCU.

"The book is best," said hospitality and tourism senior, April Fleming. "It is tangible and you can personalize it with your writing."

Mass communication senior Kendrick Jordan said that the traditional yearbook allows students to personalize comments and pictures selectively, not with the entire world. He also said that online you just can't get the same traditional yearbook emotion from turning the pages.

"A traditional yearbook is better because it would have more meaning and emotion than looking at something online," said Jordan. "You can always pull out a book and cherish the memories at any moment."

Sheneka Quinitchette writes for The Campus Echo, the North Carolina Central University student newspaper, which originally published this article.

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