

W.S.J.  
7-7-71

# Stanford University PR Office Impresses Newsmen, Irks Radicals, Dismays Alumni

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PALO ALTO, Calif. — It's a busy time at Stanford University. H. Bruce Franklin, a radical professor who faces suspension for disrupting a speech by Henry Cabot Lodge, denounces Stanford's president, Richard Lyman, as "lie-man" before a crowd of 500. As for Mr. Lodge, he tells the rally, "The appropriate response to war criminals is not heckling but what was done to them at Nuremberg: They should be locked up or executed."

A few days later, the Black Students' Union at Stanford sends a letter to President Lyman concluding that the university "is less than committed to addressing the more pressing problems facing people of color."

Not long afterward, at the office of another Stanford official, some 30 protestors shout "fascist pig" and pound doors in an attempt to harass the official and his visitor, Nikitas Sioris, Greek minister of education.

Within minutes of their occurrence, each of these embarrassing incidents for the Stanford administration is flashed in lengthy, dead-pan detail to wire services, newspapers and radio-TV stations, thence to be trumpeted around the world.

The work of an efficient underground student press? Hardly. The stories all were covered by Stanford's own official news service, which routinely rushes in to publicize stories that would terrify their PR brethren at other institutions.

### Free-Wheeling Flacks

At most schools, the university news service differs little from a corporate public relations counsel. It is the official mouthpiece of the administration and faculty, careful to serve up a bland diet of pro-administration news and cultural announcements, seasoned at times with frothy features on students or image-polishing awards to faculty members.

But at Stanford, "If someone comes here and says to blow up the Empire State Building, we'll report that Joe Blow says to blow up the Empire State Building," remarks Harry Press, a reporter for the Stanford News Service.

The free-wheeling service covers disturbances on the spot (they've been plentiful the past few years), its reporters occasionally dodging a brick aimed at them by demonstrators as well as police tear gas. It also provides a platform for dissidents, no matter how radical, to air their views to the press. According to the Chicago Journalism Review, "Stanford University is perhaps the only institution that runs a news service that is concerned with reporting student views as well as those of the administration or faculty."

For instance, one of the most sacred of cows that a university news service can handle is the appointment of a new president. Yet, when Kenneth Pitzer was named president in 1968 (he later resigned) the service here reported sharp criticism of the appointment by the student body president.

The Stanford operation is largely the product of Robert W. Beyers, an energetic 39-year-old ex-newspaperman with muttonchop sideburns who proclaims that "credibility is the name of the game." Mr. Beyers argues that "failure to deal candidly with any audience may quickly diminish the university's credibility with all of them." Universities that "take the initiative in reporting 'bad' news may find it actually helps protect their good names," he adds.

### Give 'em the Facts

Mr. Beyers recalls newspapers once bannered a story about 2,000 students staging a dormitory food "riot" at a Midwestern university. "The facts were that at most a few hundred students had protested and several had thrown their plates against the dormitory walls," he says. "It happened early in the evening, but no administrator there bothered to call a university reporter. After all, who wanted that kind of story in the papers?"

Bob Beyers joined Stanford in 1961 (he had worked for the University of Michigan news bureau and, before that, for small newspapers in Michigan and Texas) and deemed at the time that the news service, "like the university itself, should serve as a marketplace for ideas" and "encourage thinking about the problems and prospects of the university" as well as "inform the outside world of the think-

ing and achievements of Stanford . . ." He says the administration has never hindered his efforts to implement this policy.

Generally, the news service receives high grades from the media. Abe Mellinkoff, city editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, labels it "damn good" and acknowledges he makes heavy use of its copy. "They handle the putting out of bad news better than any other organization or individual in town," he says. Mr. Mellinkoff also says he's never had "kickback" protesting the inaccuracy of a Stanford-supplied quote, which he says is "unbelievable" and a better record than his own reporters can boast. An Associated Press editor in San Francisco calls the service "remarkable" and "aggressive, honest and professional." An editor for Parade, a syndicated Sunday supplement, says Stanford provides "the best news releases we get from any university."

But the Stanford flacks receive their share of criticism, too. Some radical students at Stanford refer to Mr. Beyers as Bob "Biased" Beyers and claim the service is just a lackey for the administration. Mr. Franklin, the radical professor who subsequently was suspended and who might be fired, accuses the news service of "conducting my trial and convicting me in the press." (The news service typically carried Prof. Franklin's accusations of bias, without offering any rebuttal.)

### "Sleeping Bag Six"

In May 1970, Mr. Beyers and five staff members were barricaded in their offices for several days by students protesting the Cambodian invasion—and the news service. They became known as the "sleeping bag six" on campus. The protestors, Mr. Beyers says, "wanted to have someone look over our shoul-

der. We've worked with protestors on staff but I'm not going to let anyone substitute their judgement for ours."

The Stanford Daily, which hasn't been together unfriendly to the campus radical has editorialized that in radical propaganda "Beyers appears as fascism incarnate, the puppet of the evil Stanford administration. Wrong, on all fronts. The Stanford Service stands in a class by itself for honesty and fairness. There is no other university news service that gives a paragraph to students. Beyers gives pages."

The news service bundles together its releases, good news or bad, into a monthly newspaper, the Stanford Observer, which is mailed to some 120,000 alumni, parents, friends of the university. Not everyone is enamored with the publication. Wrote one Stanford graduate: "If again we should receive it, it will be returned wrapped around a rock which you can give to one of your long-haired students to throw at a postman." Another demanded they stop sending him such "junk," noting, "it is extremely humiliating and degrading to have anyone, the postman, know that I have ever had a connection with the place."

Such reactions are rare, Mr. Beyers claims. Nevertheless, they are duly printed in the Observer.

Mr. Beyers operates on a \$145,000 a year budget and has four aides, all ex-newspapermen. The mailing list totals more than 1,000,000 addresses, though the average distribution per story—they send out more than 1,000 a year—is to some 370 publications or organizations.

### Beating the Wire Services

However, they can't rely solely on campus mails for fast breaking stories, such as campus disruption. Rather, they use Bu Wire, a privately owned San Francisco wire service that usually distributes corporate news to newspapers and the like for clients.

The news service has pushed through Bu Wire as much as 20 short "takes" a day, pages of copy in a single day on one breaking story, dictating from whatever phone is handy. Harry Press, who was day editor of the San Francisco Examiner before joining the news service in 1966, recalls being called in from notes a 12-paragraph story during the 1969 student strike and suddenly realizing he hadn't dictated a story in 15 years."

What cheered Bob Beyers most about the same event was that "we were beating the wire services into their own offices," even though the wire services had staffed the campus during the troubles.