“Informing, Scrutinizing, Debating, and Presenting”:

The Civic Functions of the Bowdoin College Student Newspaper

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In its most basic form, the press in America has four core purposes: to inform, to scrutinize, to debate, and to represent. In achieving these goals, the press serves as a crucial institution of democracy. By informing citizens about public affairs, the press enables them to successfully self-govern. The press closely scrutinizes the government and provides information that protects the public from being wronged. The press also facilitates public debate, a process that is central to a democratic society. Finally, the press acts as the voice of the people in response to and interaction with officials in positions of authority. Within this framework, small-scale media in communities such as

1 James Curran, “What Democracy Requires of the Media,” The Institutions of American Democracy: The Press, ed. Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, (New York, New York: Oxford UP, 2005) 120. Although Curran writes “that the primary democratic tasks of the media are to inform, scrutinize, debate, and represent,” he qualifies that these four functions are not a comprehensive description of the media’s civic function, but instead the description “conveys a basic shorthand from the central contributions that the media should make to the workings of democracy.” Curran, 120.

2 Ibid.
Bowdoin College strive toward the same ideals as those held by major news organizations.

Since 1871, *The Bowdoin Orient* has functioned as the newspaper of Bowdoin College. The *Orient* has modeled itself after professional media, even though it has operated under a different set of circumstances. An *Orient* editorial in November 1962, for instance, stated that the newspaper’s “first aim,” was to provide members of the Bowdoin community:

> with a good, sound NEWSpaper. To this end, we will try to include in the Thursday *Orient* all of the important campus happenings up to and including those of the preceding day.... This type of coverage is not found even in most professional weekly newspapers. To this end, we will also endeavor to present the news in a well-written, journalistic style.

Although the *Orient* served a community that was not a truly democratic society, the paper’s editors traditionally set the same standards for themselves as “professional weekly newspapers.” Certain conditions that are particular to a college setting, however, such as the *Orient*’s complex ties to authority, complicated its goal of functioning like a normal press. Yet, the same factors that have occasionally impeded the *Orient* from serving the public as a true free press have also enabled the student publication to serve the public good in another way: as a space for learning and teaching. Using the four purposes of the press-informing, scrutinizing, debating, and representing—as a framework, this study will examine how the *Orient* served as an institution of democracy at Bowdoin from 1950 to 1965.

**The *Orient*’s Relationship with College Authority**

Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, the *Orient* became increasingly dependent on Bowdoin College support for both financial as well as some managerial aid. Each year, the newspaper received an appropriation from the blanket tax, which was essentially a student

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activity fee. As printing, postage, and telephone bills grew each year, the *Orient* requested larger sums from the blanket tax committee. The newspaper’s 1950 financial report indicates that printing costs rose 227 percent in the preceding decade, while postage and telephone expenses doubled.\(^4\) The *Orient* reported in the same document that, during the preceding year, it had attempted “to increase revenues from all possible sources” and that it had reduced spending by cutting out certain supplies and staff events.\(^5\) Even so, the newspaper requested $1,200 from the blanket tax committee for the following year’s budget, a sum that was 24 percent of its expected income for the 1950-51 year.\(^6\)

Publication expenses continued to rise through the 1950s, and the *Orient* steadily requested more money from the College. By the 1961-62 academic year, the *Orient* received $3,212 in blanket tax aid, a figure representing more than 50 percent of its entire income that year.\(^7\) The following year, in May 1963, printing costs reached a level at which, according to the *Orient*’s advisers, it was “impossible to produce a weekly student paper within the allocated and earned income available.”\(^8\) The *Orient* requested $1,000 in addition to the $3,200 it had received from that year’s blanket tax, while requesting “that the Governing Boards vote approval of absorbing the current year’s deficit.”\(^9\) Due to the fact that the *Orient* was unable to generate its own revenue as other media usually do, it risked its capacity to

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\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid.


\(^9\) Ibid.
freely report on the dealings of the same college authorities that funded its operation. A financially independent press presumably has greater ability to keep the government in check than a press with financial deficits. The Orient’s dependence on its “government” for money, however, was not as problematic as it could have been.¹⁰

For the most part, the College obliged the Orient’s requests for financial assistance and worked with its editors and business staff to negotiate terms of support. Sometimes a faculty adviser, who offered only occasional advice and oversaw the paper from a distance, participated in the Orient’s fiscal management. In 1965, for instance, when it was struggling financially, College President James S. Coles reminded one of the faculty advisers that “last time the Orient was in financial difficulties” he had reviewed the budget with the business manager and editor and “it was determined that approximately 50 percent of the space in the Orient would have to be filled with paid advertising.”¹¹ Coles wrote to the adviser because he had noticed that only 23 percent of the content in the latest issue was advertising and, he said, it was “unfair of any current Orient Board to place such a burden [of debt] on future Boards.”¹²

Coles not only directed college aid to the newspaper, he monitored its attempts to increase revenues. When he noticed that the publication was earning less than it needed to survive, he tried to protect it from entering financial turmoil. Coles further supported the Orient’s economic health by occasionally negotiating with their printer, The Brunswick Record, over high costs. Although communicating with the printer was usually the job of the paper’s business manager, Coles agreed to help after students informed him that the printer had “an effective monopoly on the printing of the Orient.”¹³


¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bowdoin Publishing Company, “Financial Condition: The Bowdoin Ori-
While the *Orient* depended on the College for funds, it did not work closely with faculty or administrators to determine news content. Instead of controlling what was published, the faculty was peripherally involved with business operations. Two professors and two to four students from the editorial and business staffs directed the Bowdoin Publishing Company, an organization that was created in 1912 to govern and publish the *Orient.* According to its constitution, the board of directors supervised the management of the company, considered all major changes in financial policy, and required the student business manager to give a report of the company’s status at least once a year. While the students shared two votes, each faculty member had his own, and as a result half of the total votes belonged to college faculty.

While the structure of the board allowed for considerable faculty control over the *Orient,* Charles Ranlett ’54 described the company as a “relatively low-profile operation” whose “primary function was to serve as the financial agent and advisor to the paper.” Ranlett recalled that the company “did not advise or control [the *Orient*’s] editorial or news content policies.” Edward Born ’57 remembered that the company played a minimal role in governing the *Orient,* as it “met infrequently, mostly to ensure that we were financially solvent and to elect the next editor.” Moreover, Jon Brightman ’60 thought that the

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16 Ibid.

17 Charles Ranlett’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001. Respondents to the survey were primarily former editors-in-chief, business managers, and associate editors of the *Orient.*

18 Ibid.

company was “not very important,” and that its “main function, other than approving expenses, was to select the next Editor in chiefs.”\textsuperscript{20} The Bowdoin Publishing Company probably had minimal influence regarding what was printed in the newspaper each week, but it did have symbolic authority over the publication and oversaw its operations from a distance. The faculty members in the company did not censor or direct the content of the newspaper, but instead kept the publication financially accountable and ensured continuity through the appointment of editors.

The Bowdoin Publishing Company constitution required that at least one of the faculty members on the board be a Bowdoin College alumnus.\textsuperscript{21} Except from 1957-59, Professor of Government Athern Daggett \textquotesingle 25 served both as a member of the board of directors for the Bowdoin Publishing Company and as a faculty adviser to the newspaper. As an adviser, Daggett’s relationship with the \textit{Orient} was “totally arm’s length,” according to Pete Horton \textquotesingle 53, as he did little beyond helping to manage finances.\textsuperscript{22} According to Roger Sullivan \textquotesingle 52, Daggett was “invisible,” and the staff consulted him “only if we were contemplating something truly outrageous.”\textsuperscript{23} Like the faculty members on the board of the Bowdoin Publishing Company, Daggett helped guard the \textit{Orient} from trouble, such as debt and libel, but did not actively influence the content of the newspaper.

Despite his relative nonparticipation in \textit{Orient} affairs, people from outside Bowdoin often saw Daggett as a first point of contact when they had concerns or complaints about the newspaper. After an allegedly disrespectful poem ran in the May 10, 1950, issue, for instance, P.K. Niven of the Brunswick Record (the \textit{Orient}’s printer) contacted Daggett.\textsuperscript{24} Niven explained that the employees at the

\begin{flushright}
20 Jon Brightman’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
22 Pete Horton’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
\end{flushright}
Brunswick Record did not thoroughly read the poem before printing it and that they were “distressed” to later see it in print.\textsuperscript{25} As the Orient’s adviser, Niven saw Daggett as a person who could teach the staff about tasteful journalism and “lay down the law with the editors.”\textsuperscript{26} Niven claimed that he only wrote Daggett “to remind” him of his responsibilities as a teacher, explaining that “at the most unexpected times, a student writer will go beyond the bounds of good taste and even enter the realm of libel. Both, especially the latter, are serious matters—the latter deadly serious for both you and us.”\textsuperscript{27} Although Daggett actually had minimal influence over the content in the Orient, Niven’s letter suggests that Daggett would be implicated in any of the Orient’s mistakes. If Niven was right, and the staff’s slip-ups really were “deadly serious” for Daggett, Daggett displayed a tremendous amount of trust toward the Orient staff with his hands-off advising.

Additionally, The Brunswick Record kept Daggett informed about printing costs.\textsuperscript{28} Although students on the staff were responsible for negotiating printing prices, letters sent to the students were forwarded to Daggett. While he was not involved in actually doing business, Daggett would have been able to keep watch for unusual fees, serving as a safety guard for the Orient rather than an active participant. During the summer, when students were away, Daggett took on greater responsibilities. Although he would forward important messages to the business managers and editors, Daggett generally completed mundane tasks, such as sending letters out to freshmen’s parents asking them to subscribe to the Orient.\textsuperscript{29}

Without the College’s largesse, the Orient may have ceased to

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Robert W. Bannister of the Brunswick Record, note to Athern Daggett with forwarded letter to Orient editor Tom Roche. 16 March 1965. 4.5.2 Bowdoin Orient Publications and Records: 1945, 1959-1967, files of Professor Athern Daggett, a Bowdoin Publishing Company Director, Bowdoin College Special Collections and Archives.
\textsuperscript{29} Athern Daggett, letter to Keith Brooks, 4 September 1964, . 4.5.2 Bowdoin Orient Publications and Records: 1945, 1959-1967, files of Professor Athern Daggett, a Bowdoin Publishing Company Director, Bowdoin College Special Collections and Archives.
go to press each week. Even so, College officials did not ask much in exchange for its aid. The Orient was another venue for learning, both for the staff and the whole student body. Ranlett explained that the administration was “cordial and helpful but it did not expect that we would automatically print press releases and nothing else.”30 The College imposed only a few proactive regulations on what could be published, such as a ban on beer advertisements.31 Even in that case, it offered subsidy for the money that was lost by not printing those ads.32 According to Horton, “the administration was very cool about letting us grow up at our own pace in our own way,” and its relationship with the Orient was “cordial,” “respectful,” and “arm’s length.”33

Rather than proactively imposing laws and standards, college administrators responded, sometimes harshly, to the Orient’s content or the staff’s activity. The absence of explicit rules gave the staff the freedom to publish what it chose, but the staff’s awareness of possible repercussions had a mild tempering effect. Brightman recalled that there was “never anything written down as to what was right or wrong” or any formal supervision, but “the implied oversight was ever present and strong.”34 He explained that if the staff was “ever to step over the line or do something ‘wrong,’” it would have to answer to a dean, whose “punishment would have been severe and quick.”35 Roger Sullivan ’52 claimed that the Orient’s relationship with the administration was “complex.”36 He reasoned that the College “proudly asserted” that the Orient was an independent newspaper, but “in fact the administration kept a close eye on what we printed and maintained control by post-

32 Ibid.
33 Pete Horton’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
34 Jon Brightman’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
35 Ibid.
publication censorship.” Sullivan, a Roman Catholic, explained how he was punished after publishing an editorial that called for an end to compulsory chapel. He said the editorial was intended as “nothing more than a minor rebellion against an annoying requirement,” but the president of the College interpreted it “as an attack on the Protestant character of the school by a Catholic!” As punishment, Sullivan was banned from graduation and received his diploma by mail, “all because my ‘boycott’ of chapel constituted a failure to complete a requirement for graduation.”

Though it serves as an extreme example, Sullivan’s experience fits into the model of how the College dealt with perceived mistakes on the part of the Orient. The College did not try to censor or control the operation; instead, it sought to protect the newspaper from trouble and occasionally discipline the staff. Indeed, the College’s power over the Orient was substantial, as it could have easily shut down the paper by simply cutting off its financial support. As a result, the aid, protection, and discipline that College officials assigned to the Orient were hardly characteristic of a national press’s relationship with public authorities.

Informing Readers of Bowdoin College Happenings

In order to increase its readership, and its resultant revenue, the Orient had to convince potential subscribers that ordering the newspaper was a worthwhile investment. Before school began each fall, a representative of the Orient wrote a letter to the parents of incoming freshmen, explaining the value of a subscription. The letter sent in the fall of 1964 informed parents that although their son would enjoy Bowdoin, “he will also be very busy, in fact, that he may not be able to write as often as he would like.” Its author, Orient Business

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Bruce N. Leonard, Business Manager for the Orient, letter to parents of incoming freshmen, September 1964, 4.5.2 Bowdoin Orient Publications and Records: 1945, 1959-1967, files of Professor Athern Daggett, a Bowdoin Pub-
Manager Bruce N. Leonard, argued that as “the principle connection between parents and undergraduates,” the *Orient* could make up for a lack of communication between parents and their sons.\(^{41}\) A letter sent the following August explained how the *Orient* was just as important as a professional, local newspaper. This letter described the *Orient* as parents’ “personal newspaper to find out about the things that never make your hometown papers-what is happening in the student council, the daily activities of the fraternities, and the changing attitudes on student life and behavior.”\(^{42}\) The *Orient* often compared its reporting of news to professional papers, and covering the news of Bowdoin “in a well-written, journalistic style,” was a goal that the newspaper made explicit in a 1962 editorial.\(^{43}\) Moreover, the *Orient* claimed that the timely coverage it provided of important campus events was “not found even in most professional weekly newspapers.”\(^{44}\) Horton said that he and other members of the staff “modeled ourselves after the New York Times as far as news style was concerned.”\(^{45}\) Jim Anwyll ’55, however, recalled that although the New York Times Style Book was the staff’s “Bible,” the *Orient*’s motto was “All the news that fits, we print.”\(^{46}\)

The *Orient* aspired to be of the same quality of a professional press, but it often fell short of this goal. Sometimes writers would subtly editorialize in their news stories or provide information that they recognized as incomplete. In one article about an unusually high number of faculty members leaving the College, for instance, the writer acknowledged that “there is a considerable danger of drawing illicit

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) Keith Brooks, Peter Maurer, Laurence Weinstein, letter to parents of incoming freshmen, 12 August 1965, , 4.5.2 *Bowdoin Orient* Publications and Records: 1945, 1959-1967, files of Professor Athern Daggett, a Bowdoin Publishing Company Director, George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College.


\(^{44}\) Ibid..

\(^{45}\) Pete Horton’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.

\(^{46}\) Jim Anwyll’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
inferences” from the faculty quotations in the story because they did not necessarily represent the opinions of the entire faculty.47 However, after warning the reader not to make such assumptions, the writer himself drew inferences based on admittedly incomplete knowledge, reporting that his discussions with 13 faculty members “made it clear that whatever problems there might be with the faculty are inextricably involved with all the fundamental problems of the College.”48 Moreover, the writer hypothesized about the administration’s reaction to the departure of many faculty members, but it is unclear as to whether the reporter actually spoke with a representative from that body. Instead, the writer assumed that “the College presumably did not wish to let go [of some of the departing faculty.]”49 Then, with no supporting evidence, he asserted that “the College lacks the ability to retain men it considers valuable.”50

The Orient’s occasional failure to reach a satisfactory level of professionalism affected its ability to give readers fair, complete news coverage. For the most part, it was the Orient staff’s faulty practices, rather than its unorthodox relationship with authority figures, that prevented it from conducting excellent reporting. Ranlett recalls that “the administration never asked for a preview of material of individual articles, or the entire paper, prior to its publication.”51 Keith Harrison ’51 did not recall “any pressure from the College on Orient content,”52 and Edward Born ’57 agreed that during his time on the staff “no one ever interfered.”53 College officials gave the staff space to report the news they chose without pressure to run or cut certain stories. However, this lack of guidance also undermined the newspaper’s democratic aims. The press best serves the public by providing the most fair, accurate account of events. Perhaps more active faculty

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Charles Ranlett’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
52 Keith Harrison’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
involvement in the *Orient*’s production would have increased the fairness and accuracy of its reporting and thus would have enhanced its democratic function.

**Scrupulizing Bowdoin College**

The *Orient*’s dependence on the College for certain resources did not stop the newspaper from closely examining Bowdoin’s administrative practices and running stories that cast the College in an unfavorable light. Just as editorials often disparaged College policies, the reporting in certain articles was equally negative. The article run at the end of the 1961-62 academic year about the “faculty exodus” characterized Bowdoin as an undesirable place to teach. The ramifications of this reporting could have been significant. In describing Bowdoin as a place that struggled to hold on to valuable members of its faculty, the *Orient* threatened the College’s ability to attract faculty in the future.

The following year, the *Orient* published a curriculum evaluation that could have been just as embarrassing for the College. The paper dedicated an entire page of the newspaper to evaluating the courses offered that year. Each course was listed with the instructor’s name, the number of students who rated the course, and an average rating of the course out of 100. The scores ranged from 24 to perfect 100s, and it revealed trends in student opinion of certain departments or faculty members. The *Orient* conducted the survey by sending forms to all 360 members of the junior and senior classes. Of those, 163, or 45 percent, were returned, and every result was published. The survey captured less than a quarter of the student population, but the results were published anyway. The *Orient* admitted in a preface to the data that “the results published below are [not] definitive or wholly accurate; the questionnaire was much too brief for any far-reaching conclusions


55 Ibid.
to be drawn from it, and we are acutely aware of the failure of our form to measure up to the standards dictated by socio-psychological factors and ground rules for operation.” The Orient acknowledged that its survey was not necessarily representative of true student opinion, and the results for courses with only two or three responses were “next to meaningless.” Although the Orient intended to provide an important service to students and college officials though publishing the survey results, the incomplete data may have been misleading and ultimately harmful. Perhaps a more engaged faculty adviser would have made the staff aware that publishing the survey was unprofessional and irresponsible. Moreover, a watchful adviser may have prohibited the results from being published due to the embarrassingly low scores that some of the professors earned, regardless of the survey’s accuracy. By excluding college officials from the planning of each issue, the newspaper staff had more freedom to write about topics that might tarnish Bowdoin’s reputation. However, newspaper staff lacked access to instruction regarding how to cover those topics in the most professional way.

Although the Orient had the freedom to engage in investigative journalism, it did not do so very often. For the most part, the newspaper gave journalistic accounts of events about which people on campus would have already been aware. The editorials were sometimes controversial; the news stories rarely were. Most of what the paper reported was predictable. For Joshua Curtis ’50, the Orient “was simply a paper which carried news of campus events, current or future.” Spencer Hunt ’62 did not “remember any [articles, letters, or editorials] that provoked much controversy.” He added that “the late 50s and early 60s were rather placid, in retrospect, at least.”

Likewise, Horton ’53 attributed the Orient’s uncontroversial nature as a product of the time period. “In the wake of WWII with the Korean War brewing, The Quiet Generation was not looking for any more

56 “Students Rate Curriculum in Promised Orient Poll.”
57 Ibid.
58 Joshua Curtis’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
60 Ibid.
problems,” Horton explained. It is unclear whether the newspaper’s publication freedom was contingent upon its seldom taking advantage of that freedom, because the Orient infrequently scrutinized Bowdoin itself.

Providing a Forum for Debate

In addition to helping “disseminate campus news,” Albert Lilley ’54 said that the Orient “provided a forum for a wide variety of views, ranging from thoughtful to totally irresponsible.” Creating a space for the publication of student opinions reflects the traditional media’s role of providing a forum for public debate. Such a space should encourage a vibrant marketplace of ideas that improve public rationality and government. One of the Orient’s apparent aims in publishing the news was to “arouse student opinion,” a goal that was incessantly emphasized and even explicitly included in the body of some of the stories it published. For instance, the last sentence of one story read: “It is our hope that this article, in displaying some of the issues currently discussed will inform and stimulate discussion among our readers.” Similarly, a 1962 editorial expressed the Orient’s desire to energize student voice:

It is doubtful that the paper will ever fully satisfy its audience, but criticism, rather than apathy, would definitely serve as a guide. Consequently, the Orient will be gauged to arouse student opinion not only of the content of an individual article but also that of the entire paper.

Likewise, an editorial published the following year urged students “who sneak around corners making sly suggestions for editorials and

63 Curran, p. 126  
66 Ibid..
features stories” to contribute their ideas to the Orient.67

Despite the Orient’s continual efforts to activate student speech, it often failed to do so. The majority of letters to the editor were signed by alumni, rather than students. Horton said that during his time on the staff, “Letters to the editor were rare and bland. Usually thanking someone for doing something that they got paid for.”68 Ranlett further remembered that “articles, letters, and editorials usually elicited little campus-wide discussion.”69 Although it is possible that the low level of student contributions to the newspaper resulted from a fear of punishment by the College, it is more likely that students were not inspired or provoked by the Orient’s news and editorials. While the Orient relentlessly asked for students to contribute to its pages, its content rarely seemed to motivate them to do so.

Representing Bowdoin Students

Like most newspapers, the Orient reserved a space in each issue for an editorial, written by members of the staff. Although the opinions were the personal views of the staff members who wrote them, they generally commented on issues that were relevant to the entire community, such as regulations for fraternities, the existence of class on Saturdays, or in many cases, the editorial policy itself.70 Some of the editorials were clearly written from the perspective of an Orient staff member, but for the most part submissions advocated for causes that would concern most students. In this way, the Orient took on the press’s role in being, according to Curran, “the voice of the people, representing to authority the citizenry’s views and expressing

68 Pete Horton’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
69 Charles Ranlett’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
the agreed aims of society.”71

In response to “a few rumblings” concerning the lack of controversy in the Orient’s opinions, an editorial from November 1962 sought to clarify the newspaper’s philosophy about editorials. While the staff stated in an earlier issue of the semester that it had wanted to “arouse student opinion,” this editorial modified that aim, stating that the Orient did not believe that “mere ‘controversiality’ or ‘stimulation of thought’ is a sufficient objective for an editorial.”72 Instead, the staff argued that an editorial “should be written as to produce favorable results.”73 Criticisms of the editorial policy were common. The previous semester, the Orient solicited student opinion about the policy and published the responses, which were overwhelmingly negative, on the front page.74 One student wrote that he “didn’t care for” some of the editor’s remarks, and he felt the editor was “not representing the entire student body.”75 On the same page, another student expressed a different understanding of the editor’s role of representation. He wrote that although he didn’t “agree with everything [the editor] says,” he thought that “the editorials are the editor’s personal opinion.”76 One entry called the Orient’s editorials “promising, but not as powerful as they should be,” and another student stated, “I abhor the advent of sensationalism on the pages of the Bowdoin Orient.”77 A senior expressed that he was not bothered by the content of the editorials “as long as the editor keeps the pages open for communication from differing points of view,” which he believed the editor had been successful in doing.78

Many of these complaints were tied to students’ disagreements

71 Curran, p. 120
73 Ibid.
75 Ibid. Letter from Richard Cobb, Bowdoin Class of 1965.
76 Ibid. Letter from Gary Colleti, Bowdoin Class of 1962.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
with the arguments made in editorials. If they saw the Orient as the sole voice of the students to authority, it would be natural for students to be personally offended by editorials with which they disagreed. Other students believed that instead of reflecting the opinions of the students who wrote the editorial, the editorial was the voice of the College. In 1963, a group of students wrote a petition rebuking the Orient’s editorial staff for printing an endorsement of Lyndon Johnson.79 The letter reasoned that because “the Orient is supported by the College, an endorsement by the Orient must be construed as an endorsement by Bowdoin College and by all members of the College.”80 In 1963, the Orient ran a possibly libelous editorial mocking the restaurant chain Howard Johnson and called it “the pest of the highways.”81 After it was published, Bowdoin’s controller, James Granger, asked lawyer John A. Mitchell whether there could be legal consequences to the publication of the editorial. Mitchell responded that the Bowdoin Publishing Company was “completely responsible for the legal consequences of libelous articles.”82 Furthermore, he speculated that “Bowdoin College itself could be held responsible for the libelous articles in the Bowdoin Orient,” because the Orient had been subsidized by the College since 1924, used the College’s name (in its full name, The Bowdoin Orient), functioned as the college paper, and had two faculty members on its board of directors.83 The incident is an example of the continual struggle the Orient, the College, and outsiders faced in determining whose voice the Orient actually represented.

80 Ibid.
82 John A. Mitchell, letter to James P. Granger, Bowdoin Controller, 5 March 1964. 4.5.2 Bowdoin Orient Publications and Records: 1945, 1959-1967, files of Professor Athern Daggett, a Bowdoin Publishing Company Director, Bowdoin College Special Collections and Archives.
83 Ibid.
Conclusion

Although the Orient strove to achieve the same level of professionalism as mainstream newspapers, its ties to Bowdoin authorities both supported and constrained this goal. The newspaper reached some level of competence in all four aspects of the press’s democratic function. First, it informed readers on a weekly basis of major and minor events at Bowdoin without pressure from the College regarding what to print. Further, it had the freedom to closely examine sensitive issues at the College but did so rarely, and it sought student opinion regularly but received an unsatisfactory response. Finally, it represented a form of student opinion to authority figures in its editorials, although there was confusion about whose voice it represented. The newspaper also made mistakes and received criticism. In his assessment of the Howard Johnson’s editorial, for instance, attorney Mitchell explained to Granger that “in exchange for the privileges of ‘editorial freedom’ there are necessarily responsibilities attached.”84 He urged Granger to make the staff aware “of the fact that with privilege goes responsibility,” because in his “mind the publication of the editorial in question represents a complete lack of responsibility.”85 Although there is no record of whether the College administration followed through with these suggestions, the fact that they were communicating with a lawyer suggests that the Orient staff received criticism for publishing the editorial. While the staff did not rely on guidance from the College very often, it was afforded a sense of safety that would not have existed in the truly public sphere. Outside Bowdoin College, the consequences of errors, such as failing to earn enough money to operate or printing libelous or editorialized news, could have been far more serious. At the same time, in the rare cases of punishment, as with Sullivan who could not attend his graduation after publishing an editorial, the Orient’s connection with the College made consequences of its actions more severe than they would have been outside of Bowdoin.

Students both on and off the staff used the Orient as a sort of

84 John A. Mitchell, letter to James P. Granger, Bowdoin Controller, 5 March 1964.
85 Ibid..
experiment in order to learn how newspapers function as an institution of democracy. While the Orient fell short in emulating the civic function of the traditional press, it served the public through educating it. The idea of the Orient as a free press is one that repeatedly appeared on the editorial pages in the early 1960s. Although the Orient did not actually enjoy all of the freedoms that a traditional press did, it frequently referenced its First Amendment rights. At the end of an editorial concerning fraternities’ privileges, for instance, which certain faculty members allegedly tried to cut from the newspaper, the Orient printed a note that asserted its awareness of the freedom of the press:

Should the time ever come when members of this faculty, not contended with the attempted destruction of individual freedom by the leveling of fraternities, achieve silencing of the most articulate (indeed-the only) organ of student opinion [the Orient]...we might as well throw up our hands and let forces even more undemocratic than racists run rampant.

To emphasize its seriousness on the matter, the editorial staff reprinted, on the same page, the article “College Press and College Prejudice,” which originally appeared in a separate publication. This article identified a number of the problems that the Orient apparently believed it was confronting. At the end of the editorial about fraternity privileges, the Orient reported that “a certain department on this campus [attempted] to have this newspaper suspended from publishing.” It is unclear how the “certain department” made this attempt, but the Orient staff apparently saw its freedom of expression being threatened.

“College Press and College Prejudice” warned editors against being “cajoled into playing into playing down stories of scandals and burying paragraphs on fifth-page stories,” and in explaining the

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89 “To the Governing Boards.”
freedom of the college press, the article mentioned there existed “nuances that qualify that freedom.”90 The Orient’s inclusion of this article, and its explicit reference of a free press in its editorial, reveals the newspaper’s awareness of its own rights and responsibilities. Moreover, working for the publication added to the education of the individuals on the staff. Being an editor for the Orient “certainly helped,” as Joshua Curtis ’50 claimed, to “write more clearly and separate facts from opinions.”91 Other editors described their time working for the paper as “the most important thing I did at Bowdoin,”92 something that provided “meaningful supervisory and leadership opportunities with the challenges and the growth they afforded,”93 an activity that “considerably enriched my experience, but it hurt my grades,”94 and an experience that “fostered life-long interest in writing and print communications.”95 Individuals on the staff experienced personal growth through the creation of a newspaper that served the larger Bowdoin community. The Orient was not perfect, and from time to time, college employees or older readers reprimanded the staff for the content in the paper. The Orient often responded by admitting that it “may have been off base”96 or that it was “not infallible.”97 As Orient staff members learned about the civic function of the press, the publication’s readers also gained an education.

90 “College Press and Campus Prejudice.”
91 Joshua Curtis’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
92 Pete Horton’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
93 Charles Ranlett’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.
95 Pete Horton’s response to a survey conducted by Belinda Lovett, 2001.