

WTTW COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

REPORT ON NEWS STANDARDS

October 18, 2016

Background

On June 17, 2014, Mary Field, the Executive Producer of "Chicago Tonight", met in a public, plenary session with the WTTW Community Advisory Board. In response to questions from the CAB, Ms. Field disclosed that there existed written "News Standards" governing the work of journalists employed by WTTW. The CAB thereafter requested of WTTW management that a copy of the "News Standards" be made available for review by the CAB. Management initially declined to produce the "News Standards" to the CAB, stating that the "News Standards" were not a public document. The CAB appealed in writing to management asking management to reverse its position and Reese Marcusson, the Chief Operating Officer of WTTW, acted favorably on the CAB's request and transmitted a copy of the "News Standards" to the CAB. In follow-up communications with the CAB Mr. Marcusson acknowledged that in sharing the document with the CAB management was making the document public. No restrictions were placed by management on the CAB's use or public dissemination of the "News Standards". The WTTW "News Standards" were appended (as Exhibit D) to the CAB's Annual Report for 2014, and were made public with the publication of that report on January 7, 2015.

A preliminary reading of the "News Standards" showed that they were dated as of May 5, 1988, and did not appear to have been revised or updated in the intervening 27 years. The text was prolix and, at places, of questionable grammar and syntax. It set forth some considerations of law that CAB members recognized as having since been superseded by developments in statutory, regulatory, and case law. The CAB decided, therefore, to establish a special Committee on Journalistic Standards and Ethics to review the "News Standards" and to report to the CAB, with recommendations, regarding them.

Joseph A. Morris, the Chairman of the CAB, was appointed to chair the special Committee, and the other members of the committee are Denise Avant, Joe Bosco, Barbara Cragan, Kimberly Frost, Mary Lou Mockus (who is also Vice Chairman of the CAB), and Rita Tandaric. In addition, another current CAB member, Susan C. Ivers, served on the committee, as did two former CAB members, Ava Holly Berland (who was also the CAB's Secretary) and Chet Szerlag.

Of those who have served on the committee, Ms. Avant, Ms. Berland, Mr. Morris, and Ms. Tandaric are lawyers. At one time Mr. Morris was the Chief of Staff and the General Counsel of the United States Information Agency, which operated large news organizations (including, for example, the Voice of America radio service and the WorldNet television service), which employed large numbers of professional journalists. Ms. Berland was an attorney on the staff of the Federal Communications Commission, which regulates public broadcasters, including WTTW.

In addition, Mr. Bosco, Ms. Frost, and Mrs. Mockus have all worked in the telecommunications industry and, from the station's launch until her retirement from the station, Mrs. Mockus was on the staff of WTTW itself.

The Committee developed a preliminary agenda of questions to study and decided to enlist the assistance of experts in journalism and ethics to help educate them. The following experts were contacted and, as volunteers, met with the Committee at various times over several months to discuss how broadcast journalism is practiced, the roles played by news standards and ethical considerations in that work, and the text of the 1988 WTTW News Standards themselves. They were:

- **Casey Bukro.** Mr. Bukro is retired from a career of nearly five decades as a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, where he covered education, the environment, and other beats. He has chaired the ethics committee of the Headline Club of Chicago, which is the Chicago chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. In addition, he served on the national ethics committee of the Society of Professional Journalists, and was the principal draftsman of the SPJ Code of Ethics, which was adopted by the SPJ in 2011. With Professor Ozar (*see infra*), Mr. Bukro founded, and continues to lead, the Ethics Advice Line for Journalists, originally a telephonic "hotline" for reporters and editors now expanded to include a website, through which journalists across America and around the world can and do receive guidance in connection with professional ethical problems they encounter in the course of their work.
- **Thom Clark.** Mr. Clark is professor emeritus of media and communications at Columbia College in Chicago. He founded and for many years led the Community Media Workshop. From about 2003 to about 2008 he was the Chairman of the WTTW Community Advisory Board. He has also served on the similar advisory body of WBEZ-Radio, the National Public Radio affiliate station in Chicago.
- **Christopher FH Robling.** Mr. Robling is currently a principal of Clearspan Strategic Communications Company, a public relations and media advisory firm in Chicago. As an adjunct faculty member he has taught journalism and communications at a number of colleges and universities in the Chicago area. For several years he was a daily on-air news anchor for WMAQ-Radio in Chicago, a commercial all-news radio station. Before that he co-hosted a daily public affairs program on WBEZ-Radio (NPR Chicago). He is also the Treasurer of the City Club of Chicago, which is a major underwriter of "Chicago Tonight" on WTTW.
- **David T. Ozar.** Mr. Ozar is professor emeritus of philosophy at Loyola University of Chicago, where he specialized in the field of ethics, especially as applied to such professions as medicine and healthcare, business management, and journalism. With Mr. Bukro (*see supra*), he co-founded and co-directs the Ethics Advice Line for Journalists, formerly housed at Loyola University and now housed at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University.

In addition, members of the Committee reviewed house news standards, ethical codes, and similar guidelines that have been adopted by numerous newspapers, television networks, television and radio stations, and other news organizations in the United States, including the PBS Editorial Standards and Policies (June 24, 2011), and did substantial background reading about journalism and the news business.

Recent Events

On August 23, 2016, Mary Field, the Executive Producer of “Chicago Tonight” met with the plenary CAB and announced to the CAB that “Chicago Tonight” has engaged the services of V. J. McAleer, the former Senior Vice President of WTTW for Production and Community Engagement, to rewrite and update the News Standards. In a subsequent interview with the Chairman of the Committee, Mr. McAleer stated that it is envisioned that his project will be completed in January 2017.

On September 20, 2016, Mr. McAleer met with the Committee and, at the Committee’s invitation, sat in on the Committee’s session with Thom Clark. After the discussion with Mr. Clark ended and Mr. Clark was excused, the Committee conferred directly with Mr. McAleer, describing in general terms many of the views percolating within the Committee.

On October 14, 2016, the Committee adopted its report, and the Committee report was promptly disseminated to the full CAB.

Aims of this Report

Because WTTW, through “Chicago Tonight”, has now decided to undertake its own review and revision of the 1988 News Standards, the CAB believes that it is no longer necessary for the CAB to adopt a formal recommendation urging WTTW to do so.

Further, because Mr. McAleer has been asked to submit his draft of revised News Standards in January 2017, the CAB believes that the CAB’s issuance of its recommendations regarding the form and substance of revised News Standards should not be withheld for incorporation in the CAB’s 2016 Annual Report. The CAB’s 2016 Annual Report will not be drafted, adopted, transmitted to WTTW’s trustees and management, and made public until December 2016 or January 2017, at which time the recommendations may arrive too late to be of utility to Mr. McAleer in the project on which he is now embarking.

For those reasons, the Community Advisory Board respectfully transmits this report to the Management and Trustees of WTTW. Because of the intervening decisions made by WTTW to revise and update the New Standards and its engagement of a highly respected contractor — V. J. McAleer — who, in the view of the CAB, is well-qualified to undertake the assignment, the report

does not need to argue that revision of the News Standards is necessary. It is now universally agreed, including by WTTW management, that revision is required. Rather, the report focuses on stating key principles that, in the view of the CAB, should guide the revision of WTTW's News Standards.

Principles to Guide the WTTW News Standards

1. ***The Ultimate Aim of Journalism Is to Inform the Public.*** The business of journalism is the gathering and dissemination of information to the public to permit individual members of the public to make decisions by which they will guide and improve their lives. Such information may be used by them for reasons as countless as the individual definitions of happiness that they pursue, exalted and mundane, ranging from resolving for which candidate for a public office to vote; deciding whether or not to invest in a certain business; choosing what product to buy, what concert to attend, or what educational course to take; and even deciding whether or not to carry an umbrella on a particular day as one leaves one's home to attend to one's daily affairs. Because in this enterprise journalists are, to one extent or another, the agents of the public whom they serve, it is necessary that information is obtained without violation of laws and precepts of human decency that protect the rights, including property rights and legitimate expectations of privacy, of others, and that in the communication of the information there is no intention to skew facts or serve private or partisan interests (especially when such interests are undisclosed). To those ends, then, it is essential that, to the extent practicable, the information be (a) accurate; (b) understandably communicated; (c) timely; (d) honorably obtained; and (e) fairly and responsibly presented.

2. ***Public Media Journalism Has the Additional Aim of Serving Publics Underserved by Commercial Media.*** Commercial television stations are in business for the entirely legitimate primary purpose of making a profit. To that end they offer news programs to viewers in the hope of attracting as many viewers as possible who will then be exposed to commercial messages that advertisers pay commercial broadcasters to present. Public broadcasters, not being in business to sell advertising and to make a profit, can and should offer news programs without having the maximization of the size of the potential audience as the dominant determinant of their timing, form, and content. It must be acknowledged that, for the most part, commercial news organizations have superior abilities to gather and report news that is greater in quantity, greater in immediacy, and greater in popularity of subject than do public news media. Public news organizations can and should offer news programs that are superior by qualitative measures, such as strength of analysis, maturity and ripeness of thought, and devotion of attention to subject-matters and populations that, although significant, do not necessarily register as important by the quantitative measures by which commercial broadcasters define the viewerships they seek to attract. In doing so public media serve the public in ways above and beyond the service rendered by commercial media. In addition, through attention to the quality of programming and to serving communities (whether defined by interests, by demographics, by economics, by geography, or otherwise) who are not particularly attractive to, or attracted by, commercial television, public media can effectively compete with other content-disseminators.

3. ***The Purpose of Journalistic Standards and Codes of Ethics Is the Protection of the Public.*** Increasingly news is gathered and disseminated by persons and entities (particularly via blogs, social media, and other channels facilitated by the internet; by talk shows on radio; and by comedy shows on commercial television) who may not have training and experience in journalism, who are not guided and critiqued by peers and editors, and who are not subject to the discipline of the marketplace. WTTW holds out to the public that, although it is not subject to the discipline of the marketplace in the ways that commercial media are, the news and information that it provides are gathered and disseminated by persons who have professional education and experience; whose activities are overseen, guided, and critiqued by editors and peers; and whose conduct is controlled by known and articulated standards and precepts. This inspires consumers of WTTW's news to have confidence that the information gathered and disseminated by WTTW has been legitimately acquired, is reliable, and is fairly and responsibly presented.

4. ***Professional Self-Regulation by Journalists Is Essential.*** A free society does not admit of governmental regulation, control, or censorship of journalism, nor does it permit government to restrict or license the practice of journalism as a profession. This is especially the case in the United States, where the freedoms of speech and of the press have enjoyed constitutional protection since the founding of the nation, particularly through the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, and, independently, by comparable safeguards set forth in the State Constitutions of Illinois and of every other State in the Federal Union. Under American law and in America's culture, therefore, governmental licensure, regulation, and disciplining of journalists is impermissible. For these reasons, professional self-regulation by journalists and by the organizations that employ them is essential.

5. ***Journalistic Standards and Ethical Precepts Should Be Shared with, and Readily Accessible to, the Public.*** Because the standards and ethical codes exist for the protection of the public, their texts should be made public and should be accessible to the public at all times. The fundamental flaw in the 1988 News Standards is that they were not intended for public dissemination and, until they were made public by the CAB (with the consent of WTTW management), were never seen by the public. Making the standards public means that they can be used by the public to hold journalists to account on a known set of precepts and expectations, that can be openly and publicly discussed and that can foster fair and transparent public criticism of the work of journalists. The standards should be posted on the WTTW website in forms such that they can be read on the website and can be readily downloaded by the public. The public should be informed and periodically reminded during broadcasts that WTTW is governed by its news standards and should be informed as to where the text of the news standards can be obtained.

6. ***Journalistic Standards Should Be Used as Regular Teaching Tools for the Staff.*** News standards should not be held in reserve for reference only when there is a crisis, a controversy, a scandal, or litigation. Rather, their adoption should be accompanied by a careful and thorough presentation to all staff of the station, including, but not limited to, reporters, panel moderators, producers, and editors. All members of the staff should have their own copies of the standards. New employees should receive and be accountable for their own copies of the standards and should be

exposed to appropriate training as to their meaning and use. Refreshers should be given to all staff at periodic intervals.

7. ***The News Standards Should Be Succinct and Stated in Plain Language.*** The standards should be designed for frequent and recurrent reference and for ready comprehension both by staff and by the public. They may be accompanied by background materials, instructional guides, and detailed discussions of the meaning, history, and applications of the standards, including with illustrations, examples, case studies, and hypothetical discussions. But the standards themselves should be as succinct and as comprehensible as possible. The Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists, which can be reproduced on a single sheet of paper or a single card, is a useful model of the form in which the standards can be disseminated. By contrast, the 1988 News Standards were dense, difficult to read, and not susceptible to easy use.

8. ***The News Standards Should Aim to Establish a Company-Wide Ethical Culture.*** News and information are, and will increasingly be, gathered and disseminated by many WTTW personnel in addition to the staff of "Chicago Tonight". Many others are involved in the creation of news and informational content and the selection of such content, not just for broadcasting, but also for posting and archiving on WTTW's ever-expanding internet presence. Others in the WTTW organization seek to generate and procure financial support for WTTW's activities, particularly through sponsorships, underwriting, and grants. Actual and potential sponsors, underwriters, and grant-makers, including governmental and philanthropic institutions with policy and other committed perspectives, should not be permitted to purchase, control, or color, through their contributions or their potential for contributions, the content and viewpoints of WTTW programming. The activities of all WTTW personnel should avoid actual and apparent conflicts of interest.

9. ***In the Digital Age, the Profession of Journalism Is Evolving and Expanding, and the Scope and Reach of Standards Must Evolve and Expand Accordingly.*** Distinctions relating to the gathering and dissemination of information that may have prevailed in the past are eroding. Lines between "news" and "public affairs" programming are dissolving. The moderation of panel discussions by newsmakers should be subject to news standards and ethical precepts no less than techniques of conventional reporting through research, source interviews, and "stand-up" presentations. "Enterprise journalism", "investigative reporting", and "beat journalism" all have their places in the gathering and dissemination of news by public media, and the lines of demarcation among such traditional journalistic categories seem to be blurring. In addition, the selection and curation of content for access via the internet should be subject to the station's news standards and ethical precepts.


10. ***The Station Should Establish Processes for the Enforcement of Its Standards and for Consideration of, and Action upon, Public Complaints and Appeals.*** (a) Concomitant with the adoption of revised and updated news standards, WTTW should designate an officer or senior employee to serve as an ombudsman, public or standards editor, or advocate for the public interest with respect to the station's standards and ethics. The ombudsman, public editor, or advocate should be charged with receiving both internal and external questions and complaints regarding the

interpretation and application of the station's news standards and ethical code. The ombudsman should be empowered to investigate such concerns and to take appropriate action in response to them, including counseling and training WTTW personnel and in recommending disciplinary action, when necessary, to responsible managers, executives, or the Board of Trustees. (b) The station should establish a "Corrections" page on its website where errors can be acknowledged and corrected information or links to corrected or balancing information can be supplied. (c) The CAB does not here take a position on whether or not a "right to be forgotten", as has been acknowledged in recent European Union jurisprudence, exists or should be safeguarded or enforced, and tends to view enforcement of such a "right" as in conflict with rights protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. But, in that WTTW increasingly archives content that is accessible to the public on a long-term or permanent basis, the station must anticipate that from time to time it will receive applications for the deletion, amendment, or supplementation of such archived matter, and should work toward the establishment of principles to govern, and appellate processes to handle, such requests.

Adopted in plenary session on October 18, 2016.

Respectfully submitted,

For the COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD,



JOSEPH A. MORRIS
Chairman

Dated: October 21, 2016.