

Everyone has biases, says Detroit publisher

By Casey Hana
staff writer

He talks as he writes, telling listeners that news people are no different than others. Everyone has biases. The news business is human. And we live in a world where fierce media competition is squeezing even the big guys into small corners, said Dave Lawrence, publisher of the Detroit Free Press. Lawrence challenged an audience of business students and others from the Farmington-area community last week to learn about the news business and to understand his paper's struggle to have a Joint Operating Agreement approved. A JOA would allow a merging of business and operations departments at Detroit's two daily newspapers,

both owned by large media companies. In discussing the news business, Lawrence said the "bad news sells papers" theory is a myth, perpetuated by our biases. The largest-selling issue of the Free Press came the day after the Detroit Tigers won the World Series in 1984, he added. "My argument is we are prisoners to our biases, in that we accentuate the negative," he said. "We remember the negative. I'm telling you, if you look for the negative... in this world, you'll find it. It's a real failing in human nature." LAWRENCE SPOKE at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills as part of the college's Distinguished Speaker Series. Lawrence became a newsmaker himself this year, as he stood at the

helm of his paper's fight to win JOA approval from Attorney General Edwin Meese. He is also known for his weekly opinion column, which he began when promoted to publisher in 1985, where he explains how the news business operates. "It's a very, very different kind of world," he said. Newspapers have "enormous" competition from "people who are looking for a share of your mind." Lawrence said his major competition is not necessarily The Detroit News, but suburban newspapers and a multitude of radio and television stations that have fragmented the market during the past 20-30 years. THIS CHANGING market has created the need for a JOA in Detroit, Lawrence contends. A JOA is possible under the Newspaper Preservation Act, which allows a failing newspaper to join with a stronger one in the same market and maintain two, separate editorial voices. "It's about choice," Lawrence added. Although the newspaper business is "generally a very profitable business," he said, "we are all losing money in Detroit." The Free Press has filed for a JOA as the "failing newspaper."

Lawrence said selling the Free Press is "possible, but I think you would be forestalling the inevitable." Directors of Knight-Ridder, parent company of the Free Press, have announced they will close the paper if a JOA is not approved. Lawrence said he does not want to see the paper continue operating in the same manner, with Knight-Ridder subsidizing it to keep it afloat. "Personally, I don't want a subsidized future," he said. "I want one where we can stand on our own two feet."

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Students aid probation work

Oakland University has received a \$45,000 grant for its Oakland County Probation Enhancement Program, a paid internship effort. The program will aid students and ease the burden on the county's probation department.

"The program works beautifully and provides a great learning experience for the students," said Joyce Esterberg, program manager in OU's placement and career services department.

Esterberg said she has placed between 18-14 Juniors and seniors a year as probation aides during the program's four years of operation.

STUDENTS WORK 1,000 hours a year while continuing their studies. They receive caseloads, conduct presentence reports and perform other probation officer responsibilities.

Esterberg said several past interns have been hired in Oakland

County offices. The probation program usually draws students with majors in sociology and a concentration in criminal justice, or psychology majors. Some political science, public administration and communication majors have also been placed as probation aides.

The probation enhancement project is one of Esterberg's internship programs. The probation project's total funding is about \$400,000 from state, local and county grants. They provide paid internships for 115 to 130 OU students each year.

Placements in the other programs range from schools and nonprofit agencies to Oakland County offices, and fit a wide range of majors.

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