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Newsrooms shrink; minority percentage increases slightly

The number of full-time journalists working at America's daily newspapers shrank by 4.4 percent in the past year, the largest decrease in the past 30 years according to the annual census conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

The percent of minority journalists working at daily newspapers grew minimally to 13.52 percent from 13.43 percent of all journalists, according to ASNE.

ASNE marks the 30th anniversary of the survey in 2008. The annual survey was a direct outgrowth of the March 1, 1968, findings of the Kerner Commission report. The commission, created to study the causes of devastating riots in Newark and Detroit, was highly critical of the lack of coverage of black communities and the lack of minority journalists at mainstream newspapers and broadcast stations. The commission said that newspapers and TV stations shared some of the responsibility for the civil unrest because of their failure to adequately and fairly cover black communities over the years.

ASNE created the annual Newsroom Employment Census in 1978 as a tool to measure the industry's success toward its goal of having the percentage of minorities working in newsrooms nationwide equal to the percentage of minorities in the nation's population.

America's newspaper editors have been industry leaders in helping newspapers better reflect their communities to achieve greater accuracy and credibility.

The 1978 census found an estimated 43,000 full-time journalists working as editors, reporters, copy editors and photographers of which 3.95 percent were minorities. The 2008 census found 52,600 full-time journalists of which 13.52 are minorities.

ASNE President Gilbert Bailon said, "The numbers represent a dual reality: It's mildly encouraging that the minority percentage held steady despite difficult economic times that are causing many cutbacks. On the other hand, the total number of minority journalists employed at daily newspapers declined by nearly 300 people, which follows the pattern for the overall newsroom workforce. Such a trend will not help newspapers in their quest to reach parity with the minority population by 2025."

ASNE Diversity Chair Caesar Andrews said, "Certainly the slight percentage increase is better than the alternative, especially during another tough year with overall staff reductions. But if we're not able to accelerate diversity inside newsrooms, and if we miss opportunities to produce more compelling news coverage, then the challenge of connecting with changing communities becomes that much more difficult."

In 1980, the U.S. was 80 percent white not Hispanic and about 20 percent minority, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. By 2006, the U.S. was 66 percent white who are not Hispanic and minorities were 34 percent, according to the census bureau.

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“ASNE still gets credit for focusing intensely each year on diversity hiring. Too many newsrooms still fall short. But there’s no denying the progress since the census was started 30 years ago,” Andrews said.

This year ASNE counted full-time journalists working online for the second time to reflect the industry emphasis on expanding its Web presence. This year’s annual census found nearly 1,700 full-time journalists working only on their newspapers’ Web sites. Of those, 17.79 percent are minorities.

An estimated 2,400 journalists left newsrooms in 2007 through a combination of buyouts and layoffs. Since 2001, newsrooms have lost an estimated 3,800 professionals, a 6.7 percent decline. But the largest loss came last year.

Highlights of the 2008 survey

- **Supervisors:** Minorities account for 11.4 percent of all supervisors in newsrooms, which brings this percentage to its level two years ago. Of all minorities, 22 percent are supervisors.
- **Newspapers with no minorities:** 423 of the newspapers responding to the survey had no minorities on their full-time staff. This number has been growing since 2006. The majority of these newspapers have circulations of 10,000 or less. All newspapers with circulations of 50,000 or more that responded to the census had at least one minority staffer.
- **Where do minorities work:** Two-thirds of minorities work at newspapers with circulations exceeding 100,000. The percentage of minorities working at newspapers with more than 500,000 circulation is 16 percent; 250,001 to 500,000 circulation, 19 percent; 100,001 to 250,000 circulation now account for 30 percent.

Other findings:

- **Internships:** The percentage of minority interns stands at 28 percent, a slight increase from 26.6 percent last year.
- **First time hires:** Minorities represented nearly 18 percent of the journalists hired for their first full-time newsroom job. That number has fluctuated over the decade. In 2001, it stood at 18.8 percent and rose to a high of 22.5 percent in 2004. It has declined since.
- **Women:** Women working full-time in daily newspapers now total 19,700. The percentage of women decreased slightly from 37.58 to 37.36 percent. Minority women accounted for 17.16 of female newsroom staffers.
- **Men:** Men total more than 32,900, down from nearly 34,400. Minority men continued to account for 11.35 percent of male newsroom staffers in 2007.

Clarification of 2006 and 2007 figures

We added free daily newspapers to the ASNE Census in 2006 to enhance the accuracy of our count of full-time journalists working at newspapers. We realized this year that we had used an incorrect system to include them in the totals. This year we put them in their own circulation category. With that change, we recalculated the total estimated newsroom staff to 53,600 in 2006, of which 7,400 were minorities, and 55,000 in 2007, including 7,400 minorities. The percentage of minorities changed to 13.73 for 2006 and 13.43 for 2007.

ASNE’s Diversity Mission

Increasing diversity in U.S. newspaper newsrooms has been a primary ASNE mission since 1978. ASNE is an industry leader in helping newspapers better reflect their communities. It provides career information to aspiring journalists. ASNE sponsors and coordinates a variety of initiatives and projects, including job fairs directed at young journalists of color and seminars for editors on the changing demographics of the U.S. It is the only

major mainstream journalism organization with a full-time diversity director.

The survey is a tool ASNE uses to measure the success of its goal of having the percentage of minorities working in newsrooms nationwide equal to the percentage of minorities in the nation's population by 2025.

Census procedures

For the 2008 ASNE newsroom employment census, 924 of the 1,411 daily newspapers responded to the survey, representing 65.49 percent of all U.S. dailies. The census is based on employment data reported by daily newspapers.

The survey data are projected to reflect all daily newspapers in the country. Editors participating in the survey agree to publish the percentage of newsroom employees who are minorities. A list of newspapers with their percentages follows the summary and tables.

The data from newspapers that returned the survey are used to project the numbers for non-responding newspapers in the same circulation range. An ASNE follow-up test of non-responding newspapers found their employment of minorities closely resembles newspapers in their circulation categories that respond to the survey. The survey figures reported above are weighted in this way to reflect all daily newspapers. ASNE has implemented internal monitoring procedures to ensure the consistency and credibility of the employment data. Moreover, because the survey procedures remain constant each year, the ASNE census provides highly reliable year-to-year comparisons.

ASNE is an organization of the main editors of daily newspapers throughout the Americas. Founded in 1922, ASNE is active in a number of areas of interest to top editors with priorities on improving freedom of information, diversity, readership and credibility of newspapers.