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Students Analyze Small Town Newspapers

Summary: Zak Threadgill '15 and Joe Feely '14 worked with the Center for Small Towns to analyze and review small town newspapers from across Minnesota.

(August 16, 2013)-Zak Threadgill '15, Anoka, and Joe Feely '14, Farmington, worked together with the University of Minnesota, Morris's Center for Small Towns (CST) to create a content analysis for rural Minnesotan newspapers. Feely and Threadgill reviewed eight different newspapers from across the state to isolate different community index indicators, including examples of community leadership and diversity. This kind of data allows newspaper publishers to tailor their work to better suit the needs of their communities.

Threadgill and Feely worked with Kelly Asche, CST community program specialist, and Sarah Bauer, program director for the Minnesota Newspaper Association. Their goal was not only to provide small newspapers with a way to improve their content, but also to show communities a diverse representation of leadership and involvement. Threadgill and Feely presented their analysis and findings at the Minnesota Newspaper Association Editors and Publishers Leadership Program Conference, working directly with the publishers of the newspapers they reviewed. They were able to provide small-town newspapers with copies of their published work that were coded and organized through the lenses of different topics and community issues.

Threadgill and Feely are part of a larger push to help towns throughout the state better utilize and organize the material they publish in local newspapers. Many papers in rural Minnesota have been participating in a six-month workshop to help improve and revamp their publications. The finished content analysis of their work will help them gain more awareness of where they can improve as well as what community issues are rising to the surface.

The two commented that this work was important because small town publishers were unable to access this kind of analysis anywhere else. They added that by giving them in-depth reviews small towns could better meet community needs in their newspapers.

The Center for Small Towns (CST) is a community outreach program housed at the University of Minnesota, Morris and serves as a point-of-entry to the resources of the University of Minnesota. Small towns, local units of government, K-12 schools, non-profit organizations, and other University units are able to utilize the Center's resources as they work on rural issues or make contributions to rural society. CST's mission is to focus the University's attention and marshal its resources toward assisting Minnesota's small towns with locally identified issues by creating applied learning opportunities for faculty and students.

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