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Published March 16, 2011

## High Standards at High School Newspapers

By Lou Fancher

Technology savvy students and intense editorial standards make Lamorinda High School newspapers high quality, hyper-current, and hip, to use an old-fashioned phrase.

Although articles about life on campus form the bulk of their coverage, all three papers-Acalanes' Blueprint, Campolindo's La Puma, and Miramonte's Mirador-aren't afraid to tackle community stories. In the past year, downtown planning in Orinda, University of California at Berkeley's Title IX issues and a rash of burglaries in Moraga, all received the papers' attention.

The three publications have many things in common, especially their use of new technologies like video, Facebook, and Twitter. Here is a profile of each paper.

### The Blueprint

The Acalanes editors are technically determined by an advisor, but class votes and student editors influence the final assignments. There are eight issues per year and fact checking is primarily the responsibility of the writers.

Editors Nicole Lee, Emily Ellsworth and Sam Cheng said that the use of secondhand sources is discouraged and "any claims made in the story must be backed up by an interview or another reliable source."

Subject matter is wide open at the Blueprint. Editors in Chief have the final say and, in an email reply, they clarify the point, noting, "No subjects are off limits. We have published stories on sexting, marijuana, fake IDs, and meth."

The biggest changes at the Blueprint are due to the passage of Measure A.

"Our district has been dealing with budget cut issues," wrote the editors, "and there was a chance that our newspaper wouldn't survive. We attended district board meetings to argue for journalism at Acalanes. Fortunately, the measure passed and Blueprint lives on."

The Arts section and controversial stories are most popular. The Opinion page draws the most commentary from readers.

This year's Blueprint editors picked their coverage of Title IX at Cal and the cost of sports at Acalanes in recent articles as their greatest source of pride. "These have all been large stories with high-end sources and topics relevant to the student body," they said.

Invited to share a closing comment after responding to formatted questions, Blueprint editors said:

"As cliché as it is, staff members can really do as much as they want; the only limit to how much they can do is themselves. For example, we've had people interview 'N SYNC and United States senators, walk inside the Giants' dugout at AT&T Park, and attend a roundtable discussion with director Gore Verbinski and actress Abigail Breslin. Blueprint is committed to reporting accurate news and practicing quality journalism, and the workload can be quite demanding, but it's an incredibly rewarding experience."

### La Puma

Applications for editorial positions are accepted at the end of each year at Campolindo. The current editor in chief and faculty advisor review and interview the applicants.

An issue is produced each month and Tori Shepard and Victoria Garrity, 2010-11's La Puma editors, ask for 2 drafts before the final copy is submitted, to "try to be as accurate as possible."

La Puma allows a staff advisor and the school administration to control the content: crude jokes, criticism of school administration and topics not focused on school or community are off limits.

Their new advisor introduced layout and design changes this year, which Shepard called "influential." Like their larger counterparts in the professional field of journalism, the paper also had to cut back the number of pages to save money.

At La Puma, student surveys on the Opinion page and a satirical back page draw the most reader response. The feedback can come in the form of letters to the editor, but most often, it's through Facebook, Twitter, and Gmail.

In closing, the editors said:

"This class is unique compared to other classes because it offers students a lot of freedom and an opportunity to learn in a hands-on way. The atmosphere is very relaxed and casual, and we have a lot of fun."

### The Mirador

Hannah Tennant and Brian Friel were selected through an application and interview process similar to the one at La Puma. The final issue of last year was a transitional one, where Tennant and Friel were trained into their positions.

The Miramonte paper is published approximately once a month, with seven total issues. The editors rely on section editors to question facts and request clarifications from their writers.

California Scholastic Journalism Standards learned in their journalism classes set the boundaries.

"We conduct ourselves as a legitimate paper, and we print anything as long as it is not libelous," the editors said.

Last year, Mirador staff attended the NSPA Journalism Convention in Washington, D.C., which triggered the addition of an online website and editorial overseers assigned to the site.

An editorial on Boy's Water Polo received the collective nod from editorial staff as the most important story this year.

"[The article] focused on the pressure that we are placed under here at Miramonte. It exposed the unrealistic expectations we are held to by coaches and teachers. The writer argued that we can learn from our failures,"

explained the editors.

Mirador editors emphasized a final, important aspect of working on a high school newspaper with their last words: "Twice a month we meet from 6-9 pm to work on the paper. We call these nights Mirador Nights, and we have a pair bring food. It's always fun!"

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