

***Department of Communications Student Spotlight:
Q & A with Emily Wilson***

Why are you pursuing a career in journalism?

"I started my journey into journalism during my freshman year of high school. Initially, I chose to take a journalism class simply because I thought the teacher looked interesting—she had purple hair and an Irish accent, which intrigued me. Before that, I had always enjoyed writing, but I didn't find much joy in reading lengthy texts or analyzing them; it just wasn't my thing. I don't have some grand origin story, but I essentially stumbled into journalism and found that I couldn't stop pursuing it.

In high school, I had several opportunities to immerse myself in journalism. I began as a staff writer for our student newspaper and eventually became the sports editor for two years. This role opened the door for me to work with the Daily Californian, UC Berkeley's student newspaper, during the summer—an experience that was both exciting and educational. I then took on the role of editor-in-chief of my high school paper, which really solidified my passion for journalism.

What I love about journalism is that it never feels like work to me. It's something I genuinely enjoy doing, and I find it fulfilling. I am eager to become a reporter professionally because I know that, in that role, I will be able to explore different stories every day, meet new people, and learn continuously. Each day brings something fresh and new, and I thrive on that variety. I believe that journalism is more than just writing; it's about understanding people, conveying their stories, and contributing meaningfully to society. This curiosity and passion for storytelling are what drive me to pursue a career in journalism."

In what ways do you think local journalism contributes to society, and how do you hope to contribute to that impact?

"Local journalism plays an incredibly vital role in our communities, and I believe it is more important now than ever. The term 'news deserts' refers to areas where there is little to no local news coverage, which can lead to a lack of accountability and transparency in local governance. Many communities lack the resources to stay informed, and as a result, people may not have access to critical information that affects their lives. City governments, colleges, and other institutions often do not make it easy for the public to find objective information.

This is where journalism comes in as a public service. We act as a bridge to help people understand what's happening in their communities. For example, I wrote a story about ASI's spring concert where the artist Quavo didn't show up. I made a public record request for the contract details, which included how much they were going to pay him—\$120,000. Many students wouldn't think to look for that information, but as a journalist, it's my job to dig into these details and report them.

Furthermore, the Daily Titan serves as a watchdog for CSUF leaders, holding them accountable for their promises and actions. We have a responsibility to report on what happens within our university and ensure that students are informed about decisions that may impact their education and campus life. In this way, I hope to contribute to the impact of local journalism by providing accurate, timely information that empowers students and the community to engage with their local governance and advocate for their needs."

If you could launch a groundbreaking journalism project tomorrow, what would it be, and what impact do you hope it would have on your community?

"While I'm still brainstorming potential projects, I think there are numerous avenues I could explore that would be impactful. One idea that comes to mind is creating a CSU-wide coalition of student journalists. This initiative could serve as a centralized database that tracks stories and issues across different campuses, allowing student journalists to collaborate and share insights. This would not only help in holding CSU management accountable but also provide a richer context for the stories we cover.

I believe journalism thrives when it acts as a watchdog, especially when it focuses on local government and its impact on the community. Organizations like Voice of OC, which is a nonprofit newsroom in Orange County, are excellent examples of this kind of journalism. They operate independently and are not influenced by corporate owners, which allows them to prioritize the community's needs.

By establishing a similar project at the CSU level, we could enhance our reporting capabilities and ensure that we're not just covering stories in isolation but also building on each other's work and experiences. This could lead to more comprehensive reporting and a stronger voice for student journalists. The impact of such a project would be significant—it would foster a sense of collaboration among student journalists, improve accountability within the CSU system, and ultimately serve the interests of the student body more effectively."

Can you share a behind-the-scenes moment from a journalism internship or your work at the Daily Titan that taught you something unexpected about the industry?

"One of the most eye-opening experiences I've had in journalism was realizing the intensity of the industry and the importance of resilience. Early on in my role at the Daily Titan, I encountered a managing editor who was quite tough on me. I remember

feeling overwhelmed as an 18-year-old just starting out, trying to navigate the complexities of journalism. There was a moment during my first production day when I had edited a story that the sports editor had also worked on. The managing editor pulled us both into the break room and expressed his dissatisfaction with the piece.

At first, I was taken aback by his bluntness. It felt harsh, and I found myself questioning my abilities. However, as he explained what was wrong with the story and how we could improve it, I began to understand the value of constructive criticism. This was a pivotal moment for me; it taught me that in journalism, feedback is not personal but rather a crucial part of the learning process.

Over time, I learned to not take criticism to heart and instead view it as an opportunity for growth. This experience has been a consistent theme throughout my time at the Daily Titan. I've come to appreciate that the industry demands a thick skin and a willingness to learn from every encounter, even the difficult ones. It's about understanding that those who are in charge are there for a reason, and sometimes their tough love can lead to significant improvements in our work. This lesson has prepared me for the realities of the journalism field, where not everyone will be kind, and where the stakes can be high."

What's the most memorable story you read during your college years, and how did it shape your perspective on journalism?

"One of the most memorable stories I encountered was an editorial from the Daily Titan staff written about ten years ago, which called out the CSUF administration for a lack of transparency. As I read through it, I was struck by the parallels between the challenges they faced and those we encounter today. The editorial highlighted issues with the

university's strategic communications department, where the point of contact for reporters was unresponsive and often provided information on background, which meant it couldn't be used in reporting.

This editorial was impactful because it underscored the importance of student journalism in holding institutions accountable. It made me realize that the fight for transparency and accountability is a long-standing tradition within our university's journalism history. The fact that student journalists a decade ago cared deeply about these issues just as we do now was inspiring.

It reinforced my belief that journalism is not just about reporting the news; it's about advocating for the community and ensuring that the voices of students are heard. As I step into the role of editor-in-chief, I carry that legacy with me. I feel a responsibility to uphold the standards set by those who came before me and to continue the fight for transparency and accountability within our university. This story serves as a reminder that student journalism matters and that we have the power to effect change through our reporting."

Emily Wilson is a student at California State University, Fullerton who will be graduating in May with a degree in Communications and a concentration in Journalism. She currently serves as the editor-in-chief at the Daily Titan, CSUF's student-run news organization. Emily also was part of the Department of Communications 2024 Study Abroad program where she covered the Paris Olympics. Emily was recently awarded the 2024 JPMorgan Chase Student Journalism Award.