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English III

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The Fourth Estate By Juan Vazquez.

If you were to talk to Steven Kahl, a teacher of 39 years, 24 of which at Mountain View High School, one of the first and most impressive aspects things you'd notice about his teaching style, as well as one of the most impressive, is how he commands a classroom.

"I remember just being blown away by how like he would just stand up and everybody would get quiet," Carla Gomez said, recalling when she first met him, "He just stays grounded and so it makes you feel that way too because he's just so calm...matter of fact, but not also not cold, which is a hard balance to get."

Being a former Intro Journalism teacher, Mr.Kahl has observed many ways of education and has implemented them, and the effects of his pro-press rhetoric include and are not limited to his former students fighting against censorship.

Mr.Kahl described numerous tactics and goals for his students, specifically how a goal of his is to give students enough choices in their education.

"I think that flexibility [is] important, and I think a lot of the way that we're planning units on course teams right now presumes that everybody's ready for the same thing at the same

pace at the same time. And I think that negates the individuality of the many students that we teach.”

With his command, Mr.Kahl also brings a passion to his work, being invested in classical literature. Indeed if you were to bring up classical literature whether it be what he teaches or what he is personally invested in, you will get an extremely warm and talkative personality.

From his youth Mr. Kahl began reading classical literature, highlighting the difficulties of James Joyce's classic “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.”

“That [Book] was hard for me to get through,” Mr.Kahl said, “I was a young man [and] the language is just so unusual...But I worked my way through it and understood it. James Joyce can be hard to understand. I had only read parts of James Joyce's “Ulysses”. But I read all of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.”

Another highlighted book of Mr.Kahl would be “As I Lay Dying” By William Faulkner, given the perspective and narrative changes in every chapter. The book follows the POV of the people around a woman on her deathbed. Mr.Kahl emphasizes how you can find more truth within so many different accounts put together, along with an important recording of the relationship and reactions to the events of the story, both in fiction and in Journalism.

“I think journalism relates to [The Multi POV format] too. Good journalism looks at not just what happened as objectively as possible in the reporting but it also looks at different people's reactions to and perceptions of what has occurred.”

Mr.Kahl taught Intro Journalism for nearly a decade, and that education became crucial for the student ran organize and run newspaper the MVHS Oracle, which is entirely centered around the regular Journalism class. He specifically taught Intro-Journalism, with his stated goal

being to teach students the basics of journalistic skills, including integrity, structure, format, and types of articles. The class was added in addition to the now over-40-year-old Journalism class.

However, in the 2022-2023 school year, the Intro to Journalism class was cut, and Mr. Kahl stressed the dangers of removing the building blocks of such an important practice.

“I think, unfortunately, it's gone from direct instruction about interviewing, reporting on basic news, writing in-depth stories, writing features, and so on, to on-the-job training,” said Mr. Kahl. And I am, I'm concerned that the people who are talented and people who learn very quickly on the job will have success [and] that people who could be successful if they were directly and systematically educated about some of these approaches to being good journalists, [will] never have the chance to become what they could have become as journalists because they're missing that educational part.”

Ms. Gomez recalls how while Mr. Kahl often does not express his emotions, on this occasion, there was a form of worry for him about how new students would learn the principles of journalism, especially at such a crucial time in American history.

“He didn't say a lot, really about it, except just to be disappointed about... How are students going to learn these really important journalistic skills?” Ms. Gomez said, “What's going to happen to the program and the quality, the quality of the writing because the quality had gotten so good? And students are learning really important democratic principles, and we need journalists now more than ever in a world where there are so many different versions of the truth.”

However, the cutting of Intro Journalism as a class is part of a much larger issue, both at Mountain View High School and in modern student free speech, and free press. Because at the same time as the removal of the Intro class, the whole of the [Oracle was hit with more extreme-](#)

and what was viewed as outrageous- news, [the removal of Ms.Gomez as the advisor for the Journalism class following student and administration conflict over an article about sexual harassment within the campus.](#)

Mr.Kahl is currently in the dark when it comes to a lot of current events happening within the program, as well as events outside of it, [including the lawsuit against the Administration.](#)

[California, in comparison to any other state in the U.S., is extremely lenient when it comes to the ability of the Student Press.](#) A [famous example of this is within](#) the California Ed Code section 48907, which explicitly states,“Pupils of the public schools...shall have the right to exercise freedom of speech and of the press including, but not limited to...The Right of expression in official publications, whether or not the publications or other means of expression are supported financially by the school or by use of school facilities, except that expression shall be prohibited which is obscene, libelous, or slanderous.”

[This Ed code was a direct response to two main supreme court cases, Tinker v. Des Moines,](#) which found that First Amendment rights did apply to public schools, meaning schooling officials could not censor student speech unless in the case of disruption to education, [and Hazelwood V Kuhlmeier, a case which greater, restricts the rights of students within the schooling environment.](#) While the Hazelwood case is younger and therefore would have more precedent, California is a unique state that holds the Tinker V. Des Moines standard of free speech, even more so than some other Tinker states.

Along with this, the Ed code states that advisors are responsible for holding students to the standards of English and Journastic formatting, are protected from direct retaliation for what students publish in articles, and therefore retaliation by an

administration, such as removing an Advisor from their position, would indeed be prohibited. This is the Ed code violation for which the MVHS high school is being sued.

Mr.Kahl, when asked about his thoughts on the current administration, and how they differentiated between past Administration and the ways that affect students and their abilities concerning Journalism, Mr.Kahl emphasized how similar to parenting styles, there is a spectrum of leadership.

“One set of leadership in any organization may be considered permissive, where [they] kind of just, live and let live, and let people do as they have always done and you don't try to push for any new kind of agenda,” Mr.Kahl said, “You just support people in what they are doing...[Then] there is another type of leadership which is more assertive, the leader works ideally in consensus.”

Mr.Kahl then went on to describe how certain forms of leadership may result in becoming more aggressive and authoritarian. Refusing to listen to those who may be more experienced in a certain field, instead going with their viewpoint all the way.

In the future, Mr.Kahl hopes to eventually resume his education in the Intro Journalism class, or even advise the current solo class. He also expressed pride in his students, who have made, despite the difficult situation, what he called “wonderful’ products, including but not limited to a new broadcast by the Journalism class called Next Week Now. Mr.Kahl praised how the show has managed to be engaging by humor, but also able to transition into a more serious show when highlighting important unheard, or less talked of, subjects, such as the MVHS treasure closet which provides menstrual products and schooling-related products to students who may be in need.

Mr.Kahl noted that student journalists have a challenging, yet amazing opportunity, as with the skill of a journalist there is the possibility to be as influential or much more so than student government or ASB, and how these students, both now and in the future, have a unique responsibility.

“When you hear reports to the school board, and when you read the kinds of very positive Pollyanna notices that go out to parents and family, community members, and so forth, that's nice, and that has a role, but that's not the whole story,” Mr.Kahl said, “I think it's important that high school newspapers get the whole story, just like I think the American press does a good job in some ways and needs to be a whole lot better in other ways, not just in what it reports on, but how it reports. It's dealing with tricky issues that have never had to be dealt with in quite the same way in the history of our country right now. And, it needs to step up. And I think [there’s a]very different kind of leadership style running our school than we've ever had since I've been here. And I think I think Oracle could stand to step up too.”

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