




Advocates seek reversal of Northwest College trustees' vote abolishing journalism

By [Jordan Gass-Poore](#)¹ | Published 05/26/16 8:47pm |  Email |  Print | 
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The Wyoming Education Association wants the board of trustees at Northwest College to reverse its decision to eliminate the school's journalism program, which supports a student newspaper that has a history of clashes with college administrators.

WEA members have until June 3 to get board chairman John Housel-Board to add a review of the decision to the trustees' June 13 meeting agenda.

Trustees voted 4-2 on May 10 to ratify Northwest College President Stefani Hicswa's recommendations to cut journalism and two other programs amid a \$2.3 million budget reduction for the next fiscal year, blamed partly on a decline in Wyoming's fossil-fuel-dependent economy. Community colleges receive money from state property taxes, and when values are low they receive less money.

Last month, Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead asked state agencies to make additional budget cuts for the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

"All Wyoming colleges are in similar budget-cutting modes," wrote Mark Kitchen, Northwest College vice president for college relations, in an email.

Nine of Northwest College's programs were evaluated to determine their fiscal sustainability before the three programs were identified for elimination, Kitchen said.

"None of this is a surprise," said Rob Breeding, who has taught for almost four years at the small public, two-year college in Powell, Wyoming, and is the journalism department's only faculty member. He's also the adviser of the

school's *Northwest Trail* student newspaper, which has been published for 59 years.

Current Northwest journalism students -- six out of a total 1,210 students -- will be able to complete their degrees, but freshman classes will no longer be taught unless returning students need the class for their degree, said Kitchen in an email. This means some students will have to take both required journalism courses in one semester.

With the journalism program cut, Breeding said the student newspaper will likely crumble.

"If you don't have a journalism program and an independent journalism professor advising the student newspaper, you don't have a student newspaper," he said.

The vote followed longstanding tension between Northwest's administration and its journalism program over reporting by the *Northwest Trail* and Breeding's qualifications.

Breeding maintains that Northwest administrators sought to eliminate the college's journalism program in response to articles critical of the school. But college officials have denied any connection.

The articles in question are the possible mishandling of an investigation into campus drinking and the misplacement of a gun in a school classroom, both reflecting unflatteringly on college employees.

"The students did their jobs ... The administrators don't like student newspapers doing their jobs," Breeding said.

The *Northwest Trail* has been a thorn in the side of college administrators for years. And the college has been accused twice in the last decade -- first in 2010 under Hicswa's predecessor and again this year -- of retaliating against the paper by threatening the job of its faculty adviser.

Breeding's job was imperiled when Northwest officials said he wasn't qualified to teach because he needed a master's degree in journalism. He said he has a liberal studies master's degree from Northern Arizona University and a decade of journalism experience, which includes stints with the *Arizona Daily Sun* as its city editor and Montana's *Daily Interlake* and *Flathead Beacon*, where he remains a columnist, among others.

With Breeding's last day at Northwest scheduled for Dec. 31, the fate of the *Northwest Trail* remains unknown. But he assumes the school's administration will take control of the paper once the journalism program is eliminated.

"It's getting increasingly tough as higher education moves power and authority to administrators from faculty," Breeding said.

Kitchen wrote in an email that Hicswa intends to retain the *Northwest Trail*, assuming students remain interested in the paper.

“At this early stage no decisions have been made about how or by whom the newspaper would be advised,” he wrote.

There’s an effort, headed by the Wyoming Education Association, to save Northwest’s journalism program by convincing college board members to reverse their vote.

When Alexandria Preis, outgoing editor in chief of the *Northwest Trail*, heard about the board’s decision, she felt disgusted.

College should be about the students, and without a journalism adviser independent from Northwest administration there will be no student newspaper and no student voice, Preis said.

“I wouldn’t think a student newspaper would have such an impact ... I think we truly made a difference,” she said.

Northwest trustees also voted to eliminate the college’s radio and TV program as well as a business program dealing with shoeing horses.

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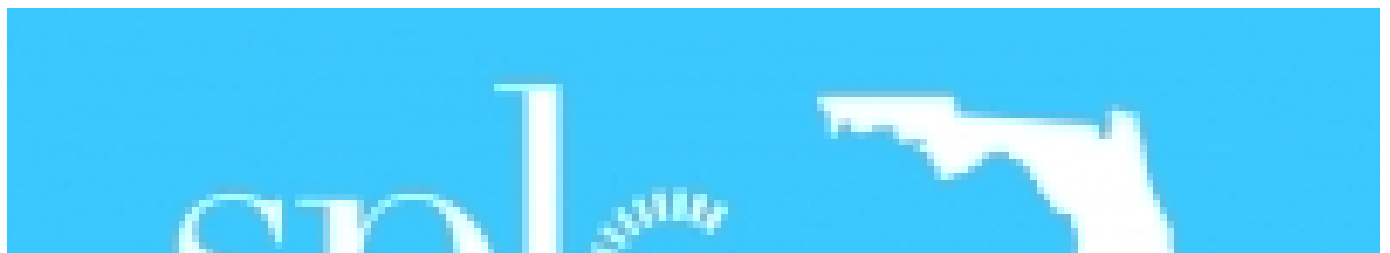
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