

## Noted media figures offer insight into journalism world



Photo by [Rouxuan Yang](#) |

From left to right: John Mooney, founder of NJ Spotlight, Debbie Galant, director of NJ News Commons, Steven Galante, a graduate Eagleton fellow and John Weingart, associate director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics, comprised the panel at “Jersey Journalists: Local News, Political Coverage, and the Changing Media Landscape” yesterday at the Eagleton Institute of Politics.

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Justin Auciello’s newsgathering career began at the age of five. He told the audience about his childhood, when he would hop on his bike and chase the sound of fire engines rushing to the scene of an emergency.

This passion for information continued into adulthood. He is the founder and editor-in-chief of Jersey Shore Hurricane News, a website focusing on news, traffic and weather for Monmouth County and Ocean County.

He joined two other local media figures at a panel discussion hosted by the Eagleton Institute of Politics: John Mooney, founder of NJ Spotlight and Debbie Galant, director of the NJ News Commons.

The event, “Jersey Journalists: Local News, Political Coverage, and the Changing Media Landscape,” gave students interested in journalism and the future of media a chance to learn from the experiences and ideas of media industry veterans.

The journalists talked about their careers and how they moved into their current positions in the news world. Mooney had been a writer for 15 years at The Newark Star-Ledger before he and a partner founded NJ Spotlight.

Galant started out as a Jersey columnist for The New York Times. When her husband gave her a website for her birthday, she quickly took to the new information sharing vehicle and started to carve out a space of her own in the online news world.

Auciello was a younger entrant to the news world, starting on Twitter before creating a Facebook page that gained of thousands of likes and eventually led to his own hyper-local news website.

The panelists discussed a range of issues, including the future of news media, the changing demands of audiences with the rise of online reporting and what it takes for a young person interested in reporting to find a place for him or herself in the marketplace.

“It’s not about being competitive,” Auciello said.

He explained that his news career has thrived on connecting with people, both readers and fellow journalists.

During the discussion, he repeatedly emphasized the need for journalists to reach out and build communities online and that his beginnings were on social media.

“This is where we get our news, whether on Derek Jeter or the local diocese,” Galant said, holding up her smartphone. Mooney discussed reaching out to online audiences and “finding your way into their mailboxes.”

The demand to constantly be producing content was stressed, as readers can always find new outlets for their information needs. But the journalists emphasized the need to balance that with a focus on objectivity and accuracy.

Winning on speed is hard to do in the modern news environment, Galant said, meaning it has the potential to move in the other direction, more toward in-depth analysis.

This led to a debate on the fine line between opinion and analysis and the difference between objectivity and transparency in reporting. They also brought up the need for consumers to become more and more sophisticated to sort through the stream of information available 24/7.

This sea of data is a reason journalists have started to find more specific audiences. Mooney said finding a passion and communicating with people who can connect with that topic has been one of NJ Spotlight’s strengths.

Mooney described his publication as “wonky,” saying they know their audience and finding a niche has helped them thrive within the state and local government community.

The moderator, Steven Galante, a graduate Eagleton Fellow, said finding the panelists was an organic process. He reached out to Galant after connecting on Twitter and through other local events.

John Weingart, associate director of the Institute, knew Mooney and invited him to take part.

Professors who wanted their students to gain exposure to the ideas presented by the speakers encouraged some of the students that attended the event.

Natalie DeAngelo, a School of Arts and Sciences junior, felt the Institute “[had] a lot to offer” and plans to attend other events the group holds in the future.