

# **Arthur Evaluation**

## **January – April 2005**

### **SUBMITTED TO:**

Arthur  
Trent University Student and Community Newspaper  
751 George St.  
Peterborough, Ontario  
K9H 7P5

Trent Centre for Community Based Education  
314 London Street  
Peterborough, Ontario  
K9H 2Z4

Chris Beyers  
Professor  
International Development Studies 422  
Trent University  
Peterborough, Ontario  
K9J 7B8

### **BY**

Miriam McFadyen  
Tammy Stenner

April 13, 2005

Project ID: 633

**Arthur Evaluation Report  
April 13, 2005**

**By Miriam McFadyen and Tammy Stenner**

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## I. Executive Summary

### **Title of Project: Evaluating the Arthur Appeal to University Readers**

We carried out an evaluation of Arthur at the request of the editors and as part of a course requirement for IDS 422. The placement began on January 10, 2005 and ended on April 11, 2005.

Arthur is a Trent University and community newspaper published weekly throughout the school year. It is a non-profit registered charity established in 1965. The present staff consists of 2 editors, a business manager, and 14 student writers although anyone can contribute articles and letters. The purpose of this evaluation was to determine who reads Arthur and who does not. For those who read it, we wanted to find out what sections of the newspaper they prefer and what they think about the quality and content in general. For those who are non-Arthur readers, we attempted to find out why not? Finally we wanted to know whether Arthur meets its goal of being an inclusive publication representing a wide range of views.

Arthur agreed to provide access to office resources such as fax machines, telephones, workspace, printers, photocopying, and so on, as well as archival information if needed. Since computers are at a premium in the Arthur office, the researchers agreed to use other Trent computers or home computers. We did not expect to incur any travel costs, as most of the research would be done at the university.

The methodology involved participant observation, surveys, telephone interviews and a group discussion.

**Participant observation:** We attended three staff meetings throughout the evaluation process, one at the beginning, one in the middle and one at the end.

**Surveys:** We distributed and collected 105 questionnaires on campus; an online version elicited a further 12 responses solely from Arthur readers.

**In-depth Interviews:** We conducted three telephone interviews with Arthur readers who had indicated on the questionnaires that they would be willing to participate further. We also conducted one interview in person with a member of Arthur staff.

**Group Discussion:** The group discussion was conducted with staff at their year-end story meeting. We initially listened and observed while they conducted the meeting and at the end we were able to report on some of our findings and conduct a group discussion. We used roughly the same questions as had been asked of the telephone interviewees.

For the surveys, we wanted to select students based on discipline and year of study. Since it proved impractical to attempt to survey all classes in the Trent calendar, we instead used a quota sampling method. This is described in detail in the report. Some groups were under-represented in our survey and this may affect the results somewhat. Specifically we did not manage to survey upper year science students, and our sample of language students was small compared with other groups.

The results were positive in some respects (most respondents are readers) but were mixed in other respects. The results showed that:

-almost three quarters of those surveyed read Arthur (72%)

-of those, 68.1% are regular readers, in other words they read Arthur either once a week or two to three times a month.

- readership increases with year of study and the most popular section is the feature section with 92% of readers indicating that they read the feature story.
- three quarters of respondents feel that Arthur sometimes or often gives a fair and balanced account of issues although only 51% felt Arthur represents a wide range of views.
- the same percentage (51%) felt that gender issues are adequately addressed in the paper; some respondents felt that gender issues are over-addressed.
- one third of respondents did not know that anyone can contribute articles to Arthur and 56% of respondents have not considered contributing.

Arthur is widely read among our sample. Most readers are satisfied that Arthur gives a fair and balanced account of issues. However there were many comments indicating that Arthur has a left-wing bias, and thus may be geared to a specific part of the university population. Our findings highlight the perception that Arthur's purpose is to provide coverage of issues which cannot be found elsewhere: this may include local issues, university politics, and an alternative to mainstream media coverage of world issues/big news issues.

Many of the non-Arthur readers said they didn't have time or were simply not interested in the paper. For those who do not read Arthur, most of them cited non-interest (38%) or time constraints (32%) as reasons. Only 3% gave dislike of content as a reason why they do not read.

Major recommendations are:

1. Include a balance of investigative journalism and opinion pieces.
2. Actively solicit volunteer contributions.
3. Continue to focus on university and local issues.
4. Attempt to include issues of interest to all areas of study.
5. Continue to include world news.
6. Continue to include provocative columns.
7. Actively promote/advertise Arthur.

The research carried out in this evaluation is limited in scope as it focuses mainly on Arthur readers and staff. Non-Arthur readers are only minimally included in the research. However, we hope that our results will provide insight into the characteristics of Arthur readers and their interests and concerns. Some of the recommendations should be easy to implement as they represent a continuation of current practices. We hope the evaluation has answered our research questions and that our recommendations will help the future editors achieve Arthur's goal of being a quality university and community newspaper incorporating multiple voices.

## **II. Introduction**

Arthur is a Trent University student newspaper, which is published weekly 24 times throughout the school year. It has a circulation of 3000. It is a non-profit corporation that is governed by a Board of Directors and is a member of the Canadian University Press (CUP). Funding comes largely through a \$9 levy paid by full time students and through advertising. Arthur acknowledges having, and wishes to retain, editorial autonomy and recognizes that being free from commercial and administrative constraints is a privilege. The staff consists mainly of Trent students who are paid to work on a part time basis although there are also volunteers who contribute to the paper. According to Arthur's mission statement it aims to produce informative, interesting and accurate accounts of issues that are relevant to Trent students. Broader issues such as education, politics, the environment and the economy are also debated within Arthur. As an important part of the Trent community, Arthur strives to be accessible and representative of the community that it serves and to provide a forum for those who have little or no access to other forms of media (Arthur Website). Arthur's offices are not on the university campus but are located close to downtown Peterborough; the paper is also distributed both on and off campus.

The research outlined in this report was carried out as a part of the course requirements for the course IDS 422 – Assessment of Development Projects. Miriam McFadyen and Tammy Stenner agreed to a community placement with Arthur from January to April 2005. Nicolas Sternsdorff and Penar Musaraj are the co editors for 2005. Nicolas Sternsdorff came to our class to discuss Arthur, following which he applied for students from IDS 422 to carry out an evaluation of Arthur, which the editors hoped would be of use to future editorial staff. Nicolas became the contact for our project at Arthur.

Do students feel that their views and interests are represented in Arthur? We hoped to find out who reads Arthur and what they like and dislike about it. We also wanted to identify reasons given by those who do not read Arthur. The editors were also keen to discover whether Arthur meets its goal of being an inclusive community publication. This information is to be presented to current editorial staff as a reflection of opinions about recent Arthur issues, and also to be made available to future editorial staff, in the hopes that it would help determine future editorial policy.

## **III. Methodology**

### **a. Research Questions**

In consultation with Nicolas Sternsdorff, we identified the key research questions, which were:

What are the characteristics of Arthur readers?

What do they read in the paper and what do they like about it?

What are the characteristics of non-Arthur readers? Why don't they read Arthur?

Does Arthur represent a wide range of views?

### **b. Participant Observation**

As part of our participant observation for this research project, we attended and observed Arthur staff meetings. The first meeting was a general planning session where each member of the editorial staff talked of their goals for the coming months. Another meeting was one of the weekly story meetings, where we hoped to observe the process of deciding the content of a specific issue of Arthur. The final

meeting was in order for us to report on some of our findings and to conduct a group discussion with staff. More detailed information about each of those events is included below:

We attended an Arthur staff meeting at Hot Belly Mama's on January 16, 2005 as part of our participant observation of the Arthur editing and production processes. Production staff as well as writers and editors attended that meeting. It was explained to us that the production staff and writers have very little contact in the process of producing the Arthur, and may barely know each other. Everyone took turns speaking and described their respective roles and their goals for the coming semester. Many of the issues that arose provoked discussion and comment from various people; issues included volunteer recruitment, investigative journalism versus opinion pieces, the quality and content of special issues and the possibility of including more fiction.

We also attended a story meeting of Arthur writers and editors on January 26, 2005 between 7 and 8 p.m. This was to allow us to observe the process by which the staff decides the content of the forthcoming issue. One editor and 6 writers attended that meeting. The discussion began with an explanation that the larger size (20 pages) of this issue was due to the fact that there were "too many ads". There followed a brief description of which pages were already full and what was needed for other parts of the paper.

As the story ideas were discussed, a submission date was set, or a determination made about whether it would be for the upcoming issue, or for the following one. As the meeting finished there was also some informal feedback on an article from the previous issue. This provided opportunity for staff to complement work well done.

The final meeting we attended was the year-end story meeting. We continued our participant observation of the editing process, reported on initial findings from our research, and conducted a group discussion after the story meeting. The meeting was of particular interest because it was a time of reflection for staff, including some who were moving on and others who would be taking on editorial responsibilities next year. The participation of two volunteer contributors added another dimension. This meeting clarified the process by which Arthur is defined from year to year. It also highlighted for us that visitors/volunteers are made welcome, and their opinions are heard and considered in the editorial process.

### **c. Sample selection for Surveys**

We identified questionnaires and interviews as the most effective way to get opinions from both readers and non-readers. To ensure some feedback from non-Arthur readers, the questionnaires could not be administered only through the newspaper itself. Furthermore we decided that we would have to select respondents to ensure wide representation of the university population in our sample.

We suspected that students in different disciplines would have differing views on Arthur given its reputation as a left wing publication. We also thought that interests and opinions might vary among students at different points in their university careers. With these details in mind, we tried to choose a sample method that would ensure representation from a variety of disciplines and years. Although we managed to include a sample representing many different groups, and made some general comments about readership among the sample, the sample size is not sufficiently large to ensure very reliable predictions about readership in different disciplines or different years in the university.

To select students based on disciplines and years, we consulted a Trent University Calendar to identify all possible degrees at Trent. The number of possibilities made it impractical to administer questionnaires to classes in all areas, so we tried to group the disciplines in some meaningful way. Six categories were devised which we felt would include most disciplines. We then decided to select 2 classes from each category, for a total of 12. Within the sample, we also selected classes to represent each year of study from first to fourth. We hoped to administer 12 surveys in each class selected, bringing the total number of respondents to 144.

We were not able to administer the questionnaire to as many classes as hoped due to several factors described in the following section. The categories and the classes actually surveyed are as follows:

**Figure 1**

<b>Social Science</b>	<b>Language &amp; Literature</b>	<b>Classics</b>	<b>Natural Science</b>	<b>Applied Science</b>	<b>Miscellaneous</b>
Cultural Studies (1). History (4).	French (4).	Philosophy (2). Ancient History (3).	Biology (1). Physics (1).	Nursing (2).	Seasoned Spoon. Trent Bookstore. Catering Staff. Professors.

The classes we surveyed are listed according to the discipline where we placed them. The numbers in brackets refer to the respective course year (1<sup>st</sup> year, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, etc.).

**d. Administering surveys**

After designing a questionnaire, we field-tested it with 4 students. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated before we printed the questionnaires (see Appendix 1) at the Arthur office for our sample of Trent students.

Using the university calendar to find out time and location for the classes we had identified for the survey, we attempted to go to each class before it started to find approximately a dozen volunteers from each class. Unfortunately, this did not always work, as sometimes classes were not in the specified location at the specified time. This may have been because classes had moved to another location, or because the particular class did not meet that week.

Some additional questionnaires were administered in the Seasoned Spoon, a student run café, the Trent Bookstore and among staff and students in other classes.

Although we did manage to include respondents representing all years and many different areas of study, we completed fewer surveys than originally intended (105 instead of 144). We decided to try to include a questionnaire in Arthur to get more readers’ responses. Considering the difficulty in getting print versions of the questionnaire returned from respondents, it was decided to advertise an online version of the questionnaire in the Feb 28th issue of Arthur (see Appendix 4). We adapted the original questionnaire for this purpose, and Penar established a vehicle for online responses to the questionnaire through Bravenet. We received an additional 12 responses via email bringing our total number of respondents of the questionnaire to 117.

### **e. Telephone interviews**

As a follow-up to the questionnaires, we had hoped to organize small group discussions with Arthur readers. A question was included at the end of the questionnaire to identify possible focus group participants and gather contact information. From the 105 + questionnaires, we were able to identify several people willing to participate in further discussion about Arthur.

Using the contact information from their questionnaires, these readers were approached about participating in more in-depth follow-up discussion groups. Once we started to contact people by email and telephone in March, we found that students were very busy with final assignments and were unable to take the time for such a group. Finally we settled on the idea of a few telephone interviews with those willing to participate.

The interviewees were contacted by email and telephone ahead of time. This took some days due to time constraints and busy schedules of interviewers and interviewees alike. Nonetheless three interviews were set up at mutually convenient times. Three telephone interviews were carried out on March 14, 17, and 20, lasting about 15 minutes each.

The format of the interview was an interview guide approach (see Appendix 2). The interviewees were assured that all information would be confidential and that the interview could be stopped at any time throughout the process at the interviewee's request. The nature and purpose of the evaluation was explained once again before the interview commenced.

### **f. Discussion group**

We wanted to get some input from Arthur editorial staff into the same issues raised in the telephone interviews with Arthur readers in order to compare the views. We thus interviewed individual staff members and held a discussion group with Arthur editorial staff after one of their story meetings.

### **g. Data Analysis**

The survey questionnaire included different types of questions including multiple choice and open-ended questions. Compiling the data into a comprehensible and comparable format was tedious and involved handling each questionnaire several times. To improve this process and to collect the data in a format that allowed for easier future reference, we developed a data summary sheet (see Appendix 3), which compiled the data from each set of questionnaires (a 'set' corresponds to the classes listed in Figure 1, the miscellaneous were grouped together into one set). Another data summary sheet was filled out with the totals from all surveys.

Using the data summary sheets for each class and for total results, we were able to compare data, design charts to display some of the data in the report, and make general conclusions.



## h. Reporting

As part of the reporting process we spoke with and emailed Arthur editors with questions and information about progress on the evaluation. Our final meeting was also used to convey some of the results to all Arthur editorial staff about our progress on the evaluation, and some initial findings.

We also decided to provide a summary report of data and comments, which could be shared with Arthur readers in the final issue of the year (see Appendix 5). We felt that those who had participated in the survey or interviews would be interested in some feedback, as would Arthur staff.

The final report will be made available in the Arthur office for current and future Arthur editors, staff, and readers.

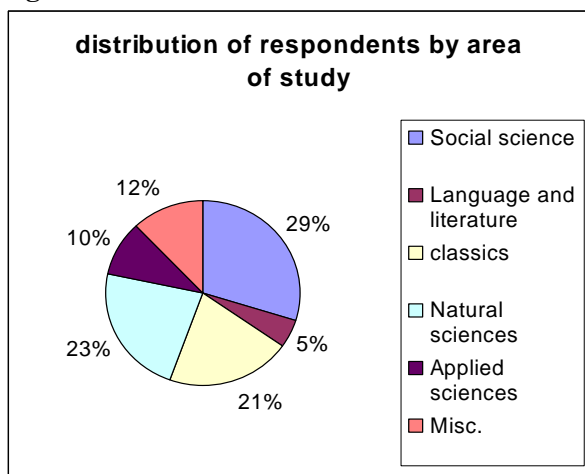
## IV. Results

### a. Respondents

We tried to include students from different disciplines within the university by distributing the surveys in classes in the areas listed on the chart below, which presents the number of respondents in each area. While our survey represents all of these areas, the language and literature and applied science sample is much smaller than that of other areas. These two areas also represent the highest and lowest percentage of readership (see below). Due to the size of those two samples, those results are not reliable indicators of readership within those areas in general. Further questionnaires would need to be distributed to students in those areas to improve the accuracy of the results, and to improve the equality of representation within the sample.

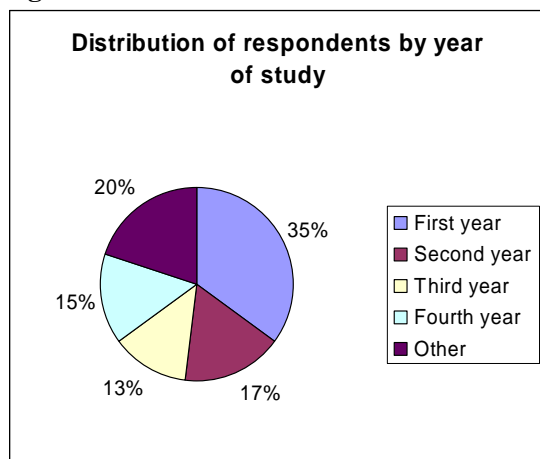
We also tried to represent students in different years of study so the sample included courses from each year from first to fourth. The first year students represent the largest proportion of the sample at 35%, while second, third and fourth years are fairly equal between 13% and 17% of the total. First year students represent a larger portion of our sample and of the university population in general.

**Figure 2**



While the survey included respondents from a variety of disciplines, the results would have been more representative by including more respondents in some areas, such as language and literature and applied sciences.

**Figure 3**



The category "other" includes staff, and students who were not identified as being in a particular year.

### **b. Survey Results Highlights**

A quota sample of 105 students (see charts above for sample distribution) is used for question 5 (see page 11) and for information on non-Arthur readers (see page 17). The results for all other questions include the responses of 12 Internet questionnaires as well. Since the Internet respondents were all self-selected Arthur readers, we did not include their responses in calculating Arthur readership among different years of study and disciplines. Not all respondents answered all questions, so the total number of responses may vary for individual questions. Some general comments are included here, with detailed findings available in the charts below (beginning on page 11), organized by responses to individual questions.

-72% read Arthur and 28% do not.

-Of those who read the paper, most of them are regular readers, reading several times a month: 68% read Arthur either once a week or two to three times a month.

-Readership increases with year of study. 41% of first years are non-readers, however, none of the fourth years are.

-52% of readers read the entire newspaper

-Most read section is feature stories at 92%, and least read section is listings/classified with 65%

-67% of respondents are aware that anyone can submit stories to Arthur; however, this means that the rest – 33% either do not know that this is possible or they think it is not possible.

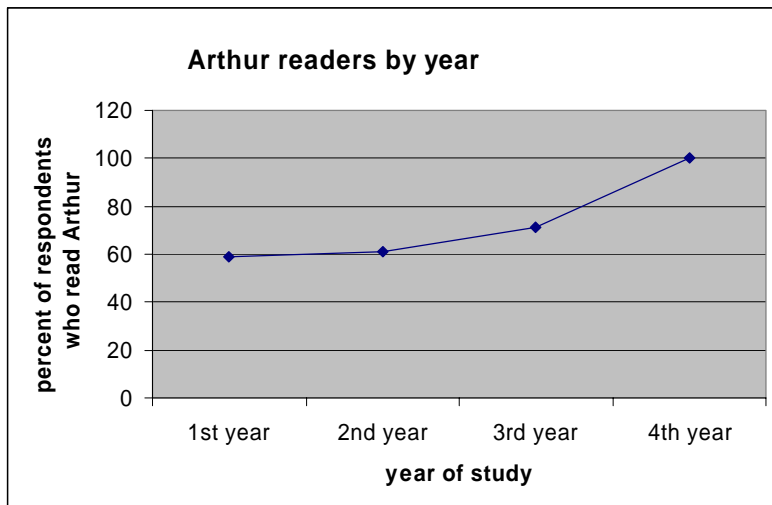
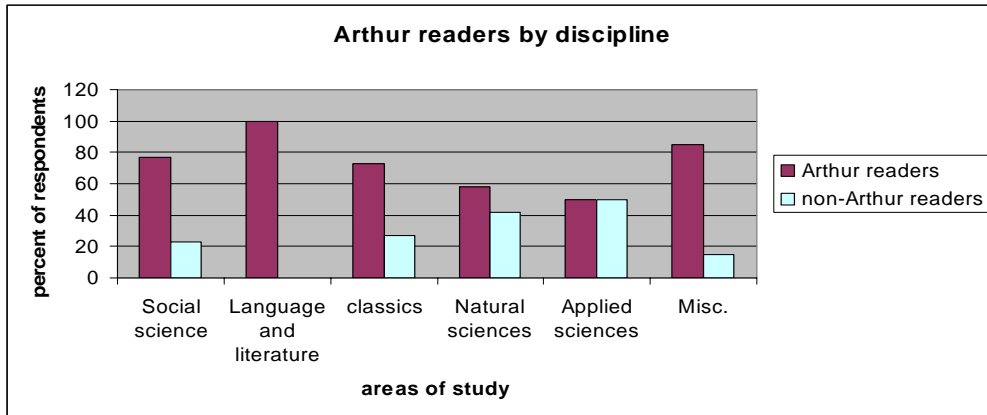
-By far the most popular Arthur pickup location was outside Wenjack theatre, or elsewhere in Otonabee College.

-About half of readers feel Arthur presents a wide range of views

-About half of readers felt that gender issues are adequately addressed in Arthur

**c. Survey results by question**

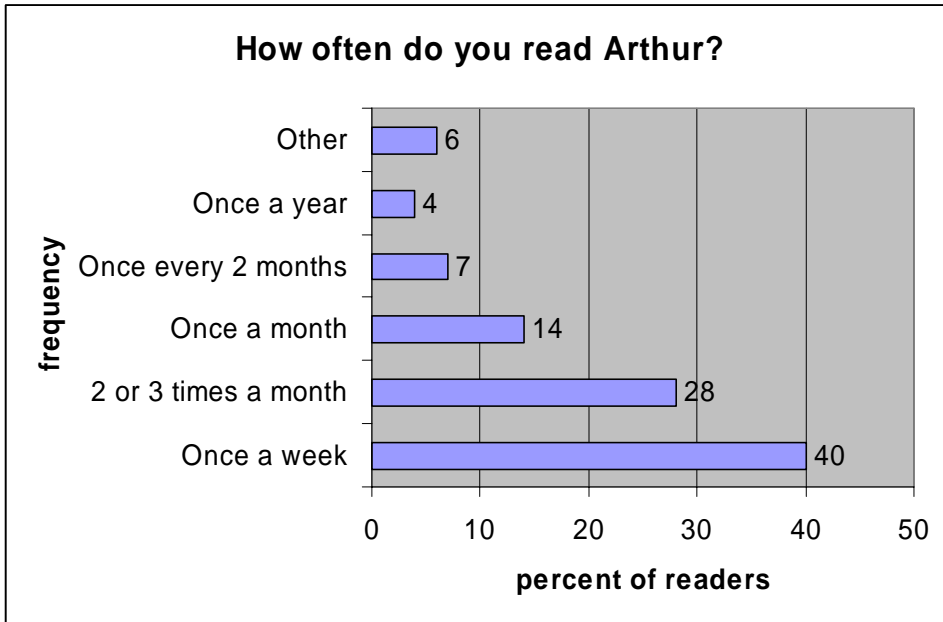
**Question 5**



**Question 6 Where do you usually pick up Arthur?**

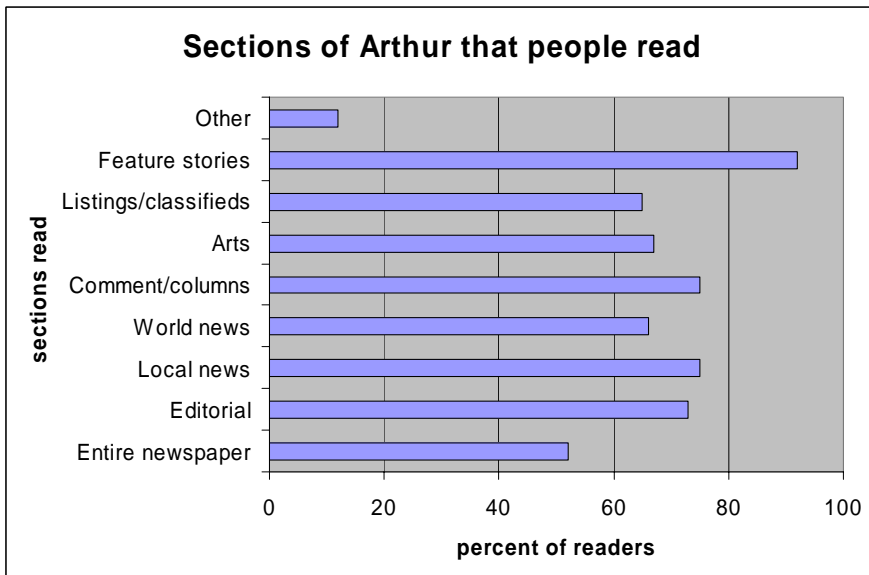
Arthur pickup locations cited by respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage
Total respondents	68	<b>100</b>
Wenjack Theatre/Otonabee College	21	<b>39</b>
On campus	18	<b>26</b>
Library	9	<b>13</b>
Bookstore	4	<b>6</b>
Athletic Complex	4	<b>6</b>
Lady Eaton College	3	<b>4</b>
Julian Blackburn College	2	<b>3</b>
Trill College	2	<b>3</b>
Sadler House	1	<b>2</b>
TCSA Office	1	<b>2</b>
Champlain College	1	<b>2</b>
Gzowski College	1	<b>2</b>
Science Complex	1	<b>2</b>

**Question 7 How often do you read Arthur?**



\*other: would read it more if I could find it  
whenever I see it  
when I see a cover that interests me

**Question 8 Which sections do you usually read?**



NB: those who read the entire newspaper are included in all other categories

\*other: letters  
random, whatever interests me

## **Questions 9 and 10 Comments about Arthur**

From questions 9 and 10 we received many comments about the general content of Arthur, and about specific sections of the paper. There were many positive comments as well as many criticisms. The comments have been grouped according to common themes. Below are some generalizations about readers' opinions, together with a selection of comments upon which the generalization was made. We received more comments about Arthur's perceived bias and editorials than other aspects of the paper and this is reflected below.

### **1. Some readers like Arthur generally.**

- Trent should be proud to have such a high quality student run newspaper
- overall, well written and presented
- informative
- interesting for light reading between classes
- enjoyable and relevant, often pleasantly progressive, but sometimes overly academic

### **2. Some readers like the perceived variety of opinions and views in Arthur.**

- The articles seem well-researched and they cover a lot of current events, which is great.
- This year has been MUCH better than the last few years for a wider variety of good journalism (as opposed to administration bashing)
- I enjoy any article that has been well researched and presents a balanced view from both sides.
- sometimes people are rude, though it is good they are voicing their opinions

### **3. Some readers dislike the perceived bias in Arthur and its editorials.**

- most of it as it is geared to a small percentage of university population
- I dislike any articles that bash the administration and/or Bonnie Paterson over needless things. Also, articles that are so biased that they are a waste of space and my time to read them.
- often quite biased
- coverage of American government, why isn't Canadian government discussed as much?
- letters and articles tend to be skewed towards the activist community in a romantic rather than objective manner
- occasionally found to be quite biased and should maybe take a more objective approach
- too much on corporate affairs
- The editorial of Trent does NOT reflect the student body it is supposed to endeavour to represent.
- Editorial board lacks diversity and editorial is pitifully monocultural
- people are liberal freaks who write letters to the editors.
- Stoops to the common denominator, seems to be mostly about sex and beer.
- editorials often anger me because they are written with that intention
- editorials have been rather right wing lately
- obscure editorials and commentary

### **4. Some readers like the focus on university and local issues.**

- I learn things about the community and the university that I wouldn't otherwise know

- local news is good
- I like the letters and feature stories particularly because they spark debate and are mostly Trent related.
- I like the editorials because they allow readers to see the opinion from another view, and also news around Trent to keep me up to date.
- It's so Trent.
- I enjoy it because it is information about what goes on around campus, as well as a little humour

**5. Some readers thought world news coverage was lacking while others thought there should be less world news.**

- world news is not well covered
- don't like world news, I'm more interested in local news
- can get world news anywhere, I would rather know about Trent

**6. Some readers thought Arthur should reflect environmental concerns.**

- Our reputation towards the environment is lacking, and this can clearly be seen in the approach to utilizing newspaper space effectively
- there seem to be a lot of paper lying around, are they being read

**7. Some readers offered comments on personal likes and dislikes**

- I love the humour in it
- I love raunchy love. Best answer column ever. I also love the feature stories, especially when they are about sex.
- dry read
- comics lack humour
- raunchy love is very vulgar
- I dislike raunchy love and dispatch from the killing floor. They are useless.
- I dislike sports, but that is personal interest, not against the paper

**8. Some readers made suggestions for improvement.**

- include more about Trent student life (hardly anything about athletics)
- some ads should be screened
- more active reporters in community affairs, especially security and accessibility
- I would like more dug up gossip about our university that we can make a stink about to change.
- bring back the socially conscious Arthur
- I want more issues and stories relating to the natural sciences
- involve more personal stories

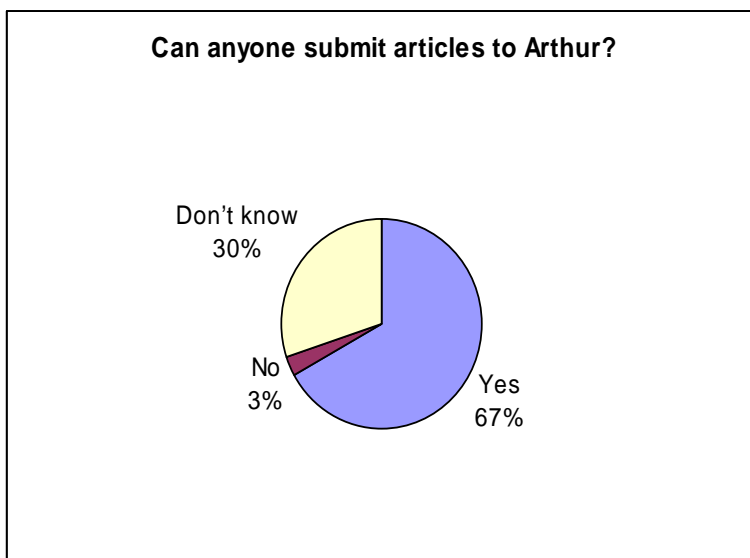
**Question 11** Have you seen “special issues” of Arthur?

	Percentage
Yes	<b>50</b>
No	<b>50</b>
Total respondents	<b>100</b>

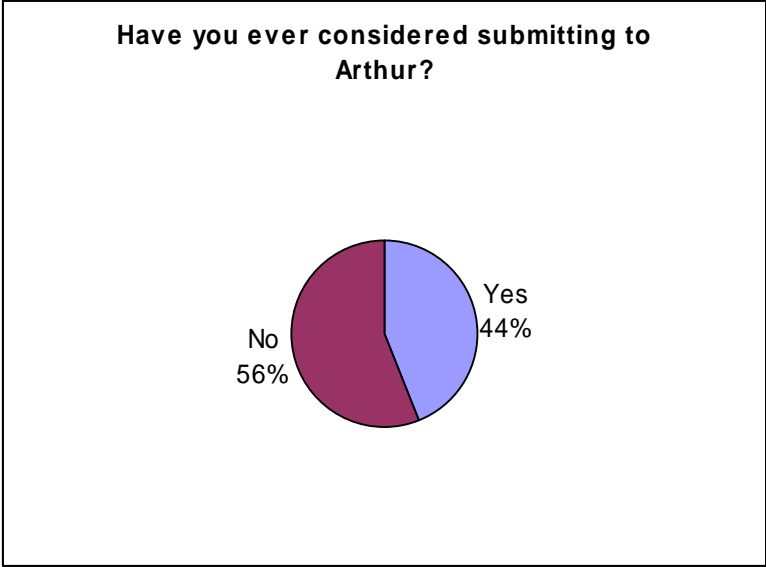
**Comments about special issues**

- good
- allows for different views and foci.
- pretty good
- interesting
- they are awesome
- very informative, good collaborations
- The artistic content is a nice change from all news, all the time.
- I think they have a lot of potential to harness and appeal to the arts community in Peterborough.
- good but could cover the issues more thoroughly
- liked the super hero one – funny
  
- GARBAGE, superheroes?-come on, how about super villains!
- “sex on campus” was too small an article for the hype it was given
- the sex issue was hilariously bad
- overall not interesting
- didn't find the themes stimulating
- Not to be too critical, but they are really quite dull. While the issue topics are imaginative, the content usually doesn't meet (or even come close) to expectations.
- seemed dry and went off on too many tangents
- one-sided, lacking in journalistic integrity

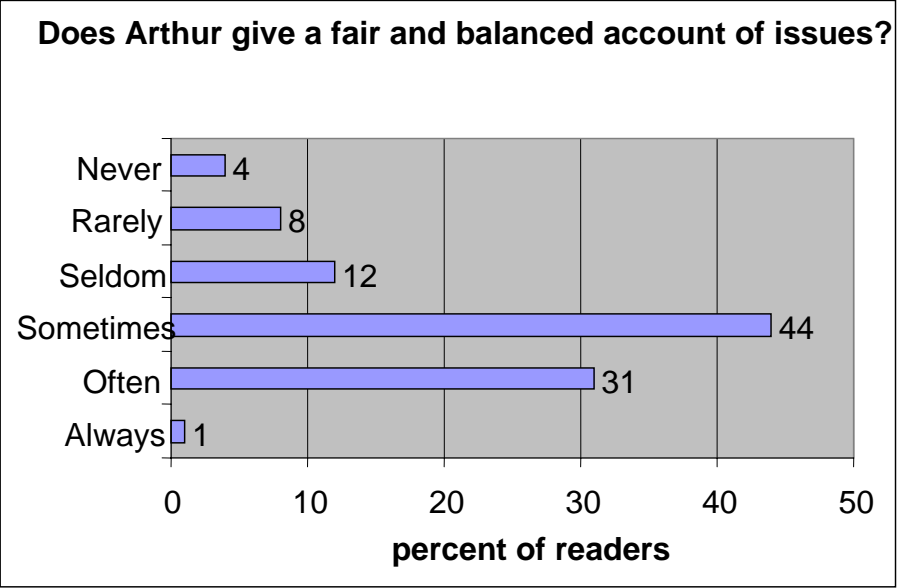
**Question 12** Can anyone submit to Arthur?



**Question 13** Have you ever considered submitting to Arthur?



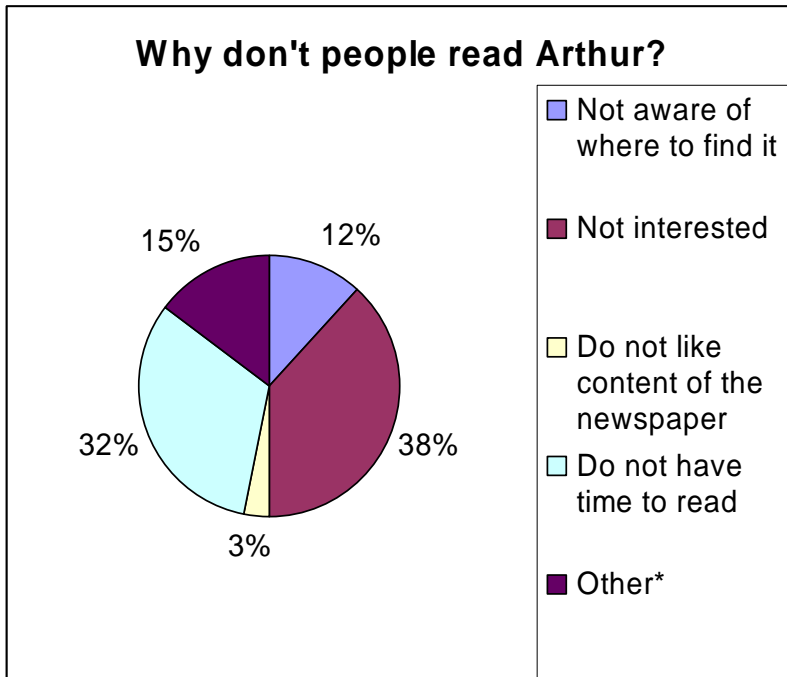
**Question 14** Does Arthur give a fair and balanced account of issues?



comments:  
-never, but that is what is great about it. It is very opinionated.



**Question 15 (non-Arthur readers only)**



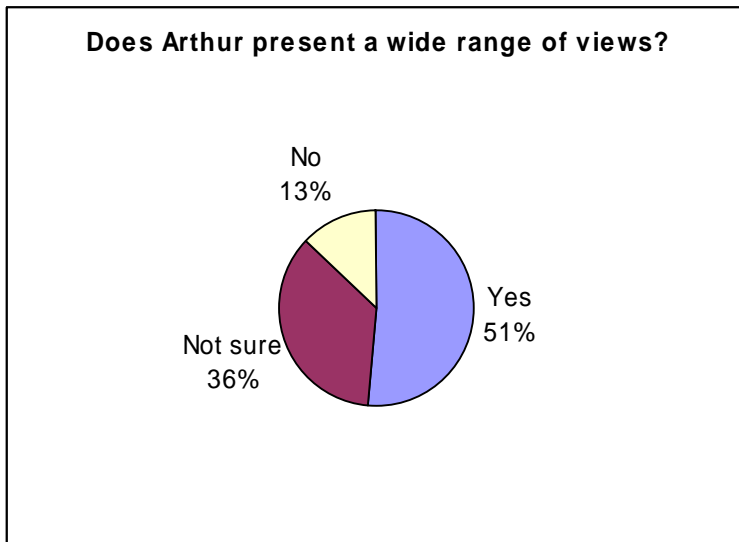
NB some respondents gave more than one reason

- \*-Not aware of existence of Arthur
- \* -doesn't seem like a serious news provider
- \*-live off campus – only at school for classes

**Question 16 Is there anything that would make you begin to read the newspaper? (non-Arthur readers only)**

Responses	Number
No	4
More time	4
Make paper more available	3
Advertise Arthur more	2
Things about the university	1
Pay me money to read it	1
More sports	1
World issues and how Trent is involved	1

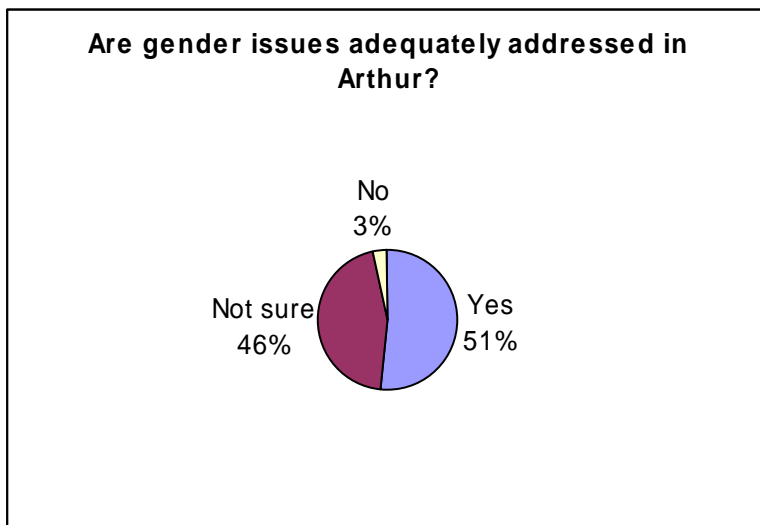
**Question 17** Does Arthur present a wide range of views?



comments:

-no, this is a problem with content of submissions, not the editorial stance

**Question 18** Are gender issues adequately addressed?



comments:

-no, they tend to be weighted towards women's issues in a manner that excludes males

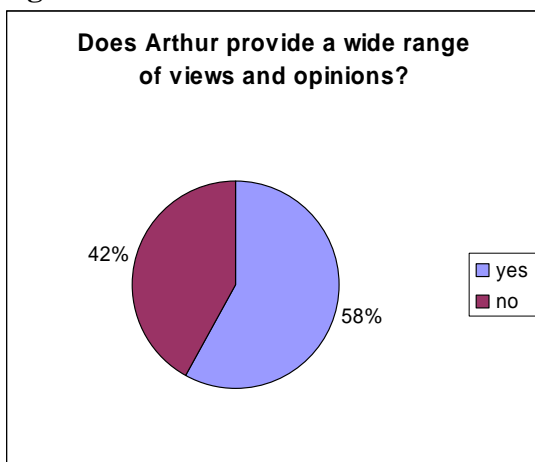
-they are over-addressed

#### **d. Results from On-line Survey**

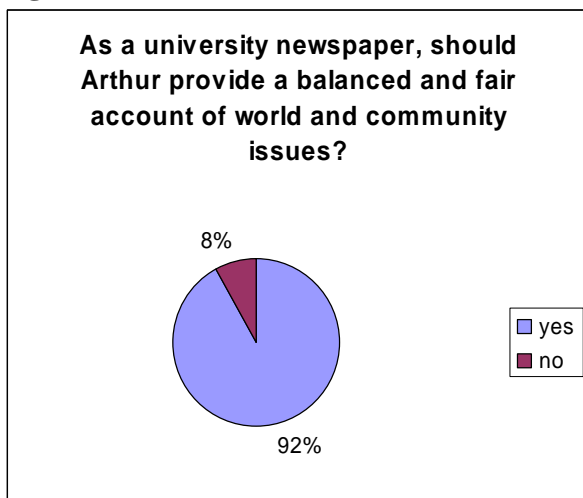
We received 12 on-line questionnaires completed by Arthur readers. Based on initial results from the questionnaires distributed on campus, the on-line version of the questionnaire was changed in a couple of respects. We added another open-ended question to get general comments on content. The results from that question and all others, which were the same as the initial questionnaire, are included in the results section above.

We also added a question relating to the perceived purpose of Arthur as a university newspaper (see Figure 6). The results show that while most readers think that Arthur should try to give a balanced and fair account of world and community issues, fewer thought that Arthur included a wide range of views and opinions (see figures 5 and 6).

**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**



It is interesting that most readers think that as a university paper, Arthur should give a balanced and fair account of issues. This call for objectivity bears a tense and even contradictory relationship to some other demands on the paper, such as the call for the Arthur to be committed to student affairs, deal with issues of gender and diversity, as well as cover both local and international news.

### **e. Results from Telephone Interviews**

All three interviewees were regular readers of Arthur. All three interviewees had made contributions to the paper and all three said it was easy to do so. One respondent said it was easy “because I work in the same building where Arthur is located, I also share many of the interests and concerns of the editors and staff of Arthur.”

The interviewees agreed that Arthur should provide a space for students to air views and engage in debate. Arthur should focus on issues of interest to students and community news, and help to foster a community within the university. One respondent felt strongly that Arthur should be an alternative source of information, especially in the age of corporate media.

One respondent suggested that one purpose of Arthur was “to provide experience and skills for the people who work at Arthur.”

General comments included:

-Lots of people think that because Arthur is called a newspaper it should present stories that are newsworthy or timely in a news style. Arthur is more of a magazine. It is printed once weekly so it can't keep up with the latest news stories. Just because it is printed on newsprint does not mean it is a newspaper.

-Arthur is a pretty good paper. It provides fun and interesting articles. It is only as objective as the people who are writing for it.

-Provide more voice for student politics.

-There are some great articles on social issues reflecting writers' opinions.

Comments on the layout included:

-I like that layout. People think it should have headlines because it calls itself a newspaper, but I don't agree.

-I would put some ads on the front.

-I really like the middle page feature and have found it personally useful for disseminating information.

-Too many papers are printed. Are they read or wasted?

-The cover may waste space, but it fits the theme and gets attention.

Advice for future editorial staff included the following:

-Don't succumb to the idea that Arthur is a traditional newspaper or that it should be. Arthur should be an agent of social change. All student newspapers should share this mandate.

-They produce a great newspaper with limited resources.

-Cover issues which the TCSA, as a voice of the students, is fighting for. Students pay for the paper through a levy, so the paper should reflect their views.

In terms of the purpose of the paper, readers seem to believe that Arthur should provide a forum for discussion and debate, an alternative source of news, an opportunity for learning and experience for writers, and a focus on university and community news from a student perspective.

## **f. Results from discussion group**

From our observation of staff meetings we saw how decisions were made about which articles to include in any particular issue of Arthur. At the story meetings, each writer spoke of the articles they were working on, issues that they had heard or read about elsewhere, (for example from conversations, posters, and other newspapers), submissions made to them, or any other ideas for a story. As the ideas were presented others commented or made suggestions about possible angles or approaches to the story, what to include or not to include, whether photos were necessary and what kind of photos would be appropriate. Examples of story lines discussed in story meetings were: a piece on the Trent-wide on-line survey; a possible submission from Trent's fair-trade group; the debate on public/private space at Gzowski College; local concerts; the NHL strike, to be covered from an alternative angle; and the Venezuelan, Colombian conflict. There was also discussion about whether anyone would travel to Queens Park to attend a "Freeze Fees Action Day".

At one story meeting a couple of questions were brought up by staff about their own coverage of women's issues, but left unanswered: "How many female musicians have we covered?" "How many gender articles have we included this year?"

After one Arthur story meeting, we held a discussion group with editorial staff. We used open-ended questions and allowed as many individuals to respond as wished to do so. Our main questions were about the purpose of Arthur, and the types of articles that should be included. We also asked about the format of the paper.

Staff responses about the purpose of the paper reflected its changing nature. We were told that the editorial policy is determined each year by the editors in chief. One type of editor will use the paper as a vehicle for political views and action. Arthur has had a reputation for being very left wing, precisely because of past editorial policies. Another strand of editors attempt to include a variety of voices in Arthur, as did the editors this year.

Staff felt that Arthur should provide a critical voice on national and global issues of interest to Trent students, but especially on local issues and university politics, as these are not covered anywhere else. Although objectivity is not possible, the views of writers should be acknowledged, and both opinion and news pieces should be included in Arthur. As well as staff opinions, Arthur should provide a channel for student voices, through their contributions of articles and letters to the paper. Content has to be from the student perspective, as it is a paper for and by students.

The format and layout of the paper were included in the staff discussion group, and they were generally satisfied with it. One staff member related that at a meeting of university newspaper staff, an expert critiqued the papers, and Arthur was thought to be aesthetically pleasing. Another person commented that the back page listings were very useful and easily accessible.

It was agreed that Arthur's format is somewhere between that of a newspaper and that of a magazine. Although it is printed on newsprint, it is published weekly, making it difficult to cover "news" in a timely fashion. Even when including news, staff felt that they should not cover it in the same way as mainstream media, but rather add a different spin reflecting student interests and concerns. The cover is usually photos or drawings rather than headlines and news, but staff felt that this type of cover often draws attention to the paper.

Another point of discussion was how to include and represent a wide range of views. Staff commented that staff story meetings are open, but may need to be publicized more widely to bring more people out. At the particular meeting that we attended, there was a member of the university student body who had come to make a contribution to Arthur. Another person came briefly to the meeting to discuss a contribution on special needs students. The staff said that while they are willing to publish contributions, they couldn't do so unless students contributed. One person present at the meeting felt that Arthur staff showed willingness to accept contributions and collaborations from students, including those who worked for the other university paper, Absynthe. One staff member, who was particularly successful in bringing in volunteer contributions, said that she often approached friends and classmates to write about themes of interest to them. She sometimes suggested articles on academic themes and also approached university groups to provide information about themes of interest to their members. She thought that lots of personal contact was the key to encouraging contributions.

Some thought that volunteer writers often want to offer their opinions, so that including a lot of contributions of this sort somewhat limits the 'news' coverage. Staff thought that there should be a balance between news and opinions. They also thought that a range of opinions should be included, and they tried to leave a lot of leeway for contributors to write about their own interests.

Finally the two "strands of editors", meaning ideologues and populists, were discussed again. The ideologues want to appear as a united and strong voice for particular ideals. The populist strand, represented by this year's staff, tries to attract a diverse readership with a variety of opinions in the paper. The ideologues see the paper as an advocate for students, while the populists see it more as a forum for student views. The direction the editorial staff will go is decided year to year by editorial staff.

Staff seemed to recognize the competing set of interests in producing a university newspaper. The readers' questionnaires appeared to show that Arthur readers expect a fair and balanced account of world and community issues. The in-depth interviews on the other hand suggest that, although Arthur should present a fair argument, objectivity is hard to achieve and Arthur should be representative of student views and/or certain political views. Editorial staff mirrored these two views with the populist and ideologue strands of editors. This year's editorial staff shares with readers the idea that a wide range of views should be represented in Arthur. They also seem to encourage the use of Arthur as a space for political thought and action by welcoming input from and debate amongst readers.

The discussions from this meeting led staff to reflect further on the purpose of the paper, and some additional comments were made in the articles of the final issue of the year. Reflecting on the year at Arthur, Penar Musaraj related that the aim of the editors this year was to include a wider range of views. Their practices and contributions this year reflected that aim. They hoped to elicit responses from readers by providing differing opinions, and judging by the number of letters, they were successful. (Musaraj, 2005)

The desire to include a variety of views and opinions is repeated in Masaya Llavaneras Blanco's article in that she feels the contributions of volunteer writers and those who send in letters lend vitality to the paper. Masaya also explained that the international page was unique among Ontario student newspapers. She felt that this section was important due to the large numbers of international students among the university population. She saw one of Arthur's roles as one of "creating bridges between experiences elsewhere and Peterborough". Masaya also reflected the view of a reader that Arthur is a

valuable place of learning; she describes it as a “school since those who actively participate in it engage in a continuous learning process”. (Llavaneras Blanco, 2005)

## **V. Recommendations**

### **1. Include a balance of investigative journalism and opinion pieces.**

In the comments from the surveys and interviews, a perception of left-wing bias was common. This may be in part due to Arthur’s reputation as a left-wing publication. Opinions pieces are valuable and can spark interesting debate, but where opinions are included, they should be made explicit.

Moreover, given that Arthur has a goal of being an inclusive publication, then perhaps there should be more of a focus on objective investigative journalism.

### **2. Actively solicit volunteer contributions.**

As many readers were not aware that they could submit articles, this is an area where there should be continued promotion of Arthur as a newspaper that welcomes and needs student contributions. It seems likely that many students do not appreciate that Arthur is being compiled year to year both by those who work there and by those who contribute. Arthur needs to continue to solicit letters to the editor as well, as they are seen as interesting and can provoke reflection and discussion. Arthur can also be promoted as a place where students can learn and gain experience in producing a newspaper.

### **3. Continue to focus on university and local issues.**

Since the mandate of Arthur is that of a university and community newspaper, Arthur editors should continue to focus on university and local news. This is seen to be important by readers because such coverage might not be available elsewhere. Given that Arthur is funded by a student levy, it should continue to cover issues from a student perspective.

### **4. Attempt to include issues of interest to all areas of study.**

As issues of interest to certain disciplines are under represented, submissions from all areas of study within the university should be actively solicited. In particular, the natural and applied sciences appear to be under-represented. Perhaps a special issue/ special feature might be able to address this. Scientific interpretations and analysis can also be incorporated into a variety of other subject areas.

### **5. Continue to include world news.**

World news appear to be of less importance to some students although it would not be wise to drop this altogether given that Trent has a high percentage of international students and that world news offers a broad outlook at many issues that have local relevance. The international page also offers opportunities to link student experiences abroad with their experiences in Peterborough. Arthur should present alternative views to those of the mainstream media.

## **6. Continue to include provocative columns.**

it is difficult to make recommendations based on personal likes and dislikes. For example, raunchy love elicited strong opinions, both in praise and criticism. Along with the comics, this column appears to generate the most reaction. Based on the range opinions it would be impossible to recommend either continued inclusion or exclusion of these features. However, if the aim is to provoke reactions from and discussion amongst readers, then clearly these types of columns should continue to be included.

## **7. Actively promote/advertise Arthur.**

Since it often takes first year students considerable time to become acquainted with all aspects of university life, it might be worthwhile for Arthur to advertise more actively in September, and to target lower year students.

## **VI. Conclusions**

The research in this evaluation focused on Arthur readers' comments and opinions about the paper. An attempt was made to provide a representative sample of the university population by including respondents from various areas of study and different years of study. Although our sample provided enough data to make some generalizations about Arthur readers in general, the sample was not large enough within each area of study to make many predictions about readers' opinions within particular areas of study.

Although Arthur staff views were included in our research, such as in the discussion group, our focus was much more on readers' opinions. Further research on staff makeup, opinions and practices would be useful to see how staff perceive and attempt to meet readers' needs.

Our research only minimally included views of non-Arthur readers. Our results show that most non-readers state that they don't have time to read, so there is little that could be done to attract that group. However, there were a significant number (38%) who said they were not interested and only 3% claimed to dislike the content of Arthur. We would recommend further research to see if there is some way to attract new readers from these groups, especially the non-interested group as it represents a large number of possible new readers.

Through this research we have attempted to answer our research questions, and provide insight into Arthur readers' interests and concerns. We hope that we have been able to provide recommendations, which will be of use to the future editors. Some of the recommendations should be easy to implement as they represent a continuation of current practices, and others should help editorial staff achieve Arthur's goal of being a quality university and community newspaper incorporating multiple voices.

The larger questions raised by our research are questions about journalistic objectivity and the nature of Arthur as a university newspaper. The Arthur staff recognizes these issues and our involvement, through our research, provoked reflection and discussion among the staff on both of these important and weighty issues. Continued self-reflection will be of benefit for present and future writers and editors.



## **VII. Sources/References**

Masaya Llavaneras (2005). “(Re)filling Arthur with Meaning: A Farewell”. Arthur, vol. 39, issue 24, p. 12.

Penar Musaraj (2005). “When Outsiders are in Charge”. Arthur vol. 39, issue 24, p.3.

Arthur Mission Statement, retrieved on April 12, 2005. [www.trent.ca/arthur](http://www.trent.ca/arthur)

## **VIII. Appendices**

- a. Arthur Questionnaire
- b. Telephone Interview form
- c. Questionnaire results tally sheet
- d. Request for participation in on line survey
- e. Summary of questionnaire results

Arthur Questionnaire

Miriam McFadyen and Tammy Stenner  
February, 2005

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**In order to analyze how Arthur can best meet the demands of students, faculty and staff of the Trent community as well as the wider Peterborough community we would like you to answer some questions. We want to determine how widely known and read Arthur is. For those of you who are regular readers we would like to know – who are you? What do you like about this newspaper? For those who are not readers of Arthur we would like to discover – why not?**

1. Are you a Trent student?  Yes  No

If yes, what discipline? \_\_\_\_\_

2. If you are not a student, are you?  Working  
 Unemployed  
 Other

3. In general, which newspapers do you read? \_\_\_\_\_

4. How often is Arthur published?  daily  
 weekly  
 monthly  
 don't know

5. Do you read Arthur?  yes  no

(If no skip to question # 14)

6. Where do you usually pick up a copy of Arthur? \_\_\_\_\_

7. How often do you read Arthur?  once a week  
 2 or 3 times a month  
 once a month  
 once every 2 months  
 once a year  
 other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

8. Which sections do you read?  entire newspaper  
 editorial  
 local news

- world news
- comment/columns
- arts
- listings/classifieds
- feature stories
- other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

9. Which sections of the newspaper do you dislike and why?

---



---

10. Do you have any general comments about the content of the newspaper?

---



---

11. Have you seen any of the “special issues” of Arthur?  Yes  No

If yes, what was your overall opinion about those issues?

---

12. Any one can submit articles to Arthur for publication.

True  False  Don't know

13. Have you ever considered submitting an article to Arthur?  yes  no

14. “When I read Arthur I feel satisfied that it gives a balanced and fair account of world and community issues.”

Always   Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Rarely   Never

(Skip to # 17)

15. If you do not read Arthur, why not?

- not aware of where to find it
- not interested
- do not like the content of the newspaper
- do not have time to read it
- other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

16. Is there anything which would make you begin to read the newspaper?

---

17. From what you know of Arthur, does it include a wide range of views and opinions?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ not sure                      \_\_\_\_\_ no

18. In your opinion, are gender issues adequately addressed in Arthur?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ not sure                      \_\_\_\_\_ no

The information gathered from this questionnaire will be confidential and respondents will not be identified. Opinions are being solicited to help improve the Arthur's ability to meet its goal of being an inclusive student newspaper representing a wide range of views

Would you be willing to participate in a one-time focus group on issues related to Arthur?

\_\_\_\_\_yes                      \_\_\_\_\_no

If yes, please provide contact information.

Name\_\_\_\_\_ email\_\_\_\_\_ telephone\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2**

### **Arthur Phone Interviews**

Topics to discuss:

Intro to interview- purpose, confidentiality, can stop at any time, etc.  
Regular reader?

1. Purpose of a university newspaper?  
(university news, sports, local/international issues?)

Should articles be balanced and objective or should they present opinions of writers?

General comments about purpose and content

2. Is format more like magazine or newspaper? (cover...)

Any comments about format in general? (for aesthetic reasons, environmental, interest...)  
(size, cover, use of photos/artwork, colour, type of print, etc.)

3. Have you or would you contribute to paper?  
Easy to do so?

4. If future editorial staff were considering opinions from these interviews, what point would you want to emphasize to them?

### Appendix 3 Questionnaire results tally sheet

Class  
Year

Number of surveys

---

Q 1+2

Student  
Discipline  
Working

---

Q3 Other papers read

---

Q4 How often published

Daily  
Weekly  
Monthly  
Don't know

---

Q5 Read?

Yes  
No

---

Q6 where pick up

On campus  
OC/Wenjack  
Library  
Athletic complex  
LEC  
Champlain College  
Science complex  
Gzowski

---

Q7 How often read?

Once a week  
2 or 3 times a month  
Once a month  
Once every 2 months  
Once a year  
Other

---

Q8 which sections read?

Entire paper  
Editorial  
Local news  
World news  
Comment/columns  
Arts  
Listings/classified  
Feature stories  
Other

---

Q9

Which sections dislike and why?

---

Q10

General comments about  
Paper

---

Q11

Special issues

Yes

No

Opinion about them

---

Q12

Anyone can submit?

Yes

No

---

Q13

Have you considered submitting?

Yes

No

---

Q14

Balanced and fair account

Always

Often

Sometimes

Seldom

Rarely

Never

---

Q15

Non-readers

Why not?

Not aware of where to find it  
Not interested  
Do not like the content of the newspaper\  
Do not have time  
Other

---

Q16  
Anything make you begin to read it?

---

Q17  
Wide range of views and opinions?  
Yes  
Not sure  
No

---

Q18  
Gender issues adequately addressed?  
Yes  
Not sure  
No



# Arthur's questionnaire

Available in our website

[www.trentarthur.info](http://www.trentarthur.info)

Please help Arthur understand its strengths and weaknesses as well as its role in student life and the University community. For those of you who are regular readers, we would like to know, who are you? What do you like about this newspaper? How would you change it?

The information will be confidential and respondents will not be identified. Opinions are being solicited to help improve the Arthur's ability to meet its goal of being an inclusive student newspaper representing a wide range of views.

The questionnaire is part of an independent research project conducted under the guidance of the Trent Centre for Community-Based Education.

# Summary of Arthur's Independent Evaluation Project

Through the coordination of the Trent Centre for Community-Based Education, two Trent students conducted an independent evaluation project dealing with Arthur's role in the student community. Following are some of the basic results of this survey:

Of those surveyed 72% read Arthur.	52% of readers read the entire newspaper
67% of respondents are aware that anyone can submit stories to Arthur; however, this means that the rest (33%) either do not know that this is possible or they think it is not possible.	By far the most popular Arthur pickup location was outside Wenjack theatre, or elsewhere in Otonabee College.
In a breakdown of respondents from first year to fourth year, the percentage of students who read Arthur increases by year. Just over half of first year students are readers but most of the fourth year students surveyed are Arthur readers.	Most of those who read the paper are regular readers, reading several times a month: 68% read Arthur either once a week or two to three times a month.
Half of respondents felt that Arthur provided a wide range of views.	Half of respondents felt that gender issues are adequately addressed in Arthur.
The most popular sections of the newspaper were the feature stories, with almost all readers claiming to read them. Local news and comments columns were also popular reads.	The least read sections of Arthur were the listings/classified section, world news, and arts. Several comments suggested people prefer to get world news elsewhere, and rely on Arthur for university and local news.

## A random sample of Arthur readers' comments about the paper:

- most of it as it is geared to a small percentage of university population
- overall, well written and presented
- too much on corporate affairs
- dry read, involve more personal stories
- occasionally quite biased, maybe take more objective approach
- dislike use of profanity that some articles have, excluding raunchy love
- people are liberal freaks who write letters to the editors
- mostly interesting-wish there was more
- special issues allow for different views and foci
- special issues: GARBAGE

The researchers would like to thank all those who responded to the questionnaire about Arthur in classes and on-line. Further analysis of the data collected will be completed in the coming weeks and a complete report of findings and recommendations will be

provided to Arthur staff. For anyone interested in seeing the completed report, it will be made available in the Arthur office.

**TAMMY STENNER AND MIRIAM MCFADYEN**