

Marie Murphy

Professor Hemingway

Word count: 857

A Local Journalist's Drive to Deliver

A makeshift nametag made of paper sits on Brenna Flanagan's desk, along with two Funko Pop action figures from the TV show *Madmen* standing tall next to an organizer. A red plant pot is propped up in front of the floor-length windows. She shares that her office is brand new. "I need to put stuff on the walls," she says in a light and playful tone.

A few short months before, the young journalist broke one of the biggest stories to come out of her alma mater, which led to big changes in the Wilmington community. All of this is a result of her drive and determination to uncover every aspect of a good story.

Flanagan is a recent alumna of the University of North Carolina Wilmington from Goldsboro, North Carolina who has been a reporter and journalist for about two years. She had a lot on her plate as a college student; she double majored in Communication Studies and Theatre. She's been a writer her whole life, being editor of The Seahawk and her high school yearbook.

One of the news outlets she looks up to is the New York Times, which Brenna calls "gold standard." She likes Vox as well, an outlet that is "very progressive in their politics" and use an "explainer-based method" when reporting.

Flanagan never thought that writing five stories a week with the Port City Daily would be her first job out of college. The path she took shocked her, but she is embracing everything she faces.

At The Seahawk, Brenna's beat was culture. She switched it up upon starting her job and she found herself enjoying education pieces the most, which she says is because of today's

politics. “In the last few years in this, sort of, post-Trump era, that [education] has really become like a breeding ground for crazy, alt-right sort of thinking,” she said. Occasionally she’ll write a culture or entertainment piece, but she’d say her focus is now in the realm of education and government.

Another surprise in her life was how she got her job. She got lucky and learned of the opening through a job website. She considered jobs in copywriting and grant writing as well. She also didn’t expect to move up in the ranks so quickly. “I never thought I’d be Assistant Editor... not even two years out from graduation, so that was unexpected,” she says proudly while fidgeting with the pen in her hand.

Shea Carver, her editor, speaks very highly of Flanagan and her work. She says that she is focused and great at sticking with a story that has a lot of potential. “She needs very little oversight from me, which is any kind of editor’s dream,” she says.

Her commitment was on display when she covered last year’s protests around the Razor Walker Award, which honors someone within the Watson College of Education at UNCW. Last year’s winner was Senator Michael Lee, a candidate who, in short, is “the antithesis of what this Razor Walker Award really stands for.”

Her coverage in began in April 2023 when a professor from Watson shared a [petition](#) with her. This petition was a place for people to express their anger about Lee receiving the award. “I forget how many people signed it, but it was quite a bit. Then [I wrote a story](#) about that petition,” she says. In June 2023, she uncovered in public records that Lee was not a top candidate; Flanagan says that “Michael Lee [was] ranked second to last” for the award.

Flanagan is proud to say she was able to “out-scoop everybody,” and break the story. “That caused an entire fallout, where the dean of students at Watson school spoke to media...

and ended up getting pushed out of UNCW,” Carver says. Flanagan shares that Watson College Dean Van Dempsey and his attorney “were both willing to share their side...and sort of keep me in the loop as that process unfolded.” Her final piece on the scandal was in October 2023, which outlined “the final agreement that they [Van Dempsey and UNCW] had reached.”

Although she’s been working as a journalist for two years, she’s still learning her way. The best piece of advice she’s received is that a journalist should let the story guide them. “That, sort of, narrows your mind into, you know, what sources you get and what quotes you’re looking for,” she says. “Letting a story and the sources and information you get guide you into what it’s supposed to be is paramount, honestly, in this job.”

Her commitment and dedication to what matters is not limited to her line of work. Her roommate and best friend Caroline Hartsell said that her and Brenna’s favorite pastime is to “sit on the couch and enjoy each other’s presence.” They met while performing in an a cappella group together. Hartsell describes how Flanagan assumed a higher position in the group. “She would kind of make sure everybody did what they needed to do,” she says.

Brenna Flanagan is a resilient woman who has welcomed every change in her life with a smile and a good outfit. While she’s still learning the ropes of being in the journalism industry, she says the most rewarding part of being a journalist is “being able to see results that was, at least in part, stemmed from your coverage.” Her ability to get good information for all her stories is key to seeing these results. Maybe they’ll result in new office decorations.