



---

# **How Well do Brigham Young University-Idaho Students Know Current Events?**



---

**Kaiti A. Moss**

**Other Contributors:**

**Alex Grooms  
Adam Farnes  
Taylor Hartman  
Lochlan Phillips**

## Research Summary

Being aware of current events is crucial to a person's interaction with society. Nations and people should learn from history and past mistakes so that they are not repeated. Current events are pieces of history in the making; the world will benefit from the understanding of current events. At Brigham Young University-Idaho I established a research team to study how often students reach out to understand current events. My research team saw the importance our professors in the communication department placed on news consumption. Through our research we wanted to know how often students reach out to news sources, what types of media they received news from, and how they felt it affected their daily lives.

My research team began by studying research about current events and its consumption in general. The Pew Research Center for People and the Press performed a study in which they synthesized 165 separate national surveys and found that American news preferences have remained stagnant over the last two decades. The percentage of people who follow the news dropped from thirty percent in the 1980s, to twenty-three percent in the 1990s. However, during the 21st Century, followers of the news jumped back to thirty percent. That swing in news viewing has less to do with the increase in different avenues by which people access media (i.e. personal internet devices like cell phones and Internet), and more to do with changes in world events.

Even though more people are closely following the news, on average the Pew Research Center found that only a quarter of Americans find the news compelling on a daily basis. The priority of news consumption has become neither less nor more serious since the 1980s. While there has been some fluctuation, the changes have not been radical enough to be noted.

For our research, we focused on determining if a student's academic focus correlates with how informed they are with the current events. In order to conduct this research we created a survey with questions that reflect their grade and their major. The survey was sent to three hundred students, in which ninety-seven participated, giving an 8 percent margin of error to our findings.

In our research we focused on how aware students are of the news, what types of media they received news from, and how they felt it affected their daily lives. We began by seeing if they could visually connect public figures with their names. We used people that as a society we are constantly surrounded by, for example: Joe Biden, Ron Paul, and Sarah Palin. We also wanted to see how informed they are about current events that are more celebrity centered such as the Kardashian family or Ellen Degeneres.

In our study we found that students were not as aware of local figures as they were of national figures. Students at BYU-Idaho are very aware of celebrities such as, Justin Bieber. An overwhelming 98% of students correctly identified Justin Bieber from a picture presented in our studies. Political figures ranked high if they had national significance. Public officials like Joe Biden and Sarah Palin were presented to students in photographs, in which ninety-five percent were able to correctly identify them. However, only thirty-eight percent were able to correctly identify the governor of Idaho, Butch Otter.

---

Focusing on what types of accounts (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and online subscriptions) the students have could tell many things, such as if there is a connection to the source(s) of knowledge they use. We wanted to know if students were getting their news information from: television, radio, online news, social media, or newspaper subscriptions. Through our research we found that over sixty percent of students were receiving their news from either the television or online, showing that this generation is a digital and visual generation. Students can access news online not just through computers, but tablets and cell phones too. Reruns of news broadcasts are also available for viewing online.

We wanted to find out how often students are accessing the news. We asked them on a scale to indicate how many times a week they access the news for current events. We also wanted to know why they were interested in finding out about the current events. Our results showed students accessed the news 1-3 days a week, excluding social media as a type of news. As a whole they were aware of newspapers that are well known in today's society, The Wall Street Journal and New York Times were among the top publications noted.

The findings show that regardless of how the students accessed the news they were still accessing it, thus allowing them to be more informed of what is going on around them. Being familiar with such knowledge will adequately help them through their conversations with most individuals they communicate with.

According to our research, most of those surveyed had current events come up in their conversations at least 6 times a week. We noted that people discuss the news twice as much as they access it. Even though students themselves might not read, watch, or listen to the news, they are still hearing it from their peers, family members, co-workers, and teachers.

Going into our research, our team assumed that a student's major would have an effect on their news consumption, but we were pleasantly disproven. Our findings show it doesn't matter what the student's academic focus is. Overall students at Brigham Young University-Idaho are accessing the news in the same ways and getting 1-3 days worth of news. Although students are only accessing the news 1-3 days of the week it is important to remember that current events occur in their conversations at least 6 times a week. The students are able to use this knowledge to better understand the world and acknowledge these current historical moments in their own lives.

## Works Cited

---

"Public Knowledge of Current Affairs Little Changed by News and Information Revolutions." Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Pew Research Center, 15 Apr. 2007. Web. 14 July 2012. <<http://www.people-press.org/2007/04/15/public-knowledge-of-current-affairs-little-changed-by-news-and-information-revolutions/>>.