

Norah Walsh interviewed by Lexi Jackson on March 26, 2024

**Lexi Jackson:** First, what I want to start with is just your basic background information, your education here, like your major and your plans for after you graduate.

**Norah Walsh:** Yeah. So my name is Norah Walsh, and I'm a senior. I'm graduating in May, and I'm a Spanish and philosophy on the pre-law track. Double major. I came into Mary Washington thinking I was going to do maybe international affairs or political science. Took some of those classes, took some philosophy classes, and really liked those, and so I stuck with those.

And then my sophomore year started, with The Weekly Ringer as editor. As opinion editor. It was when it was The Blue and Gray press, and the section was actually called Viewpoints, and people wouldn't know that it was opinion, and so they would say it wasn't objective reporting. And we were like, no, this is the opinion section.

So we changed that, uh, with the change of The Weekly Ringer, as well, which was my sophomore year. And then I was associate editor my junior year. I studied abroad this summer and the fall. So I did one semester remotely as associate, and I wrote some articles and I edited pieces from Spain. And then when I came back, um, I was in person as associate. And then elections came around, which were in election season now. And, I got elected editor, and so I've been serving in that role since August.

**LJ:** So what are some plans that you have after you graduate?

**NW:** I've been applying around. I really want to work maybe in, like, publishing or, content writing in some way. I don't know if I want to stick with journalism, particularly. But we'll see. And then grad school is definitely a plan as well. I figured out about a master's program abroad that is really interesting. So, we're going to try to see what works and how I can find living as well up to that. But, yeah, something with writing, maybe with the end goal of being a professor.

**LJ:** So about, The Weekly Ringer, how has it developed since you've been here?

**NW:** Well, okay, so I said before that we used to be called The Blue and Gray Press. And so The Blue and Gray Press was changed from what was called The Bullet originally, in about 2014.

**LJ:** Is there a reason for the name change?

**NW:** I know that there exists a reason, in our constitution. I haven't read it recently, but I think the reason was that it just aligned more and was more representative of the school. But we changed it to The Weekly Ringer because a lot of the connotations with blue and gray, especially here in the south, are with the Confederacy and with a lot of confederate history around us. We know that the school's colors are blue and gray, but we think that's maybe a vestige of the history that we're not particularly fond of, that we don't want to promote and have on our masthead.

And so we thought about new ideas, and we voted on it as a staff. And we were like, okay, like, what are some notable landmarks around campus? What are some things that we think are

representative of Mary Washington that we want to highlight and that we think are, like, important things? And so, the Bell Tower, of course, stuck out. And our associate editor at the time, Bernadette D'Auria, designed in Canva, what is now our logo. And so it has the eagle and a bell tower on top. And, we were like, The Weekly Ringer makes a lot of sense with that. So it got changed to that. With that change, we also saw viewpoints go into turn, into opinion. We started selling more ads, which I've seen as well. This semester. We've had a full page ad pretty much every week.

**LJ:** Are they from businesses around the area?

**NW:** Yeah, we try to do that. Sodexo actually has been taking out full page ads for quite a long time. They usually will ask for a full page ad when a lot of events are coming up or if there's a break coming up and they need to give more information than usual. We've also had, like, half page and quarter page ads from them, but it just depends. It's on our flex page. So sometimes if we have a lot of articles, we need only, like, a half page ad because we can't fit everything that we want to put. So, yeah, we've had that.

And then within the editorial staff, we've seen a lot of change and a lot of punctuation, but a lot of people staying the same. So I would say my first two years on the staff, it was a gradual flow of people who had been in journalism and had been editors before being promoted to more senior level positions, like associate editor-in-chief. We also had Jess Kirby as editor-in-chief for two years in a row. So the second year, because she had had a year to learn the role, she was really

able to think critically and produce a lot of her own content as well, because she knew how to manage the flow of just the news cycle and stuff.

But this year, we've had a lot of more editors than last semester. We had new editors this year. Last semester, we had an under enrolled practicum class, and so instead of the normal 20 plus, we had 13 writers and that class staffs our paper. So we had a lot of editors having to write and edit stories. And then we also had an interim advisor because our normal one was away on maternity leave. And so that also made fewer journalism minors want to, like, take the class because they knew that they wanted to take Sushma Subramanian, who's our normal faculty advisor. So that was a little bit of a struggle, but she's back this semester. And so we've seen more people sign up for the class. We have a more ample staff of writers. And so that's been good to see.

**LJ:** That's good. Can you talk about the clubhouse now and all the moves?

**NW:** So we're right now in the clubhouse. It looks pretty similar to when I first started on the paper, as opinion editor. We have a big cork board over there, where, because we didn't, because we've moved, and recently into this space, we haven't put up our previous editions on the cork board, but usually we do, we have some illustrations of our former editor-in-chief, Jess Kirby, that were drawn during a staff meeting that we have on Sundays.

So before COVID they would always be in person. During COVID they were online. And then they switched to hybrid, and now we do them on zoom often because not everyone can come.

But sometimes we'll do hybrid as well. So, yeah, and then we have a bunch of computers and we have our printer. And our printer prints out really big sheets that show the size of the newspaper so that we can print out our layout and see the dimensions properly and stuff. It also helps the copy editor or whoever's copy editing to see what it's actually going to look like.

But yeah, this was our original space when I first came on. And then my junior year when I was in Spain, the paper moved from here because there were some concerns about mold. I wrote a staff editor, a staff ed about our move after we moved from the mansion here again. But in the emails that Jess Kirby relayed with some facilities members, they said it wasn't mold, but everyone would feel really sick after they left and stuff. And there were definitely some water concerns, like in one of the emails, she wrote that the editors had to sit on towels because everything was so damp in here.

And so because of that, they were like, okay, we understand they got moved to the HCC for, like, one or two layouts. But I don't know. We're here for a long time, and so it's really necessary that we have our own space and that we have a newsroom kind of thing. We have the things that we need, and this is important work, so we don't want anything tampered with and stuff. And we're also an independent newspaper, so having our own space, that's not necessarily in a shared space with the university, I think, reinforces that element. But after that, they got moved into the mansion, which is the creative writing mansion on William street and College Avenue.

And that space was great. It was on the second floor. It's a beautiful, beautiful home. That's, like, turned into classrooms and stuff. And there was, like, a seminar classroom that we used. So that's

where we had all of our computers and printers and stuff. There's a really large master bathroom that has a tub. And so it was a kind of a notorious space. Yeah. But when Monroe got shut down, the offices, the professors' offices that were in there had to be shifted somewhere else so that people could go to office hours. And so they got moved into the mansion, and we got moved back here. And so there has been work done. We don't feel sick leaving, which is good. But we would really like to go back to the mansion when Monroe is open. Yeah.

**LJ:** I want to talk about some of your controversial columns. Like when I reviewed some transcripts from the Centennial History. One of the editors, in 2006, was talking about the Sexclamations column. So do you have anything like that, or would you like to comment on that?

**NW:** Yeah, we brought that back my sophomore year when Cosmy Pellis was an associate editor. She was my associate editor who I sent my pieces to from opinion and she was like, I want to write a sex column. So it was called the talk with Cosmy Pellis. And she would talk about a lot of different topics, um, that got sent in and that she chose to talk about, um, and they ranged from feeling confident in bed to how to engage in sex after being assaulted and things like that. So, heavy topics, but also basic sex ed that people should know how to use condoms and what it means to also use protection in same sex relationships and stuff.

And so she had a really nuanced perspective that we really valued. And it was informational. It wasn't just gossip. And so we wrote that someone did, one of the writers in practicums, a letter to the editor about it saying that it was as if we were promoting sex, like putting it on a billboard or

painting it on the rock on campus. And that she wasn't proud of that being a representation of what Mary Washington was.

And so Cosmy was allowed to respond in the same section. And defended her case of saying, okay, not everyone has sex and wants to, totally fine. But for those who do have it and do want to have sex, they should do so safely. And, like, I'm presenting an informed and experienced perspective. And so, yeah, I really like that we have a relationship column, which is not as explicit right now. And that gets published here and there. So, I really like them. I think that it's great when an editor picks up a column and really dedicates himself to it.

**LJ:** What are some goals that you have for the school newspaper this semester as well as going forward?

**NW:** Yeah, so I'm graduating. So, we're looking at goals as an editorial board. And elections are coming up, so we're, like, seeing who's going to go on what section and recommending to people as well. If you apply, this would be a section that you'd be really good in. So please, you can choose many sections and weigh your chances, but you should try this one. And so we've been trying to get practicum writers to contribute to that. And also just like posting flyers on campus and spreading the word on social media and stuff like that. So that's a lot of the goal, uh, making right now and then in general, I think just like, keeping up with beats that we've started and will continue into next year. So we're looking forward to that.

LJ: So as far as the physical attributes of campus over your time here, what have been some, like, significant changes that you've witnessed?

NW: Yeah, well I came. I came here during COVID So I think, like, everything being closed down because of, like, pandemic guidelines made it seem like all the more, I don't know, like, closed for construction kind of thing. While there was also construction on campus, I moved in early, so that was also, like, kind of just made campus seem like really like an isolated place.

Construction has changed. We don't have that on, as much on campus. We do have Monroe closed and some stuff happening in buildings, but it's not as ostentatious. And then, yeah, I guess I've just gotten to know campus more, so it's come to seem more familiar and, like, the things that happen are consistent. Of course, the. The leaf blowers are the same. They're always tormenting my philosophy professors in Farmer.

But, yeah, Ball Circle has closed and opened several times, and I really like Ball Circle. Like, when I took a tour here, it was, like, the thing that I really valued about campus, but it's been closed down because of construction. But now it's open, supposedly, but not completely. And so I don't know how to feel about that. But I guess nothing has really changed with that. It's just kind of been a consistent flux of being open and closed. Yeah.

LJ: Were there any events that you were able to attend on Ball Circle?



NW: I've had a club carnival on Ball Circle. I think during a multicultural fair, there was some event, and then I think there was a concert also. No, I think that was on Jeffy. Everything's moved to Jeffy Square. So there have been things that I've gone to that are, like, similar to what would be held on Ball Circle, but they've just been shifted over, so.

LJ: Yeah, well, hopefully they'll have it.

NW: I know, I know. Yeah.

LJ: Well, thank you so much for your time.

NW: Thank you.