



Information Needs Assessment for the City of Hermiston

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Hermiston

Sarah-Mae McCullough • Andrew DeVigal

J 463: Engaged Journalism

Information Needs Assessment for the City of Hermiston

Sarah-Mae McCullough

Report Author • School of Journalism and Communication

Andrew DeVigal

Professor of Practice • School of Journalism and Communication

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

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About SCI

The Sustainable Cities Institute (SCI) is an applied think tank focusing on sustainability and cities through applied research, teaching, and community partnerships. We work across disciplines that match the complexity of cities to address sustainability challenges, from regional planning to building design and from enhancing engagement of diverse communities to understanding the impacts on municipal budgets from disruptive technologies and many issues in between.

SCI focuses on sustainability-based research and teaching opportunities through two primary efforts:

1. Our Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP), a massively scaled university-community partnership program that matches the resources of the University with one Oregon community each year to help advance that community's sustainability goals; and

2. Our Urbanism Next Center, which focuses on how autonomous vehicles, e-commerce, and the sharing economy will impact the form and function of cities.

In all cases, we share our expertise and experiences with scholars, policymakers, community leaders, and project partners. We further extend our impact via an annual Expert-in-Residence Program, SCI China visiting scholars program, study abroad course on redesigning cities for people on bicycle, and through our co-leadership of the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network (EPIC-N), which is transferring SCYP to universities and communities across the globe. Our work connects student passion, faculty experience, and community needs to produce innovative, tangible solutions for the creation of a sustainable society.

About SCYP

The Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) is a year-long partnership between SCI and a partner in Oregon, in which students and faculty in courses from across the university collaborate with a public entity on sustainability and livability projects. SCYP faculty and students work in collaboration with staff from the partner agency through a variety of studio projects and service-

learning courses to provide students with real-world projects to investigate. Students bring energy, enthusiasm, and innovative approaches to difficult, persistent problems. SCYP's primary value derives from collaborations that result in on-the-ground impact and expanded conversations for a community ready to transition to a more sustainable and livable future.

About City of Hermiston

Hermiston is a vibrant destination that incorporates rural and urban opportunities as the largest city in eastern Oregon. In the 1860s Hermiston was known as a hotel called the “Six Mile House,” a stop for travelers in the Columbia River Basin. Following the establishment of railroads, the City was incorporated in 1907. Approximately eight square miles in area, Hermiston currently has more than 19,000 residents.

Hermiston’s employment rate is 62.1%, which is above Oregon’s employment rate of 59.3%, and has a mean household income of \$54,123. Seventy percent of the residents are between the ages of 18-64.

Hermiston is located at the junction of Interstate 82 and Interstate 84 in Umatilla County, near the Oregon-Washington border. Stanfield, the closest city, is five miles southeast, and Umatilla is located six miles north along the Umatilla River.

Renowned for its watermelons, Hermiston’s desert climate and proximity to the Umatilla River and the Columbia River have made agriculture a dominant industry since the early 1900s. In the 1970s potato processing plants and the introduction of center pivot irrigation firmly established

agriculture as an economic asset to the City. At the same time, industrial businesses like Marlette Homes, Inc., Lamb Weston, and Union Pacific expanded into Hermiston, further stimulating the economy. Additional commercial development in the 1990s and 2000s with Walmart and FedEx building distribution centers, led to an increase in employment opportunities and diversified economic growth. The 2010s saw further diversification of the economic base with the construction of data centers in Boardman and Umatilla with additional centers proposed for Hermiston as well. The City is a regional trade hub and is central to a broader area serving over 76,000 people. Hermiston’s success as a retail and data center continues to spur growth and development.

The City maintains 13 parks, 15 landscape areas, and more than 100 acres for the community while Hat Rock State Park, located near Hermiston, offers City residents and visitors a variety of recreational activities. In the summer, the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center hosts the Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo, among other events that highlight Hermiston's rural culture.

Forty-four percent of Hermiston's population is Hispanic and as the City grows, it has emphasized inclusion. The City created the Hispanic Advisory Committee in 2012, which proceeded to represent and integrate Hermiston's Hispanic communities. It was presented the National League of Cities 2013 City Cultural Diversity Award, following achievements such as an annual Cinco de Mayo festival. Much of Hermiston's

outreach materials are available in Spanish and English, including information and inquiries related to the City's most recent visioning process, Hermiston 2040.

In 2016, the Livable Hermiston process included feedback from over 2,000 residents who identified priority assets, including the development of more parks and a multi-use facility over the next 20 years. In 2013, the Hermiston Urban Renewal Agency (HURA) was created to revitalize Hermiston's downtown area and in 2019 HURA was awarded Urban Renewal Project of the Year for development that stimulated the local downtown economy. With numerous plans to incorporate community ideals in the City's development, Hermiston has a promising cultural and economic future.

Sources:

United States Census Bureau
City of Hermiston
Hermiston Chamber of Commerce
Hermiston 2040

Course Participants

NOOR ABU RABIE, Journalism Undergraduate
JACOB ARCHER, Journalism Undergraduate
BAILEY BATES, Journalism Undergraduate
MARIAH BOTKIN, Journalism Undergraduate
JAILA CHA-SIM, Journalism Undergraduate
WILL COZINE, Journalism Undergraduate
KATE DENHART, Journalism Undergraduate
SIENA DORMAN, Journalism Undergraduate
ELIAS ESQUIVEL, Journalism Undergraduate
HANA FRANCIS, Journalism Undergraduate
SARAH-MAE MCCULLOUGH, Journalism Undergraduate
FRANCIS O'LEARY, Journalism Undergraduate
HANSIKA RAU, Journalism Undergraduate
COLE SINANIAN, Journalism Undergraduate
CARSON SKRIVAN, Journalism Undergraduate
BENJAMIN SMITH, Journalism Undergraduate
LAUREN YANG BROWN, Journalism Undergraduate

Executive Summary

The goal of this report is to understand the existing information ecosystem in Hermiston and Hermiston residents' information needs. Recommendations emphasize how the City of Hermiston and other local entities can improve information flow. The Engaged Journalism class conducted a survey, led four facilitated conversations, and visited the site to better understand and meet the needs of Hermiston residents.

Overall, residents report feeling well informed about their community, with an average rating of seven on a scale of one to 10. The local Facebook group "What's Happening in Hermiston" is the first place many residents look to find information on the community, and some residents mentioned that the Facebook group posts important events faster than the local news outlets do. In regards to local news outlets, the Hermiston Herald is the most popular. More than half of all survey respondents said the newspaper is where they find local news. Finally, the Hermiston Public Library was not as popular among respondents. Less than 20% of respondents indicated that they

found out about local events from the library, and less than 10% considered it a physical gathering space for community members.

Based on these findings, students compiled seven categories of suggestions that could help Hermiston better meet its residents' information needs: enhancing the Hermiston Library with physical upgrades and more events, translating more text and media into Spanish, taking advantage of online information sharing platforms, fostering physical gathering spaces such as at the Food Pods in Hermiston, creating a community advisory board, and sharing communication platforms.

Introduction

Given its location in eastern Oregon, Hermiston residents have several options for traditional news media. The *Hermiston Herald* and *East Oregonian* cover local news in the city. Many radio stations broadcast throughout east Oregon, including KOHU/KQFM, a radio station based in Hermiston, as well as TV news outlets from the Tri-Cities in Washington. Residents also use Facebook groups, such as “What’s Happening Hermiston” and “The NEW What’s Happening Hermiston”, which have 17.6 thousand and 12.8 thousand members respectively, to find information on the city, plan events, and share news.

The University of Oregon’s Engaged Journalism class was tasked with understanding Hermiston’s information ecosystem. An information ecosystem describes the presence and dispersal of viable information, the relationship between information systems, and how information systems influence the community. Specifically, the class set out to learn:

- What information is consumed and shared in Hermiston and how it is consumed.
- Which media outlets reach the community and why.
- How the media and other local entities can better serve Hermiston’s information needs.

Students distributed a survey to Hermiston residents that asked about their local media and information habits/needs. Following analysis of survey results, a team of about five students visited Hermiston. Students met with residents, visited various community gathering places, and spoke with community leaders. The team also invited survey respondents to participate in virtual roundtables. These served as a venue for discussion and an opportunity to listen to how the city spreads information and where it can improve.

Methodology

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY

Students gathered data about Hermiston through social media sites, official city websites, and visitor information. This preliminary research provided a better understanding of the community and supported the survey, roundtable discussions, and the site visit.

ONLINE SURVEYS

At the beginning of January 2022, an online information needs assessment survey was dispersed to the community of Hermiston by the student team with the help of the Hermiston Public Library. The survey consisted of the nine questions collecting demographic or practical information and 11 questions asking about the respondent's news/information habits. See Appendix A for survey questions.

Responses to the survey were automatically documented on a spreadsheet. The first online response was received on January 7th, 2022 and the last online response was recorded on February 23rd, 2022. A total of 106 electronic responses to the survey were recorded; 36 questionable responses were eliminated from the data and have not been counted. As responses were received, a core group of the student team separated the answers into categories and found the highest needs and commonalities. Participants were thanked for their contribution and invited to participate in an optional roundtable discussion to further explore the issues addressed in the survey. Survey responses aided in facilitation of these discussions as they provided pertinent background and focus for the facilitators to follow.

IN-PERSON SURVEYS

In addition to online responses, some team members went on a site visit to Hermiston where they provided the survey in person at the Hermiston Public Library. There were 36 in-person responses added to the 106 electronic responses, with a total of 142 responses gained during the study. The in-person survey allowed for better engagement with the community. Students who were on the site visit were able to ask follow-up questions to the survey, garner interest in participating in the facilitated roundtable discussions, and build relationships with community members to better represent their needs in this report.

SITE VISIT

To further engage in the community, team members visited Hermiston to gain context for the community and collect in-person survey responses to add to the dataset.

1. A small group of the Engaged Journalism class drove to Hermiston, Oregon for two days on February 18th - 19th, 2022.
2. Students visited the library, local stores, restaurants, and popular meeting places such as the bowling alley and laundromat.
3. While touring Hermiston, students spoke with residents, distributed flyers, and held face-to-face interviews.
4. The team interviewed the Hermiston Herald editor to understand Hermiston's local news source and gain a better understanding of their perceived needs for Hermiston information systems.

FACILITATED ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

The team held four facilitated roundtable discussions on Zoom between February 22 - February 26. Survey participants were invited to sign up for a roundtable discussion;

18 initially signed up, however, only five made it to the discussions. Each session had one or two attendees and lasted around 30 minutes. Discussion hosts asked six key questions, as well as relevant follow-up questions (see Appendix B).

FIG. 1
Hermiston water tower



Results

DEMOGRAPHICS FROM SURVEY

Age

Out of the respondents, 65.8% were 39 years old or younger. This is likely in part due to the pandemic and how it affects the information flow within a town; Hermiston citizens above 39 years old appeared more reluctant to talk with strangers. Eight surveys were collected from women 60 years of age and above from a yarn club hosted by the library. The median age of the respondents is reflective of the average age of the Hermiston population.

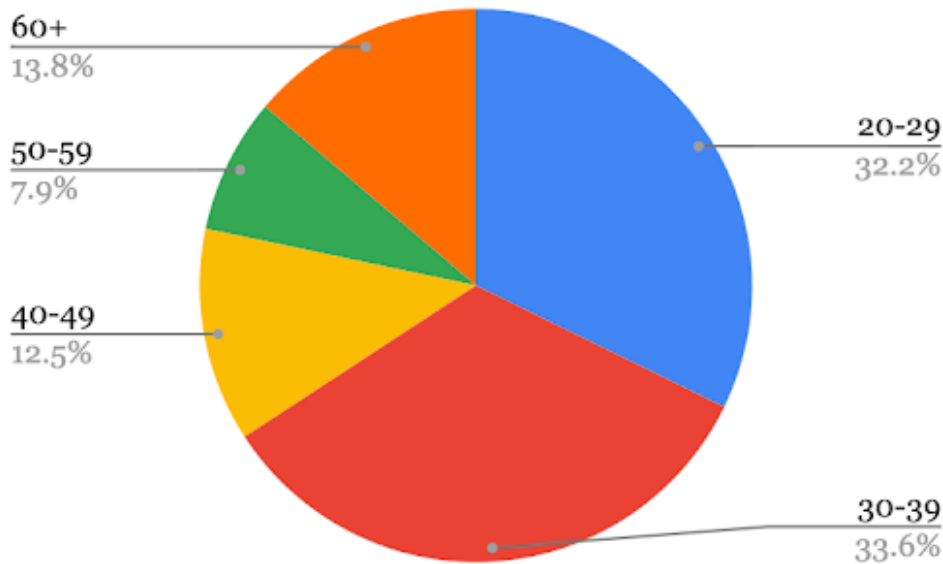
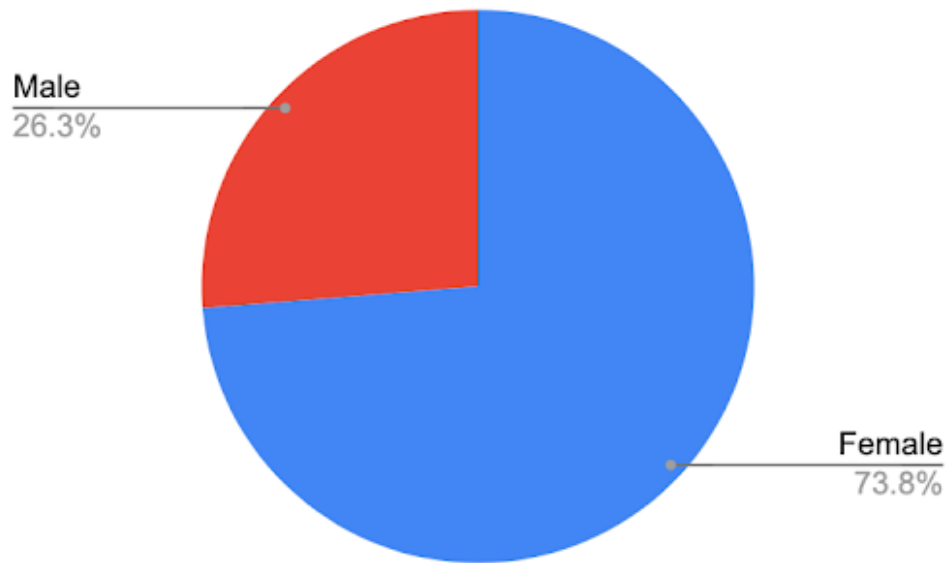


FIG. 2
Survey respondent age categories

Gender

There were 118 female respondents and 42 male respondents. Female identifying respondents were overwhelmingly more likely to fill out the survey than men. This may indicate that women exchange more information than men. When asked about where he gets his news, one male survey participant responded “my wife.” This may also indicate that men are more difficult to reach with news or information, and are more reluctant to trust or listen to new sources of information.

FIG. 3
Survey respondent
genders



Racial/Ethnic Background

Hispanic or Latino, White, Hispanic, or Latino and White, Black, or African American, and American Indian or Alaskan Native were the most prevalent responses in the ethnicity and race section. Out of roughly 160 survey respondents: eight respondents self-identified as only Black or African American; 28 respondents self-identified as only Hispanic or Latino; 111 respondents self-identified as only White.

Other responses included:

- 4 participants self-identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native
- 1 participant self-identified as only Asian
- 2 participants self-identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 1 participant self-identified as Welsh
- 1 participant self-identified as Scottish

23 respondents, or 14% of the total surveys collected, self-identified as multiracial. Seventeen respondents self-identified as Hispanic or Latino and White.

At least one person self-identified as:

- Middle Eastern and White;
- American Indian, Black or African American;
- American Indian, Latino, Pacific Islander and White;
- Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino;
- Asian, Hispanic or Latino, and Middle Eastern;
- Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and White

According to the U.S. Census Bureau the population of Hermiston is approximately:

- 0.4% Black or African American;
- 0.4% Asian;
- 0.8% Native American or Alaska Native;
- 0.3% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander;
- 46% Hispanic or Latino;
- 87% White

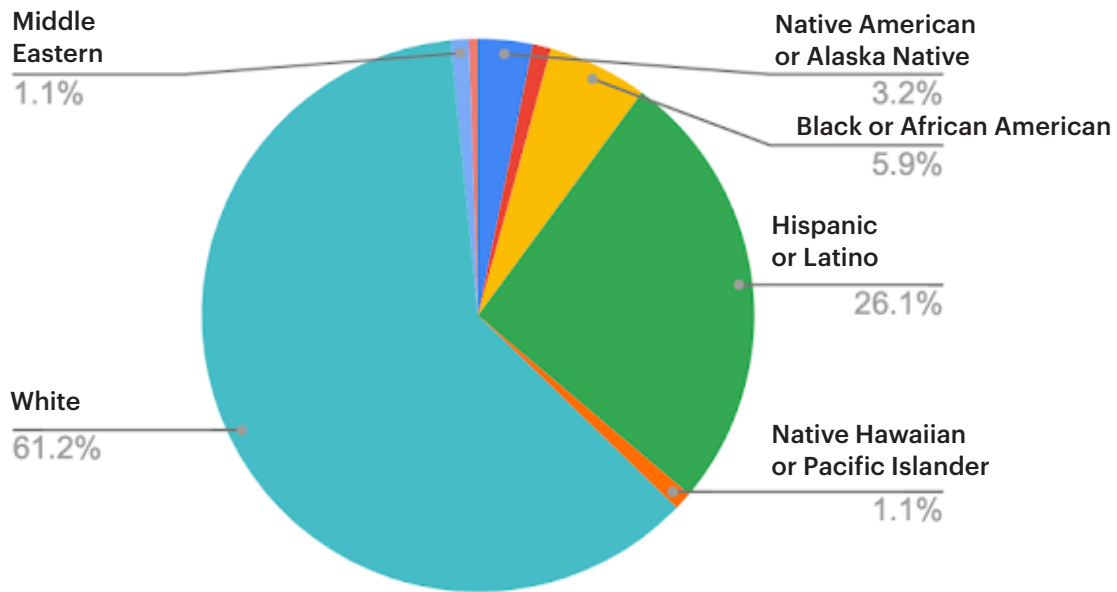


FIG. 4
Survey respondents race/ethnicity

SURVEY RESULTS: INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM FINDINGS

Notably, the most popular source of information from both survey data and in-person observation was Facebook. In particular, the Facebook groups were very popular spaces for information

exchange. Among print news sources, the local Hermiston Herald was the most popular with 85 respondents, over 53%, selecting it as their source of news in the community. KEPR TV was the most popular source of broadcast news with 43, or 26%.

FIG. 5
Information source chart

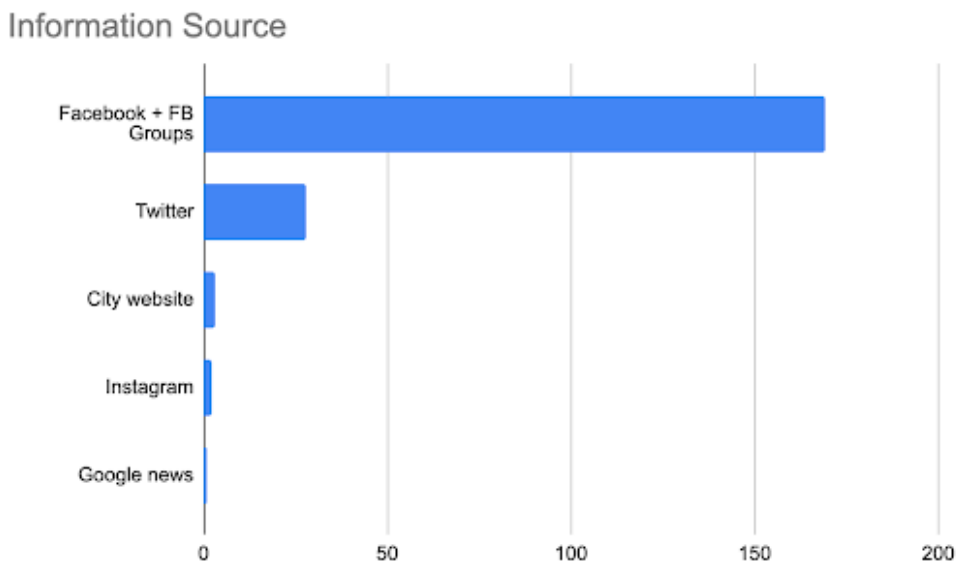
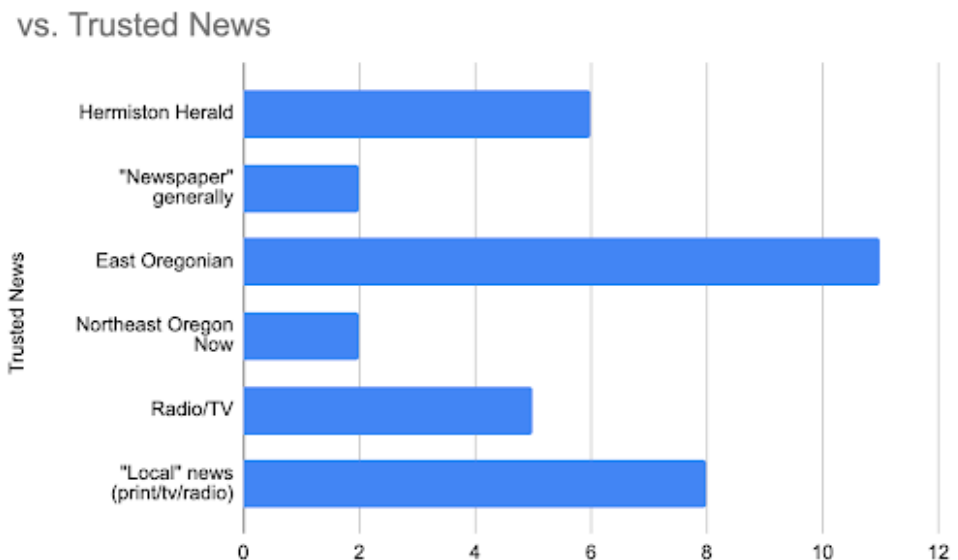


FIG. 6
Trusted news chart



Community-Sources News

Facebook

Facebook was the most used information source. Eighty-six percent of respondents said that they reference Facebook for news or information on events. Of these, 15 specifically referenced a Facebook group as an information source and 16 referenced the “What’s Happening Hermiston” or the “NEW What’s Happening Hermiston” Facebook groups as sites used for regularly getting information.

Facebook group “What’s Happening Hermiston” has 17.6 thousand members and is a private group that requires a survey to become a part of the group - it takes approval from someone. The private page has extensive rules including, “1. Don’t block admin, 2. Look before you post, 3. Be kind and courteous, 4. No hate speech or bullying, 5. No Promotions, 6. No selling, or spam, 7. No selling of pets, 8. All posts in English, 9. No personal posts, 10. No negative employee or business reviews, 11. No ISO Purchasing Pets.”

The other Facebook group, the “NEW what’s happening Hermiston” is a public group that has 12.8 thousand members. People post about missing animals, events around town, opinions on local food, and local news. Its rule read: “BE RESPECTFUL!!! No selling pets but asking for help is okay. Must provide vets name and account name. No selling anything. This is strictly an informational page. People will not get a warning. Your warning is reading the rules.”

Although 93 people said that they use Facebook to find out about events and news, only 20 people said that it was a resource they trust. Some in-person respondents almost listed

Facebook as a trusted source, but ultimately named a newspaper. People are known to act differently when knowingly being observed. When asked why they trusted the newspaper more than Facebook, many people responded that it was because it was edited and fact-checked news. There were some members that said they trust information from Facebook because it originates from other community members.

In “What’s Happening in Hermiston,” one of the rules to join the group is, “All posts in English.” One respondent in the Spanish survey pointed out this rule and said that (translated) “The Hispanic community needs a single place we could go to get information on what happens in Hermiston. I don’t know if someone could organize a page on Facebook to post information. There’s one called What’s Happening Hermiston, but it’s only for those who speak English. Or a central place to post flyers or where people could look for work, housing, etc. and could find what they’re looking for.”

The way people use Facebook varies. Some participants said they don’t pay attention to the news and instead use Facebook to find activities. One respondent said, “I actually don’t ever watch any news or read it really, but I do use Facebook to find out if there’s fun or interesting things to do with my family.” Others rely on Facebook groups as a source of information and news; one person said, “There’s also a lot of solid information in Facebook groups.” Others use the Facebook groups to find housing. A respondent said that there are a lot of people who are moving to Hermiston permanently or temporarily who need to find housing and jobs. “Housing is a challenge here because

there are a lot of newcomers and there aren't a lot of homes or apartments available," they said.

There is relatively no interaction with the community through the Hermiston Herald via Facebook. There is a good amount of participation from the Parks & Recreation Facebook page.

In-Person

A very small percentage (six survey respondents) said they hear about news in Hermiston from in-person interactions — primarily from friends. Seven respondents said that they trust word of mouth information from community members.

Forty-eight survey respondents said they gather to share information at churches. Thirty-nine respondents said that they gather at restaurants, such as McDonald's or Midway Bar & Grill, to exchange information. Thirty-three respondents said they meet and share information at coffee shops like Starbucks or Dutch Bros. Eleven survey respondents said they were unsure where people gather to exchange information in person in Hermiston.

Other locations mentioned as sources of information are:

- Hermiston Drug Store
- Library
- Mercados
- Senior Center
- Parks
- Farmer's Market

According to survey respondents, most in-person information exchanges occurred at the library, churches, restaurants, coffee shops, markets/mercados, and the Hermiston Drug Store. Survey respondents said that the city lacked resources for people to gather and share information as a community. However, responses may be influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents also reported that information is often shared through bulletin boards, laundromats, gyms, senior center, farmers markets and city parks. Hermiston's food cart pod and post office — which are close to each other — are locations that encourage Hermiston residents to come together and share information.

LOCAL PRINT OUTLETS

The most frequent responses to the question “What local news sources do you trust the most?” among survey participants were the Hermiston Herald, with 85 total responses, and the East Oregonian, with 71.

Traditional news sources

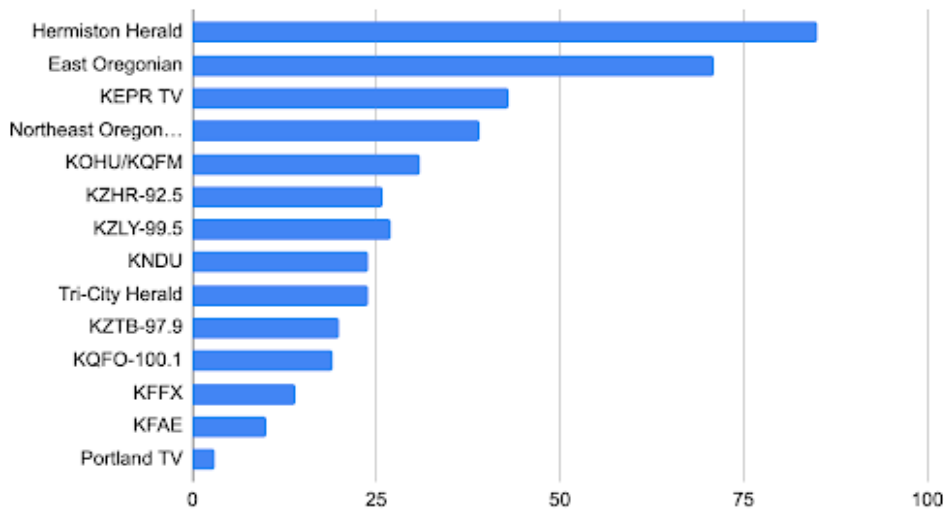


FIG. 7
Traditional news source chart

Hermiston Herald:

The Herald was the most frequent response to questions about local news sources people trust. Eighty-five total respondents said they get news about their community from the Hermiston Herald. When asked which local news sources they trust the most, 14 survey respondents said they trust the Hermiston Herald the most.

The Hermiston Herald is a local newspaper with an over 100-year history. The paper has been owned by the EO Media Group since 2008. The EO Media Group also operates several other publications throughout the state, including the East Oregonian.

The Herald publishes online daily. Website visitors can view three stories monthly for free but viewing more requires a \$4.25 monthly subscription. According to the EO Media Group’s director of audience development, Jeremy Feldman, the Herald’s website

has 146 digital subscribers and garners 12,744 unique monthly users in 18,940 sessions.

The paper also publishes weekly print editions on Wednesdays. Those print editions are mailed for free to addresses throughout Hermiston and available at pick up stands. Feldman said the print circulation is 8,900.

East Oregonian:

Seventy-one survey respondents said they get local news about their community from the East Oregonian. Twelve total respondents said they trust the East Oregonian as a local news source.

The East Oregonian’s website mentions the paper has been the largest in northeastern Oregon since 1875. The paper is based in Pendleton, about 30 miles east of Hermiston. Both newspapers are owned by the EO Media Group, and according to Hermiston

Herald's news editor, Erick Peterson, they sometimes share content across the publications.

Like the Hermiston Herald, the East Oregonian publishes daily online for subscribers, though non-subscribers can view five articles monthly. The site has 968 subscribers, 134,000 unique monthly users, and 240,343 sessions each month, according to Feldman.

The paper publishes in print on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. According to Feldman, the print circulation for the East Oregonian is 3,992.

Northeast Oregon Now

39 people said that they get local news from Northeast Oregon Now, a local news site. Three respondents said they think Northeast Oregon Now is a trustworthy local news source.

Northeast Oregon Now is a free, online-only news outlet that serves Hermiston and the surrounding area. The website was founded in 2013 and is a partnership between Umatilla Electric Cooperative and Good Shepherd Health Care System. The staff consists of one full-time reporter/editor and one news clerk.

The site includes news reporting only; There is no editorial or opinion section. There is also a section on local health care providers and an employment and classifieds section with information on jobs in the Hermiston and Tri-Cities areas.

According to Michael Kane, the site's reporter/editor, NEONow.com sees about 30,000 monthly visits.

Overall, 48 survey respondents said that they trust print and online news sources for information on what's happening in Hermiston.

FIG. 8
Inside the Herald



LOCAL BROADCAST OUTLETS

KEPR TV

KEPR TV is the most popular broadcast station among respondents (43), substantially higher than the second most popular broadcast news outlet, KOHU/KQFM. KEPR TV is a TV news broadcasting station in Tri-Cities, Washington. The station broadcasts throughout southeastern Washington and Umatilla County, Oregon. Its website lists 14 members of the news team, three of whom are National Sinclair Broadcast Group correspondents based in Washington, D.C. The station is also home to KUNW, a Univision affiliate.

The station's coverage consists largely of local Tri-Cities news, though there are instances of national and international news as well. Since the station's coverage spans such a large area, coverage of Hermiston is minimal. In the month preceding the preparation of this report, KEPR only mentioned Hermiston twice.

KOHU/KQFM

KOHU/KQFM is a local radio station in Hermiston, Oregon. KOHU/KQFM was the second most popular local broadcast news outlet, showing up in 31 survey responses. It covers Hermiston, Umatilla, Boardman, Stanfield, Irrigon and Echo. Its website, GoHermiston.com, is updated daily and includes a local sports live stream, weather reports for the Hermiston area, and a bulletin of announcements and events in and around Hermiston. The station hosts a morning news broadcast Monday through Friday starting at 8:05 am called "Odds and Ends."

KNDU

KNDU is an NBC affiliate TV station based in Richland, Washington. The station serves the Tri-Cities area and northeastern Oregon. News broadcasted by the station includes a mix of national, international, and local news. Most local news focuses on the Tri-Cities and Washington. Twenty-four respondents said they get their local news from KNDU. KNDU's website lists 17 staff members, including three bilingual reporters and a Telemundo anchor.

In the month preceding the preparation of this report, KNDU had considerably more coverage of Hermiston than KEPR, with most of the difference accounted for by KNDU's coverage of regional high school sports. KNDU ran six stories about a building fire in Hermiston, compared to KEPR's two.

KZHR 92.5

KZHR 92.5 La Super is a Spanish-language regional radio station. KZHR popularity leveled with KNDU in survey responses with 24 selections. Further information on this radio station was limited online.

KZLY 99.5 and KQFO 100.1

KZLY 99.5 La Raza and KQFO 100.1 La Kaliente are two Spanish-English radio stations broadcasting to eastern Washington and eastern Oregon. KZLY 99.5 was the more popular choice among respondents (27 and 19, respectively).

WHAT PEOPLE CARE ABOUT

In the survey, respondents were prompted to select 3-5 topics in response to the question, “What type of information is most important to you?” The most common response was “schools/education,” which was selected by 77 people, or 48% of respondents.

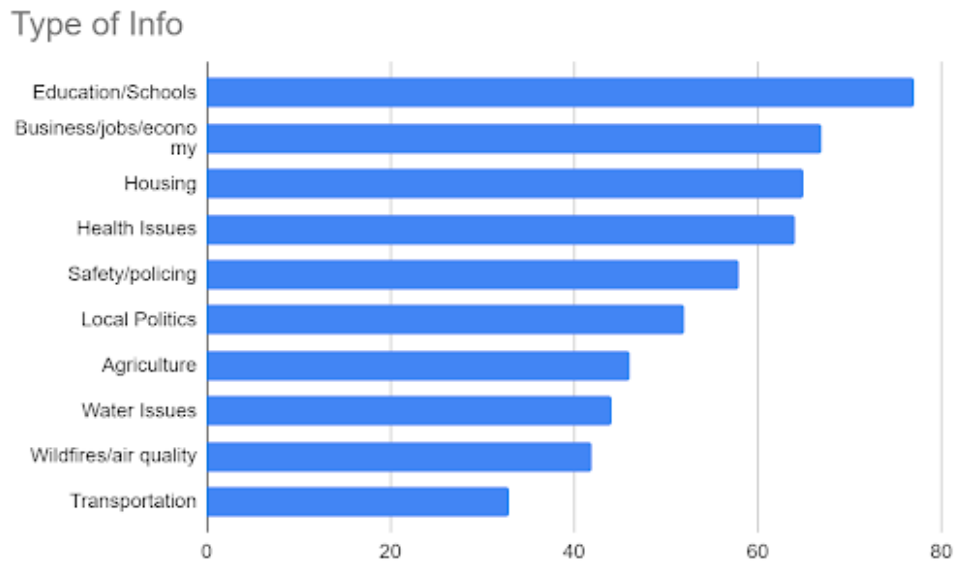
People demonstrated concern about the wellbeing of youth and opportunities available to them. One respondent wanted to know, “How can we help the youth in our community be more successful, giving them more options such as ball fields, playgrounds, maybe more activities.”

The second and third most common responses were “business/jobs/economy” with 67 selections and “housing” with 65 selections. Many

participants in-person commented on the recent developments in Hermiston, specifically the remodeling of an apartment building that had displaced many people and several families, leaving them without housing. One 47-year-old woman said that the Facebook group was useful because it gave people an opportunity to search for housing before they came to Hermiston, which is increasingly difficult to find.

“Local politics” was another popular topic with 52 selections. A 24-year-old woman, who had lived in Hermiston since childhood, commented that she’d like to see more social media updates about city council, including information on what the city has accomplished recently and what’s to come.

FIG. 9
Type of info chart



HOW INFORMED PEOPLE FEEL

Overall, respondents reported that they felt well informed about their community. On a scale of one to 10, the responses to the survey question, “how informed do you feel about what’s happening in your community,” averaged out to 7.1. Only 30 respondents, just less than 20%, answered 5 or less than 5.

Of the 18 respondents who filled out the Spanish language survey, three indicated that there are not enough information services for Spanish speaking community members. Thirty-three percent of the Spanish language respondents answered 5 to indicate how informed they feel about their community.

Survey response numbers regarding how informed the respondent feels about their local government on a scale of one to 10 was slightly lower, averaging out to 6.2%. Roughly 34% of the respondents answered five or less than five. Of the 34% of respondents, 21 said 3 or below.

Although Hermiston respondents feel informed about their community, feeling “informed” is a difficult topic to quantify. When prompted in-person, many participants appeared satisfied with meeting their general information needs regarding personal interests and general “goings-on” in town. Thus, the scale of how well-informed people are is relative to the perceptions of what information is essential. Similarly, many people said they didn’t care much about what is happening in government but said that having easier access to governmental information might encourage them to care.

City Information Sources:

Parks & Recreation

Several respondents said that the city Parks and Rec webpage was a big source of information. The webpage maintains a live display of upcoming events and provides a Parks & Rec monthly calendar. Additionally, the Hermiston Parks & Rec Facebook page updates residents about trails, camps, and other city organized events.

Chambers of Commerce

The Hermiston Chamber of Commerce has a blog that was last updated in November 2021. The blog updates periodically about notable awards in the community and about public events. There is also an updated events calendar on the website, a directory for finding new businesses in town and a web page for job listings and employer contact information.

City Council

City Council provides information about the town’s events on large screens throughout the town.

Post Office

The post office has bulletin boards where community members can post flyers. It is a highly trafficked area so there is a lot of exposure for information here.

Hermiston Library

The Hermiston Library provides a local events calendar and newsletter as well as library catalogs.

FIG. 10
Food pods



ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM FINDINGS

Gathering Around Food

Patrick Hunt, a resident who owns a food truck and has managed the Food Pod development, believes that Hermiston lacks a physical gathering space where the community can come together to share information or connect. Patrick explained he is trying to make the Food Pod a place to gather, “We’re really trying to be of service to the community but at the same time make the area grow...Food brings people together, that’s what we always have to remember” he said.

Another Hermiston resident, Angelica Alarcon, said there is a lack of a physical gathering space in Hermiston but that, even if it existed, she thinks her generation wouldn’t use it as much as other generations unless there

was food or other tangible benefits involved. The younger generations would also feel more comfortable in an informal environment like a restaurant, bar or cafe, she said. While one restaurant and bar, The Pheasant, used to be popular, it is no longer a gathering space for young people. “It was very, very, very popular among everybody my age. They were there every single weekend,” she said. “But nobody my age will set foot in there anymore.” She thinks the food pods could continue growing and become an effective place for community gathering.

Chuck Barnes and Bethany Adair mentioned how they’ve both seen the food pods, but neither have gone to them yet. Chuck mentioned how it’s not really his scene or something he would typically attend, and Bethany talked about how she drives past it often during the week.

At The Library

Patrick said he doesn't often see adults using the Hermiston library for information or gathering, but says it could be a valuable space for kids and young people or as a place to get trained in trades, like welding, plumbing, and building. "I think the kids don't have anything to do, I'm a little worried about our younger generation," he said.

Angelica hears very little about the public library in Hermiston, "They just kind of seem distant, like they're here, but they're not," she said. Instead, she'll visit the one in Pendleton, which has more advertised events for kids, such as events for homeschooling families. She says that better publicity of events on platforms like Facebook may encourage more people to visit the library.

A key theme throughout the conversation was that the Public Library wasn't being maximized to its fullest potential and it has become less of a destination spot. Bethany attends the library every once in a while, with her children for readings and other events, but Barnes hasn't been in the library in over 10 years. He uses an online version of the website to get his books and hasn't felt the need to go into the library.

Information Online

Angelica said that most people she knows rely heavily on Hermiston Facebook pages, but that the information shared on them isn't always accurate and opinions get mixed in with facts. After seeing something of interest on Facebook, she'll often ask her aunt, who works for the city, for more information or verification. She always accesses the Hermiston Herald, which she believes is a reliable source, on Facebook. "I never grab copies of the actual newspaper," she said.

Angelica said that "it needs to be made clear who you can go to for accurate information" and suggested that the city of Hermiston have a Facebook group that they moderated, posts accurate information about the city and what's happening in it, and answers questions.

Barnes and Adair mentioned how neither of them are in the Facebook group. They feel as if they don't need to get their information from Facebook because they have other reliable news outlets.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the survey, site visit, and facilitated conversation, we recommend the following steps for Hermiston to improve its information flow and meet residents' information needs.

1. PHYSICAL UPGRADES TO THE HERMISTON LIBRARY SPACES

The roundtable discussions and survey responses suggested that the library was not being used to its full potential. For example, less than 10% of the survey respondents considered it a physical gathering space for community members, while several roundtable participants felt distanced from the library and hadn't visited the space in many years. Residents we talked to in Hermiston also spoke about visiting neighboring libraries more than Hermiston's, such as Stanfield Library and Pendleton Public Library. Additionally, restaurants, bars, and farmers markets were more commonly cited as gathering spaces. To maximize library as a community-oriented space we recommend:

- Create a makerspace on the basement level to provide an area for hosting labs, workshops, and camps that teach specialized trade skills and work toward meeting the community's trade needs. We suggest the makerspace at the Rockwood Library in Multnomah County as a source for inspiration.
- Have a portion of the first floor of the library be dedicated to a "living room" style space that welcomes families and community groups to gather.

2. HOST AND ADVERTISE MORE EVENTS AT THE LIBRARY

Survey results also indicate that many residents would be attracted to the library if it hosted and advertised more events. More awareness of events happening at other libraries was one reason why our focus group participants said they didn't visit the Hermiston Public Library as often. We recommend:

- Provide community members with greater control over events by giving them the ability to book conference rooms for local events.
- Host events tailored to children and homeschooling families – two unique groups that could make greater use of the space.
- Connect with more residents by promoting events and activities in frequently used Facebook groups, Hermiston's Parks & Rec website, and local news outlets.

3. MEDIA CHANGES TO SUPPORT SPANISH SPEAKERS

The population of Hermiston is about 46% Hispanic. Survey results suggested that information is not catered enough to this community, indicating a need for more Spanish-speaking information sources. We recommend:

- Translate the city website into Spanish so that Spanish-speaking residents have the same access to city information as other residents.

- Translate information on Hermiston Facebook groups to Spanish, as Facebook groups are one of the main sources of information used by Hispanic and non-Hispanic residents in Hermiston.
- Translate stories within local media (such as the Hermiston Herald) to Spanish. Additionally, the Herald can write stories that aim to connect with this Spanish-speaking community and cater to their needs.

4. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ONLINE PLATFORMS FOR INFORMATION SHARING

The two local news organizations of Hermiston—East Oregonian and the Hermiston Herald, both owned by EO Media—are a vital part of the information environment of Hermiston. To better meet the needs of city residents, however, we recommend incorporating community voices, and collaborating with local organizations and social media.

Our results show that many Hermiston residents learn about community news and events through a Facebook page called “What’s Happening in Hermiston.” While this is an effective way to communicate information rapidly and efficiently, community members also point out the Facebook group has its downsides. There appears to be a disconnect between the Facebook group and other information resources in Hermiston like local news outlets (such as the Hermiston Herald and the East Oregonian), the city government, and the public school system. To bridge this information gap and encourage

multi-lingual participation in community online spaces, we propose the following:

- Encourage news media to contribute to conversations on the Facebook page, “What’s Happening in Hermiston,” for example, by sharing stories that are relevant to discuss or that help answer people’s questions. How journalists engage on Facebook groups is important. Because these groups are often created by local residents, news outlets can interact as guests on these sites.
- Invite local journalists to gather information about local happenings and generate story ideas by interacting directly with community members on Facebook. Beyond contributing, we encourage outlets to use these Facebook groups as tools to better understand the needs of the community.
- Facilitate direct communication between local government officials and the general public about city council meetings, upcoming elections, and public works projects through “What’s Happening in Hermiston.”
- Create a safe online space for community members to ask questions and engage directly with public officials, perhaps in a new, moderated Facebook page.
- Invite public school officials and employees to post school events on community Facebook pages. Consider starting a Facebook page specifically for local high schools and middle schools, with participation from The Hermiston Herald and East Oregonian.

5. FOSTER PHYSICAL GATHERING SPACES

Creating a healthy news environment can include offering spaces for public engagement. The main spot that emerged as a gathering space in Hermiston was the Food Pod. The Hermiston Food Pod holds a lot of potential to grow as a physical space for community engagement; this would allow for the organic flow of information-sharing systems.

We recommend working with the Food Pod to enhance the space's appeal as a place for gathering. This will also increase its capacity as an information-sharing center, where, for example, flyers, community bulletin boards or newsstands can be used to spread information. Some ways to do this are:

- Host (or encourage other entities to host) communal events like game nights or live music. The Hermiston Facebook groups are good places to advertise these events. Given the Food Pod's proximity to the high school, it could also be a good place to host youth-centered events (which was something that people in the survey and focus group expressed particular interest)
- Create more customer traffic by inviting other vendors who sell niche items beyond food, such as clothing and jewelry, to the space.
- Add heaters, covered seating and public toilets.
- Use a shared event calendar and/or community bulletin board to help keep people updated on events at the Food Pod as well as other community happenings.

In addition to the library and the Food Pod, other possible places to host communal events and further develop as gathering spots include Next Chapter bookstore and dance studio and Hermiston's parks and open spaces.

6. SHARING COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS AND PROGRAMS

We believe the many entities discussed in this report, from the city government and news outlets to small businesses, could collaborate more to improve information flow in Hermiston. Some suggestions for how to accomplish this are:

- Encourage news outlets to seek out community leaders or prominent community members to write regular columns that are locally focused, better bridging residents and news outlets.
- Share information platforms by; for example, have the library work with the Hermiston Herald to add Herald stories to the library's newsletter and vice versa.

Finally, we recommended starting a collaboration between local news outlets and Eastern Oregon University's communication school to help identify and meet the community's information needs while developing relationships with future communications professionals who could work in Hermiston.

Conclusion

Through a survey, site visit, and roundtable discussion, the Engaged Journalism class developed a deeper understanding of Hermiston's information systems and needs. Students found that residents relied heavily on Facebook groups to find and share local information, reported a lack of physical gathering spaces and consumed and trusted some traditional news sources like the Hermiston Herald.

Based on the findings, the class developed several recommendations. They center around bolstering physical gathering spaces like the Hermiston library and the Food Pod, better adapting media to Spanish speakers' needs, taking advantage of online platforms like Facebook groups and fostering collaboration between different information sources in the community.

Members of this Engaged Journalism project hope the findings and recommendations presented will help Hermiston improve its community's information ecosystem. A healthy information ecosystem responds to community members' information needs and includes their voices. Continuing to learn about existing information needs, developing further channels of communication and taking advantage of the platforms already being used can help Hermiston engage residents in finding and sharing the information they need.



FIG. 11
Hermiston City Hall

Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. I live in the... (what part of Hermiston they reside in)
4. How many years have you lived in the area?
5. Which racial or ethnic background do you most identify with?
6. What is your identified gender?
7. When something happens in your community, where do you hear about it?
8. What websites, social media or platforms do you use to find out what's happening locally?
9. Which LOCAL information sources do you TRUST the most?
10. What are the physical spaces where people come together and share information in your community? And how is information shared in these spaces?
11. If somebody moved to town and wanted to find out what's going on locally, where would you send them?
12. Who's a person in town who knows a lot about what's happening in the community? What would be a good way to contact them?
13. Which information sources do you go to to find out about events, music, things to do with children, etc. in the community?
14. Out of the following, what type of information is most important to you?
15. What do you want elected officials or candidates to discuss as they compete for votes?
16. On a scale of 1-10, how informed do you feel about what's happening in your community?
17. On a scale of 1-10, how informed do you feel about what's happening in local government and how you can participate in local elections?
18. What is your email?
19. What is your phone number?
20. Anything else that you'd like for us to know about how you discover and share local information?

Appendix B

Facilitated Conversation Questions

1. The Facebook group (What's Happening in Hermiston (private, 17k followers) AND The NEW What's Happening in Hermiston (public, 13k followers) came up very often as a source of information for people. We're curious to hear about your experience of getting and sharing helpful/trustworthy information on the social media platform?
2. On the question, "how informed do you feel about what's happening in local government and how you can participate," the average ranking came to around 6 out of 10 (meaning somewhat knowledgeable). How might the City of Hermiston improve to get it to 10 (very knowledgeable)?
3. If you could change one thing about local news media, what would you change?
4. The new Hermiston Food Pod across the street from the post office, came up as a good place to gather and talk with people. We're wondering if you've been to the Food Pod and have any thoughts on its development and potential?
5. The library has traditionally been a place to gather in many communities to obtain and share information. What has been your experience with the Hermiston Public Library? How might it improve in serving the community's information needs?
6. We recognize that we're not hearing from a group of Hermiston residents that's not willing to participate in our survey (either online or in person). We're wondering if you might have suggestions in learning more from those who chose not to participate?

SCI Directors and Staff

Marc Schlossberg	SCI Co-Director, and Professor of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, University of Oregon
Nico Larco	SCI Co-Director, and Professor of Architecture, University of Oregon
Megan Banks	SCYP Director, University of Oregon
Nat Kataoka	Report Coordinator
Danielle Lewis	Graphic Designer