

# A LOOK INSIDE THE URBAN LEGEND NEWSROOM

Written and designed by Daphne Yeh Gilman,  
Editor in Chief, Print

Inside the Moon room — the nondescript classroom on the third floor of Page Street campus, also home to calculus classes — the Yeti makes its home. The creature watches as its 20 journalists rush into class, type furiously, listen to Disney music and K-pop on Spotify and then leave. The Yeti is known for its excellent advice column — but though it willingly offers counsel, much of the journalistic operations it oversees remain mysteriously veiled.

The newsroom's process is complex. The Urban Legend operates on a cycle system, putting out two cycles per term, or six cycles per year. Its publications include five newspapers, one magazine and numerous online exclusive pieces. Before the Legend publishes any article, the Yeti must chew, swallow, spit up, reinspect and approve it.

But this process is not meant to be entirely secret. Take a walk through the newsroom with me — let's pull back the curtains and take a look into the Yeti's home.

## I. BRAINSTORM

On the first day of each cycle, writers do an unbridled brainstorm on the Moon room whiteboards. We write down every idea we can possibly think of under each of our seven sections: News, Features, Arts & Culture, Sports, Opinions, Caboose and Online.

Some ideas resurface every cycle, without fail. Journalism adviser Lingerr Senghor regularly requests an article about Liverpool F.C., the English football club. A second- or third-year journalist will frequently jot down, "Opinion: Journalism should be an Urban Advanced Studies (UAS) class." There is almost always an idea about the San Francisco mayor or college counseling.

"Usually I come to brainstorming with, like, two ideas. It's nice to talk them out with other people, and I'll come out of it with a lot more ideas," Managing Editor of Print Sophia Chandriani '27 said.

After brainstorming, students get a night or two to decide what they want to pitch.

## II. PITCH

At The Urban Legend, an elevator pitch is a 60- to 90-second presentation of an article idea in front of the rest of the staff and our advisers. Each pitch includes the article's angle — or focus

Before any  
article gets  
published, the  
Yeti must  
**CHEW,**  
**SWALLOW,**  
**SPIT UP,**  
**REINSPECT**  
and  
**APPROVE**  
it.

— along with interview ideas and why the topic is newsworthy.

Often, a majority of pitches will fall under the News or Features sections. It is not uncommon for there to be zero Sports pitches. To Senghor's dismay, no student has ever pitched and written an article about Liverpool.

Senghor, Fundamentals of Journalism teacher Sarah Levin and student writers all have the opportunity to offer feedback on pitches. The majority of pitched articles receive approval for writing, but some ideas shift or change entirely.

Staff writer Tali Siegel '28 spoke to her experience giving elevator pitches. "They're kind of stressful because I don't want my article to get shot down," she said.

The student leadership team consults with Senghor before approving articles. Leadership consists of two Editors in Chief (EICs) of Print, Mari Flores '26 and me; the EIC of Online, Aida Cooney '26; two EICs of Creative, Anna Chandriani '27 and Tessa Morenstein '27; and the Managing Editor of Print, Sophia Chandriani.

"The most important thing with a pitch is just for it to be a strong idea, where the writer really is invested and has done the work to be able to succinctly share it with the class," Flores said. "That is an indicator to me that it's going to be a good article."

## III. RESEARCH

Soon, emails and Schoology posts flood the inboxes of students and faculty across campus: It's time for the staff to begin conducting interviews and research.

The Urban Legend staff uses a variety of research methods, including — but not limited to — on-site interviewing, investigative or undercover reporting, recording film and audio and searching Google or databases. We try to reach the people on campus with the most expertise on our topics. Assistant Head for Student Life Charlotte Worsley;

good exposition

Dean of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Jason Ernest Feldman; and health education teacher Jenn Epstein are featured almost every cycle.

When a staff member sends out a Schoology post asking for interviews, they will often receive a supportive comment from another staff member or Urban community member. “Thank Goodness / I Couldn’t Be Happier to see you’re writing about this,” Sophia Chandriani wrote last December under a post by fellow journalist Ari Braverman ’27. Her comment referenced the film “Wicked: For Good,” on which Braverman was reporting.

The interviewing process is elaborate. For one article I wrote last year, I compiled 16,798 words — or 24 single-spaced pages — of interview transcripts to dig through. But interviewing is the most crucial step in our journalistic process, as it lays the foundation of every article we write.

## IV. DRAFT

In a survey, Legend staff members reported spending an average of around 2.9 hours drafting their articles each cycle. The process involves going through interview transcripts and other components of research before beginning to knit ideas together in a logical way. Writers must pay close attention to the structure of their article, which typically adheres to one of several common journalistic structures.

“Drafting is the worst part of the cycle for me,” Siegel said. “Most of the time I have a bunch of different ideas, and I just have no idea how to connect them.”

Students have anywhere from two to six nights to complete their rough draft. In a typical newspaper cycle, most articles are around 600 words, but some are as long as 2,000 words.

The Urban Legend adheres to Associated Press (AP) style, a set of guidelines for grammar and punctuation that many newsrooms follow.

Braverman shared his favorite AP style

rule. He said, “I really like that there are some cities for which you don’t have to put the state name after, because they’re sort of at the top of the class. Kind of like Beyoncé.”

## V. EDIT

The editing process is the longest part of the cycle, spanning more than two weeks. Every print article receives edits from a section editor, an EIC, Senghor or Levin, a fact-checker and three copy editors.

“As an editor, I look for clarity — making sure everything’s expressed in the clearest and most efficient way possible,” said Lila Kessler ’27, news co-editor and caboose editor. “But I really try not to mess with writers’ voices and styles.”

When it is Senghor or Levin’s turn to edit a piece, they leave comments about confusing language and opportunities for deeper research. They also often

**2.9 HOURS**  
average time  
spent drafting  
an article

catch misinformation, hyperbole and generalizations that may slip through the cracks during other editing rounds.

“I think my role is sometimes cementing what EICs have said that maybe hasn’t been dealt with,” Senghor said. “I know sometimes it’s hard for students because my edits are quite harsh, but it really is [to] think about the paper as a whole and as a collective, and

*watch out for  
the passive voice*

[to make sure] we’re keeping the same high standard.”

Occasionally, an article will have to change substantially between editing rounds, or even at the last minute. Sometimes articles are scrutinized before publication from outside of the newsroom. Most notably, Worsley has access to all articles throughout the cycle. Some community members deeply invested in or concerned about a topic will sometimes request access, too.

“Right now, given our current climate, we’re putting more of an eye on a lot of different political pieces, especially on Israel and Palestine ... [and] pieces around the [Urban] administration,” Senghor said.

Features Co-Editor Zoya Sarangan ’26 remembers having an article heavily monitored during her sophomore year. “I basically gave my interviewee access to the whole document, and based on that, they asked to modify it,” she said. “They and Senghor talked to me. We went through the process of making it less critical of Urban and highlighting the more positive sides of the topic. They told me prospective students and prospective families may have been turned against Urban from parts of my article.”

Senghor shared her perspective on adult oversight on articles. “I know the perception is that we’re doing things to make the school look good. And I actually disagree with that a little bit. I think the reality is that for pieces that are critical of the school, it’s usually not as bad as students think. But I see why they would feel like we’re shifting to make it more positive,” she said.

After completing 10 or more rounds of edits, writers can officially say their articles are ready for layout.

## VI. DESIGN

The design process for the print newspaper spans the entire cycle, but it gets extra attention during the final two weeks. The EICs of Creative spearhead graphic design, helping staff members use drawing and design tools like Adobe InDesign and Adobe Photoshop to create page layouts.

Getting acquainted with Adobe applications is often a steep learning curve, though all first-year writers learn basic design skills as members of the design team. “Designing is grim. Perpetually,” News Co-Editor Asher Albers ’26 said. “I have difficulty using the InDesign interface because it’s not intuitively designed. Random YouTube videos with five views are very helpful, though.”

To design in the newsroom, few qualities are as important as a strong attention to detail. Designers must be aware of things as minuscule as letter spacing, exact column alignment, pixel-by-pixel visual dimensions, color numbering and word hyphenation.

Though nitpicky and specific, designing pages can also be rewarding.

*don't use  
editorial  
language*

“As I learn more about it, it’s more fun, and I like the creative freedom that you can have with it,” Siegel said.

Flores remembers learning to design during her first year on staff. “It felt a little bit overwhelming,” she said. “But then once you learn the process and have done it a few times, it feels pretty intuitive.”

## VII. FINALIZE

If the newsroom is home to the Yeti, then production night — colloquially known as prod night — is its hibernation. All of leadership holes itself up mysteriously for as many as 10 hours after school. They take pieces polished over the course of many weeks and

finish assembling them into a beautiful — ideally, errorless — printing of The Urban Legend.

Braverman shared his perception of prod night as someone who does not attend it. “I think what happens on prod night is that leadership sits in a circle with a campfire in the middle, and they all have their laptops open with 10 different windows. They’re typing so fast that their fingers are a blur,” he said.

Flores declined to comment on the accuracy of Braverman’s interpretation, but she shared her experience with production nights. “I think it’s a really fun way to bond with leadership,” she said. “We always end up getting work done, but also having some fun and socializing.”

After a few final tweaks from Senghor, the paper is ready to go. The Yeti yawns, awake from its hibernation, and sends its twenty journalists to hand out mint-fresh papers all over campus. Then, it calls the journalists back in: It’s time to brainstorm. ■

*good work!*

“I know the perception is that we’re doing things to make the school look good. And I actually disagree with that a little bit. I think the reality is that for pieces that are critical of the school, it’s usually not as bad as students think.”

— Lingerr Senghor