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COXSACKIE

C-A students show media expertise on WAMC

by Debora Gilbert

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A highlight of the C-A Board of Education meeting Monday night was the chance to hear a presentation by Donna Bryan of the C-AHS English Department and two of her students, Danielle Hyman of Coxsackie, and Logan Caldara of Earlton..

“If we really listen to our students they tell us what to teach them,” said Bryan. Her students were surprised to find that their teacher does not watch TV, and insisted on telling her about shows they had seen. As Bryan listened, she came to the conclusion that “they didn’t really understand the information they were getting from the television,” and saw the need to help them become more media-literate.

“The students worked hard and learned something new,” said Bryan, “and it changed their way of looking at the media.” A fringe benefit of the study was the chance to participate in the radio station’s “Student Town Meetings” broadcast with moderators Alan Chartock of WAMC Public Radio Station, Rex Reed, editor of the “Times Union,” and Danny Schecter, author of “Weapons of Mass Destruction.”

“It was scary to have a mike in front of you,” said Logan, who researched science news coverage in the media. Because of her interest in celebrities, Danielle focused on public relations firms and how they shape the news. “I never knew about the propaganda aspect of the news,” she said. Now Danielle is considering a career in public relations.

Seven other students, all from Miss Bryan’s first and second period 11th grade English classes, participated in the program. After exhaustive Internet research, relying on the school’s access to newspaper data banks, among other resources, each student became an expert in a particular aspect of media. Kara Betke studied the repression and oppression of reporters by large media corporations. Vanessa Frisbee and Courtney Mentzer collaborated on a study of faux news (news generated by corporations to promote sales, but presented as real news footage and aired on news programs by stations who need to fill time and conserve production dollars). Chris Patsky studied the evolution of war reportage from Korea, through Vietnam, the first Gulf War, and the present war in Iraq. Jonathan Stogner and Justin Mallet became experts on the way in which large corporations control the music business.

It all started, said Courtney Mentzer, after a brainstorming session when the group gravitated toward the idea of focusing on corporate control of the media. “It was amazing,” said Kara Betke. “Not many teens get to speak their opinion on the radio.”

The segment of “Student Town Meetings,” “In a world of 24/7 Communication and Information, can journalism-- and independent news-- survive?” was broadcast Feb. 28. You can hear it at www.wamcstudenttownmeetings.org/coxsackie.htm