

# Are college yearbooks going the way of the dinosaur?

By Baltimore Sun, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.16.16

Word Count **780**



James Stimpert, senior reference archivist at the Johns Hopkins University Sheridan Libraries, holds copies of the university's first (left, from 1889) and last (right, from 2015) yearbooks. Photo: Barbara Haddock Taylor/Baltimore Sun/TNS

BALTIMORE, Md. — For 126 years, the annual yearbook of Johns Hopkins University has documented a range of life on campus and beyond: the great tug-of-war team of 1892, the Class Yell, memorials for students who died in World War II, and protests of the Vietnam War.

This year, for the first time in decades, graduating seniors won't have a yearbook to buy. Johns Hopkins, along with many other colleges, has stopped publication of its yearbook. Students who now document their experiences themselves on social media are less interested in spending a lot of money for the hard copy of a yearbook.

Towson University published its last yearbook in 2009. Morgan State University is cutting back, printing only on demand. The University of Maryland, Baltimore County printed its last yearbook in 1986. Nationwide, Wesleyan and Purdue are among the many that have discontinued their yearbooks in recent years.

Kelley Callaway, president of the College Media Association and yearbook adviser at Rice University in Texas, said yearbooks appear to be declining nationally.

They are not all going away, Callaway said, but “they’re definitely morphing and changing.”

## **Some Yearbooks Shrinking Their Size**

When universities stop printing yearbooks, they not only lose a valued campus tradition, but also a way to keep records.

“I don’t know how people will replace this resource,” said James Stimpert, an archivist, or someone who keeps track of historical records. “It had some photographs, it had some documentation of student clubs and other activities. So going forward, I don’t know how that is going to be documented.”

Yearbooks used to feature student portraits. Today, colleges have so many students that yearbooks are replacing the portraits with pictures of campus life or sports.

Some are shrinking the number of pages to cut down on costs. While some seniors might not be thinking about the yearbook as they prepare for graduation, Callaway said, they might come to regret not having one decades down the line.

“There’s a lot of prestige to having an old yearbook and having something that is cherished in a way that newspapers and magazines won’t be,” she said. “You’re just losing that end-of-the-road piece, especially for seniors.”

## **"Can't Replace With Social Media"**

At Johns Hopkins, the earliest editions of the yearbook were filled with flowery writing and poems written by the editors.

At smaller schools, the editors were able to write a detailed, often humorous, biography of each student. In 1928, a Johns Hopkins student was described as having “a happy college career without having become involved in extracurricular activities or intensive study.”

Johns Hopkins yearbook adviser Joan Freedman struggled last year to find students interested in putting together the yearbook. The edition ended up selling 228 copies at \$75 each.

“I can't put my finger on when it became a problem,” Freedman said. “We just tried to sustain it as long as we could. Students will make time for things that they’re passionate about, and this just wasn’t one of them.”

Coppin State University has a different formula for its yearbook. While most yearbooks are created by students, this one is put together by an adviser and is free to all graduating seniors.

“There’s something about having a yearbook that you can’t replace with social media,” adviser Jason Goode said.

## **A Plan To Keep Records Of College Life**

Ryan Almon is the co-owner of Houston's office of Balfour Yearbooks, a company that publishes yearbooks. He said that three universities in Houston have stopped printing yearbooks in recent years.

Balfour is trying to provide the schools with resources and training for producing yearbooks, he said. It is also trying to convince reluctant students and advisers of a yearbook's value.

"It's definitely been a challenge and a battle to make sure that the yearbook is still relevant on campuses," Almon said. "I think what campuses are struggling with is trying to convince students in the social media age that the instant information that they're able to access now on their phones will not live and reside forever."

Towson University's yearbook ceased publication in 2009 and since then, its archivists are developing new ways of documenting campus life.

They are asking student groups to submit documents like fliers and meeting notes for the library's collections. They are also trying to obtain computer software that can automatically record students' social media postings.

"Nowadays, they're leaving their mark in other ways," said Ashley Todd-Diaz, an archivist at Towson University. "They're in social media, they're creating more events on campus."

Todd-Diaz added, "It's been kind of a challenge for the archivists to meet them where they are and figure out how we can still document their experience without something like a yearbook."

## Quiz

- 1 Which central idea of the article is MOST supported by the section "Some Yearbooks Shrinking Their Size"?
- (A) The traditions and history of college campuses will suffer if yearbooks are no longer produced.
  - (B) College students are less likely to buy yearbooks now that social media has made sharing pictures and memories so accessible.
  - (C) To stay competitive, colleges are starting to focus on making smaller, less expensive yearbooks.
  - (D) Several colleges have already completely stopped yearbook production due to lack of interest and purchase.

- 2 Read the last two paragraphs of the introduction [paragraphs 1-5].

*Kelley Callaway, president of the College Media Association and yearbook adviser at Rice University in Texas, said yearbooks appear to be declining nationally.*

They're not all going away, Callaway said, but "they're definitely morphing and changing."

Which of the following words from the article provides context clues to the meaning of the word "declining"?

- (A) "morphing"
  - (B) "changing"
  - (C) "nationally"
  - (D) "going away"
- 3 Which of these sentences would be MOST important to include in an objective summary of the article?
- (A) Johns Hopkins University is not producing a yearbook for the first time in 126 years.
  - (B) The number of college yearbooks being produced around the country is declining.
  - (C) Towson University is figuring out new ways to preserve and document memories digitally.
  - (D) Yearbooks are filled with sentimental and historic memories that cannot be replaced with social media.

4 Read the first paragraph of the section "Can't Replace With Social Media."

*"There's a lot of prestige to having an old yearbook and having something that is cherished in a way that newspapers and magazines won't be," she said. "You're just losing that end-of-the-road piece, especially for seniors."*

Which answer choice BEST explains the word "prestige" as it is used here?

- (A) honor
- (B) fame
- (C) respect
- (D) value