

# How To Make J-school Matter (Again)

---

A blueprint for the future of journalism education

By Amy Webb

Visiting Nieman Fellow,  
Harvard University

Futurist and Founder,  
Webbmedia Group Digital Strategy

August 2015

Nieman



## **Copyright**

© 2015 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College

All rights reserved

Published by

The Nieman logo consists of the word "Nieman" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered within a solid red square.

Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard  
One Francis Ave. Cambridge, MA 02138

The **Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard** educates leaders in journalism and elevates the standards of the profession through special programs that convene scholars and experts in all fields. More than 1,400 journalists from 93 countries have been awarded Nieman Fellowships since 1938. The foundation's other initiatives include **Nieman Reports**, a quarterly print and online magazine that covers thought leadership in journalism; **Nieman Journalism Lab**, a website that reports on the future of news, innovation and best practices in the digital media age; and **Nieman Storyboard**, a website that showcases exceptional narrative journalism and explores the future of nonfiction storytelling.

# How To Make J-school Matter (Again)

---

**A blueprint for the future of journalism education**

**By Amy Webb**

In the fall of 2000, when I was a student at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, I sat in a large seminar room listening to a lecture about whether journalists should be allowed to use digital cameras. It was meant to be a complicated discussion about ethics, but I felt there was a bigger issue that needed to be addressed. I'd just moved to New York City from Tokyo, where I had direct access to a brand new world of emerging technology, including some of the first Internet-connected, mass-market camera phones. To me, it seemed more useful to talk about the ethics of accepting and publishing photos from readers, since we'd all be using similar phones within five years.

I raised that point, acknowledging that while the technology had not yet taken hold in the U.S., soon my classmates would see a dramatic change in their mostly analog mobile phones. Consumers would be able to snap photos, email them to friends on the spot or even post them to the Internet, without ever having to use a computer.

But I was immediately, and somewhat embarrassingly, dismissed. "Why on earth would anyone print a low-quality photo in the newspaper or show it on TV? That won't happen," my professor snapped back, returning the conversation to the ethics of digital cameras.

Of course, the rest isn't history; it's the present. In classrooms across the country, students are being taught about a media ecosystem that's already been eclipsed by new platforms, devices, and business models. Some of them might be wondering, as I did, whether they've made a mistake in attending journalism school at all.

I am deeply concerned about the future of journalism education in America. Journalism isn't a licensed profession in the United States, and so anyone—journalism degree or not—can call herself a reporter. It can be argued that universities exist solely for scholarship and pedagogy, and that they do not play a role in the day-to-day practice of modern news media. I disagree with both assertions. Universities must propel the profession forward and become the connective tissue between what's come before and what's still yet to come. Journalism's problems are journalism education's problems, too.

There have been many efforts to rethink journalism education, including at my alma mater. Many individuals and institutions are working on various aspects of this issue: Dianne Lynch, president of Stephens College in Missouri; Geanne Rosenberg Belton, media law professor at CUNY's Baruch College; the American Press Institute; and, of course, the ongoing Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education. Indeed, all of these worthwhile endeavors have crystallized the need for reform. Now, we must advance the foundation they set, creating a new blueprint for the future of journalism education that exists in a constantly evolving digital environment where the means of transmission are being built and controlled outside of the core profession and where anyone can produce content that looks like—but isn't necessarily—reported, vetted news.

Some schools welcome the disruptive change. They're offering classes in virtual reality and wearable technology. Some are betting on code, mandating courses in data science, even if the syllabi don't integrate well within the rest of the curriculum. Still others are yielding, slowly, to transition away from traditional concentrations, shifting the focus from the print and broadcast mediums, as well as PR, toward entrepreneurial, convergence, and data journalism.

Meanwhile, the ways in which news is reported, written, packaged, and produced are being redefined by decidedly nontraditional organizations. Sites like BuzzFeed have been so successful in acclimating us to listicles, aggregated social posts, and native advertising that our digital behaviors have shifted to anticipate similar story formats from The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. Startups such as NewsCred and Contently have built wildly successful content marketing tools in that spirit, enabling brands such as Pepsi and Dell to create websites that feature a mix of social content and what looks very much like news.

But that's content. Organizational management structures within media companies, too, are evolving: Vox Media, which operates The Verge, Vox.com and a number of other sites, does not have traditional newsroom roles. Instead, staff work in various functions *across* all the usual silos. Trei Brundrett, Vox's chief product officer, leads the team that develops homegrown internal systems and tools. Melissa Bell, vice president for growth and analytics, is also an editor.

What about distribution? The means of transmission are being built outside of journalism schools and without the input of news organizations. In 2015, Apple and Facebook each

launched new platforms for content<sup>1</sup> with launch partners including The Economist, Time, The New York Times, the Financial Times, Bloomberg Business, and Wired, among others. Algorithms decide what we are shown and when; and that includes whether those services deem certain content appropriate. As part of its community standards section, Facebook includes the following<sup>2</sup>: “To help balance the needs, safety, and interests of a diverse community...we may remove certain kinds of sensitive content or limit the audience that sees it.”

In June, Philadelphia-based photojournalist Jim MacMillan noticed that a photo he’d posted had disappeared from his feed. The photo, showing a fatal accident but not the victim’s body, seemed newsworthy to MacMillan—in recent years, a number of fatal duck boat accidents like the one he photographed had occurred in Pennsylvania, as well as in Lake Michigan and in Arkansas. Reacting to the removal of his photo, MacMillan posted: “I’ve been scrubbed. I haven’t photographed breaking news in years, but this seemed important and newsworthy.”

*This may all seem far fetched to you now, but this research is already underway. In this scenario where would a journalist even fit in? Or better yet, how would we define journalism then?*

What about near-future distribution? Google, Microsoft, and Apple are building intelligent mobile operating systems, which use our email, calendars, contacts, location, digital behaviors, and search history as inputs in order to deliver us just the right information at exactly the right time, acting as a sort of personal information layer on top of our digital experience. Soon, these personal information layers will become as ubiquitous and indispensable as the utility layers—the Internet, the Cloud, word processing software—we all take for granted today. News content will be part of that ecosystem; stories will be matched with our individual needs and preferences, delivered to us not via a news organization’s app acting as an intermediary but, instead, directly through the smart OS itself.

And in the far future? Historically, information has been taken in by our five known senses, and our information output has been restricted to language and gesture. But at the University of Washington Center for Sensorimotor Neural Engineering, researchers have built a system allowing one person to transmit her thoughts directly to another person<sup>3</sup>. Using electrical brain recordings and a form of magnetic stimulation, one researcher sent a brain signal to another person elsewhere on campus, causing the recipient’s finger to tap a keyboard. Scientists at Barcelona-based Starlab fitted a brain-computer interface on a man in Kerala, India and instructed him to simply imagine how he was moving his hands and feet<sup>4</sup>. His thoughts were

sent to a man in Strasbourg, France wearing a Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) robot, which delivered electrical pulses to his brain. When the man in India thought about moving his feet, the TMS caused the man in France to see light, even though his eyes were closed. What will happen in the far-future, when everyone becomes a roving reporter, watching and transmitting events as they unfold without filter or intermediary? This may all seem far-fetched to you now, but this research is already underway. In this scenario—where would a journalist even fit in? Or better yet, how would we define journalism then?

The best legacy we can leave for that future generation is to reconsider how we define and teach journalism today. That means thinking beyond journalism's traditional silos and envisioning it as an interdisciplinary field that is setting the pace for how we create and consume information. The future of journalism cannot be ceded to distributors; rather, it should be researched and tested within the realm of academia, just as the future of other disciplines—such as biochemical genetics artificial intelligence, behavioral and experimental economics—is being imagined and built by the world's best research universities.

Research and development teams within single organizations cannot have a transformative effect on the entire industry; nor can the fruits of forward-thinking practitioners working on individual research fellowships affect the industry in total. News organizations must collaborate on building the forefront of the industry, but they are hampered by day-to-day operations and cannot devote enough focus on practical experimentation. Universities have the time and flexibility to think about the future of news, but they lack funding and real-world laboratories.

If we recast undergraduate and graduate journalism education beyond teaching the fundamentals to include preparing young people for a modern media ecosystem—as well as providing a reliable base for experimentation and meaningful research and development—it would be difficult to argue against the need for journalism programs and schools. We therefore must figure out a way to make the degree matter more.

As part of my 2014-15 Nieman Visiting Fellowship at Harvard, I have spent the past several months developing a new blueprint for journalism education. To do this, I surveyed faculty and administrative staff working in academia and professionals working in all areas of journalism (publishers, editors, reporters, broadcasters, designers, product managers, and developers) as well as people in sales and finance). I conducted in-depth interviews with academic leaders (deans, department chairs), journalism faculty, and professionals working in various roles within media, technology, journalism, and finance<sup>5</sup>. And I solicited respondents through the Online News Association's educator's network, via influential thought leaders in journalism and academia, and through various social media channels.

Together with a research assistant, I analyzed the degree and major requirements, courses offered, and faculty community for 68 undergraduate and graduate programs, which

are representative of the various programs throughout the U.S.<sup>6</sup> I also read all of the available research on the future of journalism education, including works from the Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education. Finally, I worked with researchers, administrators, and professors at the Harvard Graduate School of Education to learn more about leadership and management within universities, educational models that must serve a changing profession, and change management within a rigid environment like academia.

Though I am not an academic, I have served as an adjunct professor at Temple University, the University of the Arts, the University of Tokyo, and the University of Maryland, teaching emerging technologies and data-driven reporting. I've also consulted for a number of universities, including Colorado State University, Columbia University, and the University of California-Berkeley. Currently, I serve on the advisory board for Temple University's journalism department.

I began my research with a set of assumptions about what the future of journalism education should look like. Like most non-academics I interviewed, I originally thought that eliminating tenure and reforming curriculum was the only path forward. However, midway through my work at Harvard, I realized that catalyzing real change requires a cultural revolution. I discovered that the entire mission of journalism education must be recast for the knowledge economy, which implies recalibrating approaches to leadership, tenure, and accreditation.

What follows is an analysis of the hidden challenges in journalism education—and a tactical plan for how to overcome them. Because there are so many variables—some schools of mass communication include PR, advertising, and corporate communications, while others only offer journalism degrees—this paper focuses exclusively on undergraduate schools that currently meet accreditation standards and offer journalism majors.

*When asked: “If you were to redevelop your entire curriculum now, what steps would be necessary?” one survey respondent wrote, “Three retirements and an act of God.”*

# Part One

---

## Overcoming The Six Hidden Challenges in Journalism Education

1

### There are long-standing tensions between universities and their journalism departments or schools.

To understand the path we must take into the future, it is important to understand how we arrived at this moment in journalism education. A century-long strain exists between journalism schools and other departments within universities. In their paper, “Educating Journalists: A New Plea for the University Tradition,” former journalism school deans Nicholas Lemann of the Columbia Journalism School, John Maxwell Hamilton of Louisiana State University, and Jean Folkerts of the University of North Carolina offer a meticulously-researched, detailed history of three strands of journalism education: as a social science (University of Wisconsin), as a laboratory approach (University of Missouri), and as a liberal arts hybrid (Columbia University). “The tension between educating reporters and editors to improve the quality of journalism and contribute to a democracy versus training them to function efficiently in a newspaper office—or any media environment—continues today,” the deans write. By the mid-1920s, “a still familiar pattern had emerged: an attack on journalism education from the university side, for being too skills-oriented; a response from journalism educators, promising to become serious practitioners of professional education like their colleagues in other fields; and a counterattack from the news industry, which was worried about journalism education’s becoming too impractical and too expensive. Over time, this final position, the news industry’s, tended to have the strongest influence on journalism education.”<sup>8</sup>

Outside of journalism education, this debate continues, with some dismissing journalism as a professional endeavor serving no real purpose inside a serious research institution. Journalism programs are an academic unit within a broad university community, even if they offer some skills-based coursework that service the profession. “The challenge that journalism education has always faced in higher education is that it is neither fish nor fowl,” says Maryanne Reed, interim dean of the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences and dean of the Reed College of Media at West Virginia University. “So it is neither a trade school nor an entirely academic discipline. In a large institution, it’s helpful to be able to demonstrate that you have faculty doing scholarly research that satisfies the central administration and that you still have a professional-oriented program that’s producing creative activity. Sometimes we don’t do a good enough job explaining what we have to offer and how that contributes to the university’s research and scholarly mission.”

By and large, journalism departments and schools—to their detriment—do not contribute the same kind of applied research as other departments throughout campus. “In other areas of the university, the research agenda in academia serves to create some benefit for somebody. That’s never existed in mass communications,” said Thom Lieb, a tenured professor of journalism at Towson University. “The research agenda [within journalism and mass communications] is to get tenure and promotion by publishing obscure articles. That’s not to discredit the great work that people have done. But when you hear about some of these micro-topics people are working on, you want to just beat your head against the wall. We’ve never really had any leadership when it comes to applied research. The news industry is facing all these challenges, and universities have been a bystander.”

Without that research—indeed, without many of the hallmarks of a traditional university school or department, such as faculty recognition within prominent journals, significant fundraising, or partnerships with high-profile outside organizations—it can be difficult to gain recognition from administrators. “At Temple, we made tremendous strides and offered unique partnership opportunities,” said Andrew Mendelson, associate dean of the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism and former chair of the journalism department at Temple University in Philadelphia. “We put a lot of effort into helping the administration understand the role of a journalism education within the knowledge economy. We had some tremendous success stories, but it required diligence on our part to help convey that message.”

The lack of clear messaging, combined with a difficult job market for new graduates, has negatively impacted America’s journalism programs and schools. In its most recent annual survey<sup>9</sup> of journalism and mass communication enrollments, the University of Georgia found that 2013 was the third consecutive year of declining enrollment within journalism and mass communication programs, both graduate and undergraduate.

In the Spring 2014 issue of Nieman Reports<sup>10</sup>, Jon Marcus reported on a number of startling changes at schools around the country:

*The provost of Indiana University is proceeding with a contentious plan to move the journalism school out of Ernie Pyle Hall and combine it with the schools of communication, telecommunications, and film. Emory University is phasing out its journalism program as part of a broad reorganization that will focus on “emerging growth areas,” such as contemporary China studies. And the University of Colorado at Boulder eliminated its school of journalism in 2011 and demoted journalism to a minor, though it’s since decided to open a new College of Media, Communication and Information that would include advertising, public relations, media design, communication, information science, journalism, and media studies.*

For decades, journalism programs and schools have wrestled with a difficult decision: to split away from the university or to fully assimilate. While forming an independent school would guarantee certain freedoms—allowing for rapid curriculum iteration, for example—forming an independent school would require significant funding, scores of new faculty and administrative staff, and vast investments in branding and marketing, not to mention a lengthy accreditation process. “Over the decades, some professors have speculated about going independent of the university, especially when things looked fiscally bleak a quarter-century ago. But that would have been a terrible mistake,” said Sree Sreenivasan, former dean of student affairs at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Integrating more closely with the rest of the university, he adds, affords opportunities to experiment, to work with other departments on research, and to help lead—rather than follow—the industry. For journalism education to thrive, it will require funding, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and research partnerships.

Historically, journalism faculty and administration do not hold enough clout within the university community. Deans and administrators set the vision and the overall strategy for their departments, but external faculty governance committees determine tenure requirements and promotions and set the rewards structure for others within the university. Central administrators create university-wide budgets, often without a clear understanding of what journalism programs require to excel. High-ranking faculty and university administration are not always clear as to what value journalism programs add to the broader community. “Journalism faculty don’t really act like other faculty,” says Matt Waite, professor of practice at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s College of Journalism and Mass Communications and founder of the school’s Drone Journalism Lab. “Many of us are former journalists. We didn’t come up in academia. We tend to seek leadership positions in our profession, not within the university.”

There is little interoperability between mass communications/journalism departments and other departments within the university. While some schools have started to offer joint degree programs in journalism and computer science or other disciplines, the partnership is uneven. Journalism students are eager to learn coding skills; computer science students are focused on intense coursework and less inclined to take electives in mass communications. Unlike departments offering certain math, statistics, or writing classes, journalism departments have not yet become an invaluable resource for other academic units within the university.

As I began my research, I intended to create a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) to enable journalism programs to measure and show their worth—not to funders, foundations, or accreditation agencies, but rather to school administrators and faculty governance committees. Originally, I was developing a new list of KPIs, which included setting meaningful benchmarks.

For students, faculty, and curricula, a few of those benchmarks included:

- Number of applications vs acceptances (year over year)
- Diversity of applicant pool and changes (year over year)
- Student to faculty and student to administration ratio
- Job placement of graduating students at the one, five, and ten year intervals
- Lifecycle of classroom equipment
- Rate of course iteration
- Frequency of syllabus updates
- Frequency of meaningful curriculum updates
- Test score averages relative to other majors within the university
- Number of crossover classes taken by students in other majors

To measure the output and success of applied research and a school or program's impact, some of the benchmarks included:

- Number of applied research projects and successes/publications
- Instances of applied research projects earning patents/copyrights
- New research partnerships funded by industry organizations
- New products, tools, or companies developed or launched within the school
- Measurable impact on community, for experiential classroom learning projects/tracks

While these (and many, many more) KPIs would be an invaluable internal resource for mass communication departments, I realized that this data alone wouldn't necessarily help a department gain prominence within the university. Other academic programs may collect and track similar data, but university administrators and other academic departments pay attention to an established list: the number and quality of tenured faculty, the quality and quantity of research, the amount of money generated by the department, and the like.

"The discussion about how to be a good journalism school is the same as how to be the best IBM Selectric typewriter in the world, and nobody wants to buy that," said Robert Kegan, professor of professional development at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "You'd need to assess the quality of your conversation about what you want to become, and determine whether it matches both the opportunities and the challenges that the industry is actually facing" and make sure that the broader academic community is receptive to engaging in that conversation.

## 2

## **There is no culture of academic leadership within journalism departments and schools.**

While there is a clear leadership ladder within universities, many journalism departments do not actively mentor or train faculty for those leadership positions.

In a newsroom, staff ascend to management positions for a variety of reasons, often depending on circumstance and timing. A reporter might show tremendous promise as a managing editor and receive a promotion or she may be extremely well-liked and respected by her peers. Or she may have a big audience and great ratings and can therefore call the shots as an anchor. Newsroom titles are evolving quickly along with the digital media landscape: there are editors for strategy, senior product managers, editors for innovation, audience engagement managers, executive digital producers, and the like. There is little standardization in the news industry, where titles are increasingly less representative of status than in other fields.

The opposite is true in academia, where a rigid structure dictates promotions within an academic unit for those who are not tenure-track: an assistant professorship, followed by an associate professorship (this typically happens when the faculty member is awarded tenure) and a final promotion to full professor. Depending on the university, more or less emphasis is placed on research, teaching, and service.

Academic promotions aren't easy to come by, and while the criteria for promotion are explicit, other faculty and administrators on a committee interpret an individual's achievements subjectively. Getting past the first rung to associate professor typically happens after serving five to seven years as an assistant professor and showing a track record of academic successes: earning internal and external grant money, presenting research to large conferences, and publishing research in prominent journals. Acceptance to a peer-reviewed publication may not be enough if it's not a journal that others within the university recognize and value. Also important is university service: working on committees and serving in leadership positions. Promotion to a full professor takes a minimum of another five to seven years, with a focus on additional research and scholarship. An academic at this level must be recognized as an expert in her subject matter, publishing chapters or writing highly regarded books. She must have a track record of securing substantial external funding and she must have achieved leadership positions around the university. In most cases, the amount of time spent in a department or positive student feedback has little impact on promotions.

Journalism does not fit as neatly into this leadership ladder as well as a discipline like economics, which is a constantly-evolving field grounded in research. Economists have highly-regarded academic journals, famous conferences, and research that's recognized by the Nobel Prize. Academic economic scholarship is applied, in real-time, by governments and corpo-

rations, and it is quoted by a wide variety of media. The potential funding pool for economists is vast and diverse.

In contrast, mass communications research tends to be insular or obscure. Academics in mass communications can publish either scholarly or creative work, and it doesn't necessarily need to be in an established journal to meet tenure requirements. Even so, the scholarly research being produced by mass communication faculty is not cited or referenced with the same enthusiasm as economists (or other academic disciplines). This is due, in part, to the subject matter.

For example, in the spring of 2015, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* published academic research about QR codes in U.S. newspapers<sup>11</sup>. QR codes were first used in the U.S. as early as 2008, and newspapers began experimenting with them in 2010. However, within a year, executives decided that, for a variety of reasons, QR codes were not a good way to drive readership in the U.S. The trend had already passed by the time the journal published "A Slow Response to Quick Response: Diffusion of QR Technology on U.S. Newspaper Front Pages" at the end of 2014. By then, the "slow response" was due to the fact that QR codes were already on the wane. Another study published in the journal reviewed the 2012 Olympic Games social media strategy by NBC, concluding that a social media backlash was due to the network not streaming all events live<sup>12</sup>. These studies are inherently a look back—they don't test, prototype or develop entirely new thought leadership on the future.

Publishing scholarly work is one requirement to achieve tenure, which itself is a point of contention within journalism higher education. Tenure requirements place more emphasis on scholarly work like these papers than on applied research.

Journalism departments are underfunded relative to other academic units in the humanities, so they do not have the additional funding or the political sway to add new tenured faculty positions. Unlike the English department, journalism requires software, multimedia equipment, computers, recording studios and more. A freshman-level calculus course can be taught in a lecture room with a teacher to studio ratio of 1:300. That would be impossible for a reporting or writing class. As a result, a significant number of adjuncts are needed to teach classes. However, the disproportionate ratio of tenured to non-tenured faculty causes additional tension and cultural division within departments.

There is widespread agreement that adjuncts are seen as a connection to the professional world, relieving tenured faculty of the need to stay current with the changing media landscape. However, while adjuncts may have a firmer grasp on what's happening in modern journalism, they often lack formal pedagogical training. They are brought into departments after an interview and, in some, but not all cases, an orientation session. Worse yet, they may have come to the profession without any explicit training in ethics, law, and history.

Adjuncts who are practicing journalists are no panacea, as recent scandals have shown. In November 2014, Rolling Stone published the now-infamous University of Virginia rape story. The magazine retracted the story in April 2015, admitting—after months of speculation from outsiders and an investigation of the article’s discrepancies—that the reporter never contacted the alleged perpetrators of the horrific gang rape described, nor the three friends who were cited in her story. Sabrina Rubin Erdely, the Rolling Stone contributing editor who wrote the story, taught magazine writing for four years as an adjunct at the University of Pennsylvania. Another adjunct, CNN reporter Don Lemon, who taught new media at Brooklyn College, used airtime to admonish black people for wearing baggy pants, and then said “obviously, there’s a smell of marijuana in the air.” He also asked one of Bill Cosby’s alleged rape victims why she didn’t use her teeth as “a weapon” while being forced to perform oral sex.

This doesn’t mean adjuncts don’t have a place at journalism schools. Indeed, they present a unique collaborative opportunity. Partnering an adjunct with a full-time professor to team-teach courses would offer hands-on learning for everyone. Faculty would be exposed to real-world newsroom challenges and best practices; adjuncts would gain on-the-job immersion into teaching; students would gain more perspective. Partnering adjuncts with faculty for every class would be impractical and expensive, but creating a team-teaching program for certain courses with rotating faculty and adjuncts would benefit everyone within the department.

Many in the profession blame tenure as a primary source of journalism education’s problems. Tenured faculty, who have usually spent their whole careers in academia and may have never worked in a newsroom, are often chided for their lack of professional experience. What we forget is that those faculty members have a wealth of institutional knowledge about how universities work. Just as adjuncts are valued for their newsroom experience, we must value tenured faculty for their ample experience in academia.

Tenure itself is not the problem. It’s a requirement for the academic leadership ladder and a mandatory part of university culture. Rather, *some tenured faculty* can be *problematic*. Once tenure has been achieved, faculty are not incentivized to continue learning, collaborating, and experimenting. To be sure, several faculty I’ve interviewed are eager to learn new skills and collaborate with the industry or other academics. However, there is no reward for this additional work if a faculty member has not been encouraged to take on additional leadership roles.

There is a workaround: Journalism deans and department chairs must make collaboration, learning, and leadership a condition of ongoing membership within a department. There are numerous options, from auditing courses around a university to participating in hands-on training sessions or simply enrolling in a massive open online course (MOOC) offered by companies like Coursera. There are Hacks/Hackers meet-ups, where working journalists, designers, and developers get together to share best practices and build projects together. The

Online News Association now has chapters all over the country, and it produces local training events. Last summer, I created a simple, self-directed eight-week course, Summer School for Journalism Professors, intended to help tenured faculty better understand the evolving nature of media and technology. I released the syllabus for free online<sup>13</sup> as a low-touch, high impact way to catalyze ongoing learning.

It isn't a lack of opportunity, but rather a lack of time holding back some faculty. For those pursuing tenure, they must juggle teaching classes along with advising students, serving on committees, and completing research for publication. Understandably, tasking those faculty with ongoing learning may be a stretch. Tenured faculty or those long-term faculty members who will not pursue tenure often have more flexibility. Depending on seniority and rank, some faculty members may teach only a single course once a week. To be fair, they may be writing books or working on articles for communications journals—but they can surely devote a few hours a week to professional development.

Ongoing learning and collaboration is a necessary component for those ascending to chief academic officer positions. In America's system of higher education, administrative roles vary; however, most universities have academic department chairs, directors, deans, vice-chancellors, provosts, and presidents. A 2010 study<sup>14</sup> by the Council of Independent Colleges found that at least 90 percent of chief academic officers serving four-year colleges and universities have a terminal degree (most commonly a PhD). At public doctoral universities, the number is even higher: 93 percent earned a PhD, while 3 percent earned an EdD.

Between 2013-2014, nearly 40 percent of all new deans were hired from within their own institutions and had held previous administrative roles, according to an annual survey by the Chronicle of Higher Education. The most common previous position for new provosts was dean while 40 percent of new presidents had been provosts or vice presidents for academic affairs before taking the top administrative position. But they didn't come from mass communications. The executive management within universities almost always hail from other areas of the humanities or from law and business schools. There are rare exceptions: Vincent Price, a communications scholar, is the provost at the University of Pennsylvania; Dianne Lynch, is president of Stephens College; Patricia Moy, another communications scholar, is the associate

*Tenure itself is not the problem. It's a requirement for the academic leadership ladder and a mandatory part of university culture. Rather, some tenured faculty can be problematic.*

vice provost for academic and student affairs at the University of Washington; Susan Herbst has a PhD in communication theory and is now the president of the University of Connecticut.

Journalism faculty must be mentored and encouraged to ascend the academic ranks. As is tradition within academic units, department chairs of journalism programs tend to rotate every one to three years, and the position carries little responsibility. Worse, faculty members often reject the additional layer of leadership and instead task the department chair with tedious administrative issues. Surprisingly, when asked about the most critical skills necessary for academics working in journalism departments today, not a single respondent in my survey mentioned anything about leadership training, organizational management, or administrative strategy.

By and large, journalism departments do not mentor faculty to become university leaders, even though many of the new academic executives cited in the CIC study are likely to have participated in some kind of formal leadership development program<sup>15</sup>. There are several offered: the American Council on Education's Fellows Program, the American Association of State College and Universities' Millennium Leadership Initiative, Harvard's Institute for Educational Management, Higher Education Resource Services' Summer Institute at Bryn Mawr, and the Kellogg Fellows Program.

In addition to leadership development, there are immersive programs that teach strategy, innovation, and critical approaches to problem solving. One—the Punch Sulzberger Program at Columbia University—focuses specifically on journalism, bringing together the university's executive business school faculty and thought leaders in the future of news space. Executives spend a year working on a particular challenge under the advisement of top management executives and consultants.<sup>16</sup> “In an academic setting, you are contending with formal versus informal approaches to development,” said Douglas K. Smith, the founder and executive director of the Sulzberger Program and a former co-leader of McKinsey & Company’s worldwide organization practice. “So there should be a group supporting the outcome, not a single individual who wants to see change.” In the program, participants are taught a host of strategies to catalyze and manage positive change.

Louisiana State University created a weeklong leadership academy for mass communications professionals to help new chairs, deans, and directors build their leadership skills and will welcome its third cohort this summer. But that one week of training can't possibly deliver meaningful organizational change without intensive buy-in and support from faculty and administration once the fall semester starts.

Recently, some journalism programs have subscribed to the idea that appointing non-academics to leadership positions will stimulate interest from foundations and corporations and will attract larger numbers of student applicants. In the January 2007 issue of the

Harvard Business Review, John P. Kotter, professor of leadership-emeritus at Harvard Business School, argued that “major renewal programs often start with just one or two people. In cases of successful transformation efforts, the leadership coalition grows and grows over time. But whenever some minimum mass is not achieved early in the effort, nothing much worthwhile happens.”<sup>17</sup> In order to build that coalition, the leader must be respected and trusted among her peers.

I am one of those outsiders—I’ve been approached about four dean’s positions in the past 24 months. I may be an expert on the future of media and technology, but I lack all of the academic credentials and qualifications required for consideration as an equal among established academics. It is concerning to me that any school would be considering someone like me with so few academic qualifications, even if I am an enthusiastic supporter of academia.

Departments and schools must redouble their efforts to identify capable, charismatic leaders, to cultivate them, to provide them mentoring, and to enable them to rise through the administrative ranks of academia. As Smith said, this cannot be an effort driven by one individual within a program, or even one school within the vast ocean of academia. The entire journalism and mass communications academic community must agree to work collectively to support leadership development. An academic executive with a background in journalism and mass communications can champion new initiatives and innovation that benefits the department, and she can help others within the university understand the critical role the department plays in our future knowledge economy.

In practice, this means that departments must accept a short-term negative return on their investment, as time and resources will be spent mentoring good candidates who must leave their positions or even the school to accept promotions. It benefits all if schools accept this burden, as it will pay significant dividends for all programs well into the future.

## 3

### The current system prevents curriculum development from keeping pace with the changing realities of modern newsrooms.

Modern newsrooms desire a new brand of journalist, like many of those working at BuzzFeed. The site launched a news app in the summer of 2015, but it didn’t follow the kind of development and launch cycle familiar to many traditional newsrooms. On NiemanLab.org, Joseph Licherman wrote<sup>18</sup>:

*BuzzFeed has worked to build the app and newsletter quickly. By January, [Stacy-Marie Ishmael, managing editor for mobile, and Noah Chestnut, head of product] had built a prototype that only let users download the app and receive push notifications in*

*order to begin to test what types of notifications were most useful. In the spring, BuzzFeed introduced a public beta test of the app, creating a private Facebook group for testers to discuss their experience using the product and to also give feedback and suggestions for improvements. The newsletter development went just as quickly. On only her third day with BuzzFeed in January, Millie Tran, who is heading up the newsletter effort, was already sending out preliminary versions of the newsletter internally to other BuzzFeed employees. “I sort of threw her right into the deep end,” Ishmael said. The first public newsletter was sent out February 23.*

People like Ishmael and Chestnut represent a new breed of journalist, one that's desired by modern newsrooms. “The people who do the best work at BuzzFeed are well-rounded,” said Eric Harris, chief business operations officer at BuzzFeed. “They're part-product, part-editorial. They're able and willing to see the bigger picture of a news operation. They work in a very different way than journalists who came up in a typical newsroom.”

A culture of rapid testing and iteration will become the norm within modern newsrooms, but it isn't being cultivated within journalism programs. This is in part due to the fact that the current system prevents curriculum development from keeping pace with the changing realities of modern journalism. “My impression is that most colleagues freshen up their syllabi once a year,” wrote one survey respondent, a professor working at a large journalism school in the Northeast. “I'm also under the impression that once the semester begins, they will not budge from their syllabi, regardless of what's happening in the world.”

“Our department says it's not a production school, so faculty are resistant to adding any new technology in their classes,” wrote another respondent, an assistant professor at a university in the Midwest. “Or, they assume that the few of us who teach certain skills classes can cover everything our students need to know.”

A curriculum redesign requires the approval of key stakeholders: department faculty and leadership, faculty governance committees, a university's central administration, accreditation committees, and, in some cases, even state boards of education. While this environment is intended to safeguard a high quality education, it can cripple fields that are in the midst of great change.

Striking a balance between deliberate planning and iteration is paramount. “Everything about journalism has been shaped by its medium,” said David Weinberger, former co-director of the Harvard Library Innovation Lab at Harvard Law School and co-author of “The Cluetrain Manifesto.”<sup>19</sup> “If you were designing a news org in the networked age, you would need to design news to be redistributable and interoperable. News in the network moves because the people in the network are moving it, they are the medium. What will journalism become? What

will the net become? There is no central management on the net. Understanding the architecture of the net is important. The properties of the net enable direct connections and assume innovation will happen on the edges. There is a reason to teach how the net works.”<sup>20</sup>

At many schools, the curriculum review model involves bringing together faculty with others from around the university and, in some cases, outsiders from within the journalism/PR/marketing community. This poses a few immediate challenges, primarily for larger undergraduate mass communications schools, which offer a number of different majors that, from an outsider’s view, may appear to have significantly overlapping needs.

In March 2015, two new applications, Periscope and Meerkat, were introduced, and they have forever changed how we broadcast video content. These applications can be used for public relations and marketing. They can also be used—and were, on March 26th, when a building exploded in Manhattan—for breaking news events. These applications aren’t just new tools to broadcast content; rather, they’re representative of instant, social video content. I’m not advocating a Fall 2015 course on Periscope and Meerkat; however, there should always be a course on real-time storytelling offered within undergraduate programs. It would necessarily require weekly recalibration by the faculty, who would need to have her pulse on new product launches, changes and iterations. Ultimately, it would be less about learning individual tools and more about what those real-time systems represent, the circumstances and ways in which they’re being used, and the ethical considerations of using these kinds of networks as part of the coursework.

“There’s a danger in teaching a specific device, platform, or software,” said Steve Dorsey, vice president, innovation and planning, for the Austin American-Statesman, visiting professor at Syracuse University, and past president of the Society for News Design. “Even though tools change quickly, there is still value in having learned how to design using a particular software or how to code in a particular program. When I was in school, I had to go through an entire semester of drawing maps at 5 a.m. for an afternoon edition...just to understand how maps are made properly. We use different technology today to make maps, but what I learned transferred over.”

The challenge is that those charged with developing and approving changes to curricula are often out of touch with the impending changes in media. For example, how many faculty had hands-on experience trying Meerkat or Periscope during the spring 2015 semester? How many will talk about streaming social video’s impact on journalism in the fall? The people tasked with approving curriculum make assumptions about what skills to teach based on their own experiences, which may not accurately reflect the evolving media ecosystem. Their experiences are no doubt relevant for some of the courses and coursework, but their lack of familiarity with other areas of emerging technology, media, audiences, advertising, and the like are a liability to

ongoing curriculum development. As a result, there are often incremental changes to the status quo rather than meaningful updates and sweeping reforms.

“I feel like journalism schools don’t know what to do and they don’t have time to figure it out,” said Jacob Harris, a former senior software architect at The New York Times. Harris, who holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said it’s imperative for journalism programs to focus on skills, but also on context and concepts. “Nothing infuriates me more than when people refer to us as ‘wizards’ and to what we do as ‘magic.’ Schools should teach how to think about data and code. What I do isn’t magic. No one would look at your car and call it magic.”

It may come as a surprise that the majority of respondents in my survey rated the effectiveness of their curriculum for graduates entering the workforce as average or below average. More than half said that the journalism degree their university is offering isn’t necessary to pursue a career in journalism. Some survey participants reported that their departments only self-audit curriculum once every three years, and that’s mainly to ensure that courses offered are still relevant.

Overwhelmingly, professionals I interviewed agree that courses taught in journalism programs are incongruous with the demands of a modern newsroom. “It would be helpful for journalists to understand that what they do is monetized,” said Harris of BuzzFeed. “It’s important to keep the church-state divide. The editors at BuzzFeed understand that we need to make money and they understand the business model. That’s important.”

“There is a persistent conversation about how to teach the next generation of journalists, but it’s in relation to different silos, like a broadcast concentration or a multimedia concentration. That seems like a red herring,” said Meredith Artley, editor in chief of CNN Digital and president of the Online News Association’s board of directors. “There are classes being taught on subjects that don’t fit into daily journalism, like software that no one uses anymore. Professors ask me all the time, ‘What tools should we be teaching?’ but it feels like a distraction. Yes, skills are important, but only if they’re what we still need once students have graduated.”

Kevin Riley, editor of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, wants to hire journalists who are exceptional critical thinkers, who ask difficult questions and who are driven to the profession not for a byline, but “because they need the incredible thrill of being in the middle of a story and having the responsibility of communicating what’s happened to the public.” For Riley, it’s not a matter of teaching code or the latest social media networks, but rather fostering those immutable journalism skills: getting to the right source, helping the public gain context and understanding, and adapting storytelling for our modern means of transmission. “Our capacity to tell stories has never been greater than it is right now.”

Unlike the hard sciences, where there is a general progression of learning, there is no standardization in mass communications. Many programs are increasingly interested in building data and code skills into their curricula. “There are academics who say that every journalism student needs to learn code,” said Dick Tofel, the president of ProPublica and former assistant publisher at The Wall Street Journal. “It would probably be a good thing to learn a little bit, so that conceptually you understand it. But it would also be very important to be under no illusion that, even if you had state-of-the-art computer programming skills, on the day you graduate college if you did not use them at all, five years later you would be hopelessly behind. How can you advocate that everyone must learn how to code, when not everyone actually codes as part of their job? It doesn’t make any sense.” Like Riley, Tofel advocates a rigorous liberal arts education that would help future journalists understand the world as people, movements, and events “fit into the wider course of the development of civilization.”

One issue cited by those interviewed is the lack of a certain fluency in reporting and publishing at a fast pace. Anna Holmes, editor of digital voices at Fusion, said that multimedia courses offered at journalism schools aren’t practical, in part because they’re not nimble enough. Fusion wants to hire “people who have an appetite and ability to produce content at a more rapid pace than what’s being taught in journalism schools.” Holmes, who founded Jezebel.com and is also a columnist for The New York Times Book Review, earned an undergraduate degree in journalism from NYU. “For digital natives, editing video is a technical skill that can be learned over the weekend rather than as a semester-long class,” she said. Critical thinking and sound judgment are imperative, she said, adding that the degree would matter more if students “learned by doing, rather than sitting in a classroom and listening to how someone else does or used to do journalism.”

Among the faculty I surveyed and interviewed, there is a divide between those who think their current programs are serving both the students and the profession well, and those who think that schools ought to revise the curricula immediately to reflect courses in data, statistics, and code. There is a certain stagnation reflected in this indecision—at many schools, there is no ongoing, holistic approach to curriculum development. “What is the future of journalism education” is not being forecast using possible, probable and preferred scenarios that reflect paths the news industry might follow ten or more years from today.

Survey participants cited administrators and faculty who “don’t understand the value of digital journalism,” “meetings upon meetings” in which “one person can completely derail everything” before a plan is formed. Therefore, meaningful change is difficult to muster. “Many of our electives could have been taught 10 or 15 years ago,” wrote one assistant professor at a large university in the South. When asked: “If you were to redevelop your entire curriculum now, what steps would be necessary?” one survey respondent wrote, “Three retirements and an act of God.”

We can't simply blow up journalism schools and departments. Again, if we agree that a journalism degree is a valuable asset in the knowledge economy and that the best path forward for those programs is continued attachment to their academic institutions, then what we need are creative hacks and workarounds. Not dynamite.

There are three initial approaches worth considering:

### **1. Hacking the department or school's vision:**

One innovative solution is to make academic advisory boards function as they do in other organizations: help leadership develop a vision and then a strategy to execute it. Many schools maintain advisory boards, but they only convene twice a year and have little responsibility. Instead, schools should create advisory boards with a combination of industry change-makers and open-minded faculty in order to meet a nexus of innovation and institutional support. In addition to helping inform the vision of the department or school, professional members of the board should be tasked with reviewing syllabi, offering feedback on courses, and performing an annual curriculum audit. This only works if those professional members are themselves helping to create the future of journalism and communications.

The College of Charleston's communications department created an advisory council for exactly this purpose. CNN's Artley, who is a University of Missouri broadcast journalism alum, serves instead on Charleston's advisory committee. "We give direct feedback on how best to shape what they're teaching," Artley said. "It's an incredible model. I am constantly amazed at what they're doing. I don't have any tie to the school, but I'm engaged with them because I can see them using our input and shaping their classes." Part of the draw for Artley is that she wants to transfer her real-world knowledge to the up-and-coming students who will soon enter the workforce, which Charleston embraces. The council has attracted names and companies you'll recognize<sup>21</sup>: Jeff Matteson, senior vice president and strategic communications officer at TBS; Edward Barbini, VP of external relations at IBM; Aaron Hite, senior account executive at Google; Michael Moore, senior vice president, core narrative, for Thomson Reuters; and Alicia Thompson, a general manager at Edelman, among others.

### **2. Hacking the department's faculty:**

"Above & Beyond: Looking at the Future of Journalism Education," a report by Lynch at Stephens College, includes myriad essays and extensive survey data from those working in academia. One conclusion is that "slow turnover among longstanding, tenured faculty can make it more difficult to bring fresh perspectives, innovation and currency into higher education in general."<sup>22</sup> The report offers valuable perspective on various intersections within news media and academe. However, I disagree with the assertion that faculty—tenured or not—can't be a part of the solution.

Faculty should be relied on to contribute to the future of their departments and to help build the next generation of curricula, courses, and experimental labs. That begins with a coalition of the willing. Encouraging a few faculty members to think differently and providing them with the space to experiment will incite a groundswell of engagement among other faculty, as it has at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Northeastern University.

Matt Waite, the professor who built the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Drone Journalism Lab, was inspired at a digital mapping conference—one that was intended for professionals in the space, not necessarily journalists. "I came back and talked to Gary Kebbel, who was our dean at the time," he said. "I thought drones were going to be a thing and we should be a part of it, and he more or less said go for it. We started to craft what our pitch would be to funders to see if they would be interested. I put up a site and a quick blog post right before getting on a plane and by the time I landed, I had a couple of emails in my inbox. I would say it worked because from the very beginning we had a vision that it would involve students, the college, and professionals in figuring something out that was very practical at heart. I think you have to take stock and look at what you have as resources. And the really key resources any journalism school has are students, faculty, space and time." Of course, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln had a key resource, too: a faculty member who was driven, passionate and entrepreneurial enough to see the program through to launch.

Jeff Howe, assistant professor of journalism in the College of Arts, Media, and Design at Northeastern University, successfully launched a pilot program for media innovation in the school's graduate journalism program that recognizes that learning to code, shoot video, or design interactive media is less important than learning to think like a coder, a documentarian, or a designer. It was a three-year effort, but Howe's work has so far yielded a groundbreaking course on the future of digital storytelling, a research and development partnership with Esquire magazine, and a \$250,000 Knight Foundation grant. "We've received a lot of institutional support, moral, administrative, and otherwise," Howe said. "That said, it's still felt a lot more like crawling than running, as we've had to battle not just pre-existing conceptions about journalism, but also pre-existing conceptions about higher education, and more to the point, administrative procedures that generally make sense, but which we have to circumvent in order to make our program function."

To be sure, there are varying obstacles across departments and schools, from funding to space to resources. Some obstinate faculty may stand in the way of progress; in that case, a dean can invite those faculty members to secure a role in a different department within the university.

### **3. *Creating a workaround to make the curriculum and coursework more nimble:***

The Reed College of Media at West Virginia University has been able to prototype classes before having to submit them for full curriculum approval. "We have been able to try all

sorts of things before we push them through,” the school’s dean, Maryanne Reed, said. “We have a more flexible curriculum that allows us to change, add courses, subtract courses. For example, we have a certain number of courses,” but they’re divided among three internal categories, which are set by the college but not publicized: writing, producing, and engaging. Since those categories are all internal, “we could add more categories or subtract categories without needing approval.”

In other cases, some schools have reframed their curriculum so that course descriptions don’t include specific technologies. At Ohio University, Michelle Ferrier, associate dean for innovation, research/creative activity, and graduate studies, created a two-week module on mobile technology. Rather than revising the curriculum entirely or developing a semester-long course, she instead developed an innovative class-within-a-class model. “We brought in an industry expert to develop the content,” Ferrier said. “I put her in the classroom for two weeks. We fit [the material] into the syllabus.” Teachers were expected to participate right along with the students. “The response from the faculty was great. Six used the module, and two taught it themselves. We touched several hundred students by hacking the 15-week schedule. It was such a win-win-win.” Those faculty members are now teaching the module on their own.

Another strategic approach is to decouple educational components from publishing mediums. “It strikes me that much of journalism education is still very rooted in a print design mentality,” says Justin Ferrell, fellowships director at the Institute of Design (also known as the d.school) at Stanford University and the former digital design director at The Washington Post. “That’s designing for a certain type of narrative. Web design is not about narratives. It’s about behavior. This requires a much more holistic approach to curriculum.” One of the things Ferrell teaches at the d.school is how to think broader. “Think of the organizational construct of a journalism school. If you think of the potential student as your user, how are you designing curriculum for their behavior? I wonder if students come to programs making the same distinctions between different programs—print, new media, broadcast—that academics do, or if those distinctions are cemented after they start an undergraduate program.”

In addition to ongoing curriculum review, schools and departments can overcome stagnation by aggressively marketing courses offered within journalism programs to others around the university. This will serve a few purposes: to help raise the profile and purpose of the department throughout the university and to put pressure on faculty to keep their course material current. “What’s taught in a journalism program should translate into all domains,” says Lee Rainie, director of Internet, science, and technology research at the Pew Research Center and a former U.S. News & World Report editor. “Any organization is now its own broadcaster, its own media enterprise. A central business function is being able to find information and explain it in a way that’s compelling and makes sense to others. The right kind of journalism degree should be highly desirable by any organization.”

Building a coalition across campus to include journalism courses in general education requirements will solve a problem for other schools and will ultimately communicate the value of journalism education throughout the university. Yet, undergraduate journalism students must take nearly all of their general studies courses (economics, statistics) in other departments. Remarkably, English composition is still a requirement for many all journalism majors, and those credit hours must be taken in the English department. Courses in the journalism school rarely count toward requirements for non-majors.

For example, the data-driven reporting class offered at the University of Texas-Austin addresses data analysis; identifying data needed to test hypotheses; how to gain access to needed data sets; how to clean, analyze, and compare data; and how to synthesize the information into an impactful story<sup>23</sup>. What's taught in this class is unique to journalism but applicable to students elsewhere at UTA, including those studying at the College of Pharmacy, the McCombs School of Business, and the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs.

## 4

### **Accreditation in journalism is a paradox, making things simultaneously better and worse.**

Accreditation in journalism education is a paradox, simultaneously making programs stronger and stifling momentum. There are currently 114 journalism programs in the United States—fewer than 25%—fully accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC)<sup>24</sup>. Accreditation is an arduous process requiring rigorous self-study, extensive documentation and site visits by peer groups. Not every school applying for accreditation earns it.

Let me be clear. Because accreditation is a standard peer-review practice within a university, journalism departments need accreditation in order to be recognized as equals on campus. It should be a required designation. Whether or not you give credence to the argument that parents highly value accreditation when helping their children make decisions about college is a separate and less important point. If we agree that journalism programs are stronger when they are stronger members of a university community, then accreditation is paramount.

Some respondents in my survey and interviews repeated a now-familiar refrain: dissolve the ACEJMC and start fresh with a new accrediting organization. Before we determine whether that's the best possible pathway, we must first understand what the ACEJMC is and how it came into being.

The ACEJMC includes 31 members, 17 of which are academics and 14 of which are either members of the public or professional organizations<sup>25</sup>. From an outsider's perspective, and cer-

tainly mine when I first started my research, the council may seem oddly staffed. Anyone with an interest in journalism may apply to buy a seat on the council, which is why some groups such as the American Press Institute, the Public Relations Society of America, and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists send delegates to meetings.

This is because, when it was founded in 1945, the ACEJMC was actually designed to serve the profession first and parents second—not the university system. Decades ago, the organization was created to make sure that schools were producing the kinds of students that news organizations wanted to hire. From a practical standpoint, the ACEJMC is still endeavoring to serve its intended purpose. The professional mass communications organizations, deans of schools, and working journalists—again, primarily those working the profession—who want to profoundly impact the future of journalism education can participate on the council.

Some, including Lynch in “Above & Beyond: Looking at the Future of Journalism Education,”<sup>26</sup> question the relevancy of the ACEJMC today given its membership and its process for accreditation:

*No digital-first companies or nonprofit investigative news organizations are represented...The Online News Association, the largest professional association for journalists working in digital news, is not among them. It is commonly assumed that accreditation signals to a journalism school’s stakeholders that it has met the rigorous and relevant standards that are the hallmarks of educational excellence. After two years of soliciting comments, the ACEJMC updated the standards in 2013 to allow eight more credits within the major (requiring 72 credits to be completed outside the major, down from 80); it also revised the standard by requiring students to apply “current” tools and technologies appropriate to their professions, and added the phrase “to understand the digital world.” Accredited programs also must post to their websites data on graduation, retention, and job placements (difficult or impossible to find on many school sites). The revisions did not address the rapid changes occurring in the profession, nor their impact on faculty competencies, budgets, student satisfaction, enrollments, or outcomes. As journalism education changes in response to the transformation reshaping the industry, so, too, must the standards and metrics against which it is measured.*

I agree. By its current design, accreditation can unintentionally encourage the status quo. But it can also be fixed.

First, the assertions. I spoke with members of the current Online News Association’s executive management and board of directors about why ONA is not a member of the ACEJMC.<sup>27</sup> The reason has to do with a lack of bandwidth and, it seems from the conversations I had, a

lack of understanding about the role an organization with no history of participating in accreditation standards can have today. It's not that ONA is anti-ACEJMC, or has been prevented somehow from participating. It's a lack of awareness about how, through accreditation, ONA can help push forward the next best practices for journalism education.

This reflects the point made earlier: that academic-professional partnerships today are transactional—providing internships and experiences for students—rather than mutually beneficial such that researchers, academics, and professionals are all building the future of our news ecosystem in symbiosis.

Next, the challenges. Including preparation time, the accreditation process can take three to seven years. Most often, administration must pass new courses through faculty governance, which takes additional time. And, once a school begins that process, it is using accreditation standards that will have been set a minimum of one year earlier.

To its credit, the ACEJMC now includes among its criteria “instruction, whether on-site or online, is demanding and **current** [ACEJMC’s emphasis], and is responsive to professional expectations of digital, technological and multimedia competencies.”<sup>28</sup> The ACEJMC is also working to emphasize applied research that informs the practice as a criteria for tenure and accreditation.

Within today’s framework, there is no incentive or reward for iteration or to significantly modernize journalism programs within a reasonable timeframe. By the late 2000s, it had taken so long for many journalism programs to incorporate interactivity into their curricula that students were graduating with skills in Flash, a software product that was already being retired in newsrooms. In his keynote address during the 2012 annual conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Richard Gingras, director of news and social products at Google said<sup>29</sup>: “At a journalism conference a year or so ago I heard a journalism professor bemoan the fact they taught students Flash only to have it fade from use. Really? Every one of those students learned valuable and transferable skills. Authoring tools change. Understanding of programming concepts and models persists and evolves.” There is certainly an argument to be made in favor of teaching technologies, as long as higher-level strategy and critical thinking are being taught simultaneously.

Although it is working to update the criteria for accreditation so that they more closely reflect the changing needs of the profession, the ACEJMC hasn’t yet fully recalibrated its model to propel the future of journalism education forward.

The members holding board seats—those charged with determining what’s “current”—are not themselves working in the forefront of professional practice or in emerging pedagogical research. Currently the Accrediting Council meets only twice a year—once to discuss policies and requirements and once to discuss accrediting decisions. Accrediting Committee members,

who are voted on by the Council, meet once a year to review reports from observations by accreditation site visit teams. Council and Committee members serving current terms have strong leadership and academic experience, but none are working on future of news projects or within the digital media space. In many ways, the ACEJMC's challenges mirror the professional-academic divide of the communications departments they serve.

It is vital to recalibrate the membership model so that those determining accreditation standards also include professionals with a deep understanding of the future of academia, the future of journalism, and the future of the workforce. But a strong case must be made to the professional community, so that they understand the impact involvement can have on journalism education, and therefore on the news media itself.

It is also important to reflect the future of journalism within the construct of present-day accreditation. I spoke with David Boardman—president of the ACEJMC, former executive editor of The Seattle Times, and dean of Temple University's School of Media and Communication—about the council and about accreditation in general. The organization is working to modernize, part of which means putting a heavier emphasis on practical and applied research.

The ACEJMC is the recognized accrediting body for journalism education, and it should be strengthened—not abandoned. Starting fresh with a new accrediting body will not solve the challenges in journalism education overnight; worse, a new organization would take a decade or more to establish and legitimize itself among the academic community.

There is, however, one way to reward schools for pushing ahead with reform, and that is via a secondary certification. In the world of architecture, for example, there are certifications stipulating that certain standards for a building's architecture, structural engineering, and construction principles have been met. Without those designations, a building cannot be opened for occupancy. There is an additional, voluntary program—LEED Certification—denoting whether a building is environmentally friendly, and there are levels of achievement within this designation. In journalism, we might offer this added layer of certification for schools and programs that meet and/or exceed criteria for applied research, digital-first course offerings, and the like.

## 5

### **Journalism departments do not fundraise on par with their peers within the university.**

Even though universities have development offices and staff charged with fundraising, the upper echelons of academy leadership, along with deans and some program directors, are also expected to help cultivate donors and develop streams of financial support.

Undergraduate and graduate schools of business, engineering, medicine, and law are fundraising powerhouses on campus. They seed advisory boards with local, successful entrepreneurs and business leaders who are either personally able to donate money or whose companies can contribute funds. They devote time and resources to cultivating alumni as donors.

The Harvard Business School expertly tells a compelling story of why to give back to the school, using four key areas to show impact: fellowships, innovations in education, research, and programs for global understanding. A HBS Fund Investors Society includes publications, networking, and events. Profiles of donors are featured prominently on the school's website. There are hundreds of alumni clubs, ongoing programming and classes, reunions, opportunities to work with students, and events to learn about how the school is evolving—which provide great value to alumni, but also cement an ongoing relationship with their school post-graduation. Rather than an occasional email or letter asking for money, HBS alumni are continually engaged through various opportunities to network, learn, and connect.

In 2014, HBS announced that it had raised 72 percent of its \$1 billion capital campaign in just three years<sup>30</sup>. At \$2.9 billion, HBS has the largest endowment of any school in the world, but other schools are meeting steep fundraising goals as well. Now in its fifth of a seven-year campaign, Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management has already raised \$240 million of its \$350 million target<sup>31</sup>. The Columbia Business School is halfway through a \$500 million campaign to build a new campus<sup>32</sup>. Yale Law School is nearing the end of its \$200 million capital campaign<sup>33</sup>. The University of Chicago Law School is midway through a \$175 million capital campaign<sup>34</sup>. At UCLA, several professional schools, which include undergraduate programs, are nearing their fundraising targets: the Anderson School of Management has earned 59 percent of its \$300 million goal while the Luskin School of Public Affairs has raised most of its \$70 million goal<sup>35</sup>. It's worth noting: major campaigns almost always begin in a quiet phase and aren't announced until the goal is close to being met.

There is a direct correlation between lack of political standing within a university community and the resources allocated to that department or school. On its own, HBS accounts for one quarter of Harvard's larger \$6.5 billion capital campaign<sup>36</sup>. How could the school not command political sway on campus? At the University of Pennsylvania, a \$4.3 billion capital campaign that finished in 2013 resulted in a new Neural and Behavioral Sciences Building, which "will house laboratories, classrooms and interactive spaces designed to foster collaboration across the various fields that encompass the life sciences" and a "Ronald O. Perelman Center for Political Science and Economics, a new centrally-located home for two of the most popular undergraduate majors."<sup>37</sup>

In contrast, journalism programs do not contribute nearly as much to the university's coffers. To be sure, a small percentage of journalism and communications graduates matric-

ulate to the highest-paying jobs compared to graduates of business or engineering programs; however, beyond cultivating individual donors, there are fewer collaborative partnerships, which include investments from the industry, between news organizations (and those creating the tools and services to support newsrooms) and academia relative to other fields. As a result, journalism programs are funded through the university's general funds.

"It's hard to continually get funding from our university to update computers, video recorders, cameras, and software and to get access to data sets," wrote one associate dean of a mid-sized journalism program. "University administration doesn't understand the changing nature of storytelling tools. I have to keep reminding them that we're not the English department."

Indeed, journalism programs cost more than the English department, for example, because they require equipment. Sally Renaud, interim chair of the journalism program at Eastern Illinois University, notes that "schools are struggling to finance the equipment [and] technology" required to teach classes. "Journalism has to learn to defend itself better and to educate the public about its role [within a university]. We don't do this very well."

Compared to other schools, journalism programs lack lifelong alumni programs and active networking opportunities. Undergraduate programs could offer continuing education for alumni in the form of online or in-person brush-up courses (i.e. social media workshops, introductory courses on emerging technologies). There are numerous conferences, from the Online News Association to SXSW to the Society of Professional Journalists, where schools could host alumni cocktail receptions. Schools could offer a reverse mentorship: rather than simply asking an alum to mentor and advise an undergraduate student, that student could also mentor the alum on newer digital skills. Journalism programs are missing an opportunity to foster a sense of community, and therefore an opportunity to help raise funds for the university.

## 6

### **Journalism schools have not cultivated a symbiotic relationship with the industry.**

Unlike partnerships between large companies and other academic departments, such as those in economics or life sciences, which put universities at the forefront of research and development, partnerships between journalism programs and the broader journalism community are largely transactional: students research a project as a class or provide content as interns. And for the most part, that primarily benefits the schools. "We were asked to host interns," says Zach Seward, vice president of product and executive editor of Quartz, echoing a common sentiment among others I interviewed. "This created more work for us than anything else. It

wasn't a true partnership in any sense, where we were creating value together." News organizations, which are already strapped for cash, do not have a rubric for corporate involvement within journalism schools.

There are a very few exceptions. For example, Syracuse University and Gannett previously worked together on a virtual reality news environment using the virtual reality display Oculus Rift. While I applaud this effort, it would further everyone's interests to create partnerships where universities research and prototype the future of news from a more practical standpoint.

There are a number of applied research topics that could facilitate meaningful partnerships between industry and academia and catalyze the kind of achievement for which other departments are recognized, such as:

- How might algorithms be used to create multivariate story versions that are automatically customized for each individual consumer and the devices she uses?
- How might artificial intelligence and machine learning be used to predict an individual consumer's immediate and near-future information needs, interests, and activities?
- Is there a transactional model that can replace the traditional subscription model for newspapers, magazines, and websites?
- Do certain emotional triggers increase a news consumer's willingness to pay for content?
- How might news-as-a-platform be used as a personal information layer for individual consumers?
- Can a new organizational plan be developed to manage a large newsroom's staff as a distributed network, reducing operational costs without sacrificing editorial quality?
- How can consumers and their devices be harnessed to contribute data for individual and ongoing projects of varying scopes?
- Would a personalized news assistant offer a stronger use case for consumers than mobile apps or stand-alone websites?
- In the long-term, will dependence on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter cannibalize a news organization's audience or erode its brand impact?
- How are everyday algorithms and the data they use impacting quality journalism?

All of these topics are important to the future of journalism as an industry. This is exactly the kind of applied research that a broader academic community would welcome. The Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia does offer a fellowship program, allowing journalists to explore the various ways in which technology is changing journalism. Some of the fellows are academics, while others are working journalists. The Center awarded 31 fellowships for the

fall of 2015, and many of the subjects to be studied fulfill critical areas of R&D need within the industry. Although this is the closest equivalent to the kind of applied research that ought to be done within journalism, there is no formal partnership between the Center and any particular news organization. Projects don't fit into longer-term scenario planning for the future of the news industry. Rather, the research—and it is terrific research for the very near-future—is being proposed and worked on by individuals.

Outside of academia, the Knight-Mozilla's OpenNews Fellowships offer an outstanding 10-month program for open-source experimentation. Fellows embed in newsrooms such as NPR, Frontline and Vox Media, building new projects for journalism organizations. While both programs are tremendous offerings for those interested in the intersection of technology and media, they do not create that necessary bridge between industry and academia.

In other fields, critical research and development is conducted in explicit partnerships between universities and external partners. Stanford's corporate partners include Intel, Google, Boeing, Bosch, HP, and more. The MIT Media Lab counts Hearst, DirecTV, Comcast, Pearson, Twitter, and Google among its corporate lab members. Aside from a very few cases, these partnerships and programs do not exist at other journalism schools. As it stands, the future of news is being built by those working at the epicenter of technology.



## Journalism Education and the F.U.T.U.R.E. Test

Several years ago, Webbmedia Group Digital Strategy developed an assessment tool to determine whether a project, product, startup, or strategic direction is future-proofed. The tool, called the F.U.T.U.R.E. Test, weighs known and unknown changes within an organization and industry, given the dynamic nature of digital media and technology.

The assessment considers six categories, requiring a deeper analysis in key areas that can be applied directly to the future of journalism education:

### F – Foundation.

- Do you have support from key stakeholders?
- Can journalism education continue to function and evolve, even as key stakeholders transition away from your organization?
- Do you have a reasonable amount of time, money, and desire to shape, launch, and maintain evolving aspects of journalism education?
- Have you set initial benchmarks to measure levels of support? Are your short-term and long-term timelines realistic, given your available resources?

**Summary Question:** Can the modern foundation and the very purpose of a journalism education harmonize with our current and future media landscapes?

### U – Unique.

- Is the unique value proposition of a journalism education clear to students, parents, industry, and others at the university?
- Is the IP of your journalism program difficult to replicate? As competitors emerge—perhaps even other fields of study—how will you help others continue to understand what differentiates you?

**Summary Question:** Do journalism programs afford a unique enough opportunity to learn? Is there is too much replication across the hundreds of programs and schools in America?

### T – Track.

- Given your current school, department, or program's structure, are you able to set meaningful benchmarks and to measure outcomes?
- Can you use that data for reliable analysis for student planning, new student recruiting, fundraising, and impact?

**Summary Question:** Are the metrics by which journalism programs and schools evaluated a factor in the changing dynamics of how people learn, think, and teach?

## **U – Urgency.**

- Does the recalibration and future of journalism communicate a sense of urgency within your department, school, and university? Within industry?
- Will there be continued demand for journalism education in the marketplace?
- Can you create demand within new audiences (those students wanting to work within the knowledge economy)?
- Will the academic community, prospective students, alumni, and the professional community view journalism education as indispensable and invaluable, even as the marketplace evolves and new competitors emerge?

**Summary Question:** Is there a true sense of urgency to obtain a journalism degree, now that anyone work as a journalist or start her own publication/channel?

## **R – Recalibrate.**

- Can journalism education evolve along with its intended customer and partner segments as technology evolves?
- Is your budget nimble enough to meet the unique needs of facilitating journalism education?

**Summary Question:** Do you and your staff have the time to comprehensively evaluate your curriculum, staff capabilities, and program impact every two or three months, in order to make adjustments?

## **E – Extensibility.**

- How nimble and flexible are faculty members? Are they being provided with enough motivation and opportunity to continue learning?
- Can journalism education evolve along with the changing nature of the media landscape? How quickly can new services, software, tools, and the like be embedded into individual classes and curriculum?

**Summary Question:** How can journalism education be reshaped to include courses that can be added or taken away without a lot of effort and political capital? How can tenured and other faculty be encouraged to continue learning?



## **Conclusion: The value of a journalism degree doesn't matter as much as it should.**

In this age of information, anyone with an Internet connection can call herself a journalist. So what distinction does a journalism degree really convey? In the very near future, we must work collectively and doggedly to make the degree matter more—not just within journalism circles, but to those within the academic community, to those in the media and tech ecosystem, and to those participating in the knowledge economy.

Overcoming these six complex challenges requires a dramatic, internal shift within departments, but that shift is necessary for the future of journalism education to thrive. In “*Immunity to Change*,” a book about organizational change leadership, Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Kegan and co-author Lisa Laskow Lahey, also of HGSE, write: “The memories of most higher education institutions are littered with failed efforts and broken dreams on the school-wide reform front, as one idealistic aspiration after another runs into the reality that it is far easier for small factions to impede a process of change than for a larger, like-minded group to bring it about.” However, in the case of journalism schools, Kegan told me that change is indeed possible. “To unlock the potential for change, deans must create a revolution, a sense of urgency and motivate their departments towards the horizon.”

That revolution must begin within departments, but it cannot be fully realized without a new blueprint for the curriculum and coursework that comprise an undergraduate journalism degree.

# Part Two

---

## A New Approach To Curriculum and Classroom Education

As the hidden challenges in journalism education—those having to do with administration, a school or department’s standing within the larger academic community, the ability of faculty to stay current with emerging changes, accreditation, and fundraising—are addressed, we must reimagine the curricula and approaches to classroom education.

Previously, a journalism degree was viewed as an asset to new journalists entering the workforce. This is no longer the case. In my survey, fewer than 25 percent of those working in media said that a journalism degree is necessary for the profession. Instead, degrees in computer science or data science are in demand. Executives and hiring managers interviewed at a number of newspapers, magazines, and websites indicated that a journalism degree does not impact their decisions about hiring new employees.

Journalism departments and schools have made incorrect assumptions about how young Millennials learn. This fall, the incoming college freshman class will have been born in either 1997 or 1998, which means that they were born *after* the launch of Dreamweaver, Amazon, eBay, Sony’s PlayStation, Yahoo, Salon.com, the Drudge Report, and Google. Lumping this group of young Millennials in with those whom we currently refer to as “digital natives” is a mischaracterization. Not only do they not know a world without the Internet and ubiquitous WiFi, but if you look at newspaper circulation data, it’s highly possible that the majority grew up in households that did not subscribe to a local newspaper. The first time they may have encountered a physical newspaper might have been during a high school social studies class. This is an important point of reference: many faculty members still use an inverted pyramid as a central pedagogical device, even though it’s likely that many or all incoming students will have never read a newspaper story in print.

What young Millennials view as critical digital study tools (Facebook groups, digital classroom boards) may be seen as distractions by faculty. Whereas faculty might be inclined to email a student, those students are already habituated to texting and instant messaging. What constitutes privacy, primary source material, ethics, and the like may not translate—a faculty member relatively new to social media might feel comfortable sharing the personal details of her life. A young Millennial is much more likely to connect digitally only with the people she already knows.

A college math department would need to adapt for an incoming base of students who are already using particular computer programs and who might rather hold office hours via video chat than in an actual office. A computer science department must adapt for students

who have always had access to computers and who have likely learned a bit of code before leaving high school.

Journalism faces similar, but far more nuanced challenges. Technology has radically changed how students communicate, and that impacts how they learn and function in a classroom. For example, current undergraduate programs assume that young Millennials learn factual information best in rigid time allotments, using standard syllabi or teaching rubrics. Professors assume that students have experience taking notes by hand rather than on a computer. Many programs assume that incoming freshmen will have had ample opportunity to practice spelling, grammar and handwriting before they arrived at college. It's possible, but highly improbable, that an incoming student's spell check was disabled on her computer before she arrived to an introductory reporting and writing class. Therefore, she may have good reason for now knowing how to spell certain words. Is there a modern, functioning newsroom without spell check on its computers? Yet there are still undergraduate programs that will fail a student who turns in a test with misspellings.

In the survey, faculty reported that students are not as prepared for college as they used to be, that they're not as attentive, and that they're not as motivated. There were numerous comments about poor spelling and grammar. And yet somehow these students have met the basic qualifications to matriculate at their universities. This either means that universities have lowered their standards, or that these young Millennials are, in fact, prepared—just not in ways that journalism faculty are used to recognizing.

If we agree that in order to thrive, journalism programs must become more visible and powerful within their universities, then we must also agree that the programs themselves must become more rigorous.

In this new, long-term blueprint for the future of journalism education, a modern program should be recast with three key components: a foundation of exceptional liberal arts coursework; a holistic survey of modern journalism and newsrooms with deep-dives into specialized concentrations; and a compulsory experiential learning component that can better mirror the educational background and expectations of young Millennials.

A recommended list of required, three-credit general studies courses for a journalism or communications major would therefore look like this:

**1. Macroeconomics:** The study of national economies; causes of inflation and unemployment; understanding productivity, standards of living and national growth; the economic interdependence of nations. **Key change:** Currently, most schools only require a single, introductory-level economics class.

**2. Microeconomics:** The study of consumer behavior and business; understanding the distribution of income and wealth; learning about policies for taxation, poverty, and

discrimination. **Key change:** Currently, most schools only require a single, introductory-level economics class.

**3. Probability and statistics:** Preferably a class offered within the journalism department. **Key change:** This replaces the statistics requirement at most schools, which only require 3 credits of any statistics course in any department.

**4. Empirical and mathematical reasoning:** The application of abstract principles and theories to difficult problems. **Key change:** This replaces the math requirement at most schools, which only require three credits of any math course.

**5. Ethical reasoning:** Preferably, this is a class offered within the journalism department focusing on ethics in news and media. **Key change:** Not all schools require (or even offer) a media ethics course. This course would include deeper instruction in ethics.

**6. Comparative religions/cultures:** Learning about how our cultures and beliefs impact laws, expression, and society. **Key change:** This is not a requirement for communications/journalism majors.

**7. Cultural anthropology:** A cross-cultural study of our values, the evolution of our societies, and of becoming and being human; an introduction to ethnographic research. **Key change:** This is not a requirement for communications/journalism majors.

**8. Sociology:** A study of the relationship between society and the individual; understanding complex issues surrounding race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, nationality, and ethnicity. **Key change:** Currently, most schools only require a single psychology or sociology class.

**9. American politics or public policy, law, and administration:** Provides a solid background in an area of public policy and lawmaking. **Key change:** This is not a requirement for communications/journalism majors.

**10. U.S. history:** Provides a solid background in the formation of our country and, ideally, the role journalists played in helping to shape it. **Key change:** This is not always a requirement for communications/journalism majors.

**11. International politics or public policy, law, and administration:** The Internet is redefining international boundaries, opening up new communication channels; coursework to help students gain perspective on other nations is essential. **Key change:** This requirement replaces the previous foreign language requirement at many schools. Because of the rigorous demands of college coursework, it is highly unlikely that a college student will gain enough fluency to use the language studied after graduation. The time is better spent learning about the histories, religions, and complex political structures of other societies.<sup>38</sup>

**12. Comparative literature:** Introduction to literary criticism and rhetoric; study of the relationship between domestic and world literature; development of critical reasoning and thinking skills; challenging writing assignments. **Key change:** This replaces

the basic English Composition requirement at many schools.

These general studies courses ensure a more rigorous preparation for the knowledge economy, regardless of whether graduates pursue jobs in journalism or elsewhere. These courses also expand a student's worldview, allowing her to find, substantiate, and tell better stories.

## Journalism coursework

Coursework should include a study of the following subjects, with classes specifically geared toward journalists but not segmented by distribution medium (such as print or digital). There are far fewer required technical skills courses in this model because the newsroom co-op, outlined below, covers that material.

Mandatory courses for a journalism degree should include a history of Silicon Valley and the philosophy of the Internet as a stand-alone class, as well as a class on the First Amendment and mass communications law with up-to-date case studies. All students should be required to take newsroom operations and business-side classes: finance for newsrooms (includes basic finance, accounting, and discussion of revenue models) and audience engagement (discussion of the attention economy, A/B testing, search, and social optimization). All students in the major should take courses to give them a more holistic foundation in journalism: design for news (principles of design elements across all mediums); deep research (methods for data mining, evaluating sources, and investigating algorithms); introductory programming (in a modern language).

Finally, the standard reporting and writing requirements should be replaced with much more focused courses that will apply across the entire field of journalism as it evolves. All students should take a nonfiction writing class so that they learn the fundamental method and practice of storytelling, regardless of medium. (Currently, many schools still use newspaper writing as the basis for this instruction.) What's taught doesn't always translate to the Web, to mobile, or to continuous digital coverage across devices. The class I'm proposing isn't about leads and nut grafs, but rather about mastering the fundamentals of great journalistic writing. The general reporting requirement should be replaced with a mandatory investigative reporting techniques class: students should learn how to find sources; obtain data sets and documents; file Freedom of Information Act and public information requests; conduct research and interviews; obtain and understand property records, court records, search warrants, and police records; and organize large amounts of data and reporting so that it can be used for whatever story is produced.

Advanced courses on design, interactivity, and data-driven reporting as well as subject-focused reporting and writing (such as gender, science/medical, the arts) should be offered as electives within the department.

A recommended list of required three-credit journalism/communications courses would therefore look like this:

**1. History of journalism** (up to the present day): Offers students institutional knowledge and context. **Key change:** History of journalism courses, when offered, do not always cover present-day material.

**2. History of Silicon Valley and the philosophy of the Internet:** How did the media and tech landscape begin and evolve to where it is today? Who were its founders? What did they build? How and why do we connect with each other, share information? **Key change:** While this is a requirement in some computer science and engineering programs, it is not a requirement for communications/journalism majors.

**3. First Amendment and mass communications law:** This course is currently offered in most programs. **Key change:** Material is not always updated. This course should cover present-day case studies (such as net neutrality).

**4. Cultural awareness and diversity:** While the general studies courses should provide ample background and exposure to cultures, ideas and identities outside a student's familiar orbit, this class will teach students about the specific challenges of reporting on race, gender, ethnicity, culture and faith as well as how to ensure that myriad voices are represented in the news. **Key change:** This is not a requirement for communications/journalism majors.

**5. Newsroom operations:** A hands-on approach to business strategy, basic finance, accounting, and P&Ls, discussion of revenue models and finance strategy. **Key change:** This is not a requirement for communications/journalism majors.

**6. Audience engagement:** How do you define audience? What are the tests and tools used to understand audience? **Key change:** This is not a requirement for communications/journalism majors.

**7. Programming:** Introductory programming class in modern, current languages. **Key change:** This is not a requirement for communications/journalism majors.

**8. Nonfiction reporting and writing:** While all programs currently require at least one course in reporting and writing, many focus on a single medium, such as newspaper or broadcast. **Key change:** In this course, the focus would be on mastery of reporting and writing regardless of medium.

**9. Design for news:** The principals of design elements, including photo and video, across all mediums. **Key change:** Courses in design are not currently a requirement for all majors.

**10. Deep research:** Understanding the methods for data mining, evaluating sources, investigating algorithms, and the like. **Key change:** While some programs require

a course in deep research, few (if any) focus extensively on using the modern tools of investigation.

**11. Investigative reporting:** This is an in-depth, intensive class on the fundamentals of investigation using both traditional techniques and modern technology. **Key change:** This is not currently a requirement for all communications/journalism majors.

**Journalism electives:** Students would select from a number of courses, such as the following:

- Advanced courses in design
- Advanced techniques in investigative reporting
- Subject-focused reporting and writing (sports, science/medical, arts)
- Advanced courses in programming
- Advanced courses in statistics
- Machine learning
- Natural language processing
- Front-end development
- Back-end development
- Editing for digital publications
- Managing people and teams
- Negotiation
- Journalism for emerging platforms

To be sure, this curriculum cannot be implemented overnight. It will require longer-term strategic planning, experimentation, recalibrating existing accreditation requirements, and a reorganization of faculty. But it can be done.

## Two semesters of newsroom co-op

Developing a curriculum and coursework that are more aligned with the present-day and future needs of both newsrooms and our knowledge economy will ensure a more well-rounded, adaptable graduate. But what about tangible skills?

For many years, Eric Newton, the innovation chief at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication and the former advisor to the president of the Knight Foundation, has been advocating for a "teaching hospital" model for journalism education. "People learn by doing," he said. "Law schools have clinics, where students learn to handle cases. In teaching hospitals, medical students work alongside real doctors to

learn about disease, how to deliver babies, how to practice their craft. It is hard to believe that there is no journalism education program in America using a fully developed version of that same model.” Newton’s assertion is right, and there is a way to advance his theory by adding in a mandatory co-op component to journalism majors.

In this new blueprint for the future of journalism education, each journalism program would be responsible for creating and maintaining a “newsroom,” a hyper-local or hyper-topical digital publication or digital news broadcast. The purpose of the newsroom would be three-fold: to transfer real-world skills within a meaningful environment to students, to provide the community with a local publication, and to catalyze external partnerships through research and development work.

While some in the academic community will be quick to argue that such a program already exists, this newsroom co-op does not mirror what’s currently being offered. Students and professors would be required to work full-time in the newsroom for two semesters during their junior year (which would include the option of summer semesters) and/or the first semester of their senior year. The newsroom co-op would offer hands-on learning across a broad range, widening a student’s understanding of how journalism works. This training would ensure empathy and better agility once the student enters the workforce, but it would also catalyze new, pragmatic experimentation on customer-centered news, adaptive design, sustainable future business models, personalized algorithmic news distribution and the like. The newsroom co-op benefits both the student and the industry in the long-term.

Successful co-op models in other subject areas are already in effect at many universities: Drexel University is just one of the schools requiring at least one six-month co-op for nearly all of its majors. At these schools, co-ops are taken off-campus at a local employer. This model can be applied internally to the newsroom. In practical terms, this replaces the internship requirement for some schools and adds in the experiential learning component missing from so many curricula. Tenured and adjunct faculty would work together, mentoring students and ensuring continuity of coverage, even during the summer.

This co-op model requires a vastly different approach to existing programs. Students would be required to rotate through key divisions of a news media organization, just as medical students make rotations through specialties. In two semesters, newsroom co-op students would spend equal amounts of time in the following departments: editorial, business, production, PR/marketing/advertising, and management. Rotating students through these disciplines not only ensures that they develop practical skills required to file on deadline, but in learning all of the roles of a news organization, they will have gained invaluable perspective before starting their careers in earnest.

This model also ensures a more harmonious relationship between schools and the

communities they cover. Rather than a class of new students descending upon a community each semester, asking the same questions of the same people again and again, there would be enough institutional carryover so that students could advance new stories. In effect, the newsroom replaces the daily and weekly community newspapers that, for the most part, no longer exist.

To be sure, current faculty appointments and schedules would need to be adjusted—and perhaps new faculty members would need to be hired—to administer a newsroom co-op within each school. This model can be adjusted to adapt to smaller programs and larger programs alike. It is also an opportunity for schools to collaborate. For example, Towson University, Stephens College, Loyola University of Maryland, and Morgan State University all offer undergraduate journalism programs. Rather than each school launching its own co-op, these schools, which are within close proximity of each other, might collaborate on one or two programs to service all students. While this would pose an initial administrative challenge, there are numerous precedents of universities collaborating to offer joint classes and programs.

My aim with this report is to strengthen journalism education such that it becomes the engine propelling the news media into the future. My hope is that it catalyzes real-world, durable action rather than temporary didactic reaction, and that the academic community will commit to collaborative, long-term planning. Academia, in a true partnership with industry, must set a vision and course for the next twenty-five years of journalism. If the six hidden challenges in university programs can be overcome, and if curricula and coursework are recalibrated, then all of journalism—perhaps all of our knowledge economy—stands to gain, beginning today and continuing well into the future.

# Notes

---

<sup>1</sup><http://www.theverge.com/2015/6/8/8746289/apple-tktk-looks-like-flipboard-and-replaces-news-stand-on-your-iphone> and <http://instantarticles.fb.com/>

<sup>2</sup><https://help.instagram.com/477434105621119/>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.washington.edu/news/2013/08/27/researcher-controls-colleagues-motions-in-1st-human-brain-to-brain-interface/>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20150106-the-first-brain-to-brain-emails>

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A for a complete list of those interviewed.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix B and Appendix C for complete lists of schools analyzed.

<sup>7</sup>[http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/system/documents/785/original/75881\\_JSchool\\_Educating\\_Journalists-PPG\\_V2-16.pdf](http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/system/documents/785/original/75881_JSchool_Educating_Journalists-PPG_V2-16.pdf), p.5

<sup>8</sup>[http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/system/documents/785/original/75881\\_JSchool\\_Educating\\_Journalists-PPG\\_V2-16.pdf](http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/system/documents/785/original/75881_JSchool_Educating_Journalists-PPG_V2-16.pdf), p.16

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.grady.uga.edu/annualsurveys/Enrollment\\_Survey/Enrollment\\_2013/2013EnrollCombined.pdf](http://www.grady.uga.edu/annualsurveys/Enrollment_Survey/Enrollment_2013/2013EnrollCombined.pdf)

<sup>10</sup><http://niemanreports.org/articles/rewriting-j-school/>

<sup>11</sup> “A Slow Response to Quick Response: Diffusion of QR Technology on U.S. Newspaper Front Pages” Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly March 2015

<sup>12</sup> “Gatekeeping the 2012 Olympic Games. Did #NBCfail the Social Media Audience?” Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly January 21, 2015

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.slideshare.net/webbmedia/ji-conf-summercurriculum>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.cic.edu/Research-and-Data/Research-Studies/Documents/CICCAOSurvey.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.cic.edu/Research-and-Data/Research-Studies/Documents/CICCAOSurvey.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> I have been a lecturer on emerging technology in the Sulzberger program since it began in 2007.

<sup>17</sup> <https://hbr.org/2007/01/leading-change-why-transformation-efforts-fail/ar/1>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.niemanlab.org/2015/06/why-buzzfeed-wanted-everyone-to-know-about-its-new-news-app-even-before-it-launched/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.cluetrain.com/>

<sup>20</sup> As a Shorenstein Fellow (Spring 2015), Weinberger recently authored an important paper, “The Rise, Fall and Possible Rise of Open News Platforms”, which explores the challenges and opportunities for news organizations using APIs. It is essential reading for scholars and professors in mass communications. <http://shorensteincenter.org/open-news-platforms-david-weinberger/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://communication.cofc.edu/advisorycouncil/memberlisting/index.php>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.knightfoundation.org/features/je-introduction/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://utdata.cmcdonald.com/p/course-syllabus.html>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/STUDENT/PROGLIST.SHTML>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/COUNCILLIST.SHTML>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.knightfoundation.org/features/journalism-education/>

<sup>27</sup> I am a former member of ONA's board of directors and served two terms.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/STANDARDS.SHTML>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.poynter.org/news/mediawire/185089/googles-gingras-the-future-of-journalism-can-and-will-be-better-than-its-past/>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2014/11/7/HBS-cap-campaign-progress/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/about/transforming/progress.aspx>

<sup>32</sup> <http://fortune.com/2014/04/28/why-harvard-b-school-needs-another-1-billion/>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.law.yale.edu/utilities/3651.htm>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.law.uchicago.edu/give/firmchallenge/message>

<sup>35</sup> <http://giveto.ucla.edu/our-progress/>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2015/2/7/capital-campaign-reaches-5-billion/>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.upenn.edu/pennnews/news/penn-campaign-raises-43-billion-transforming-university>

<sup>38</sup> Please note that I am not dismissing the value of or arguing against learning a foreign language. I am bilingual, and my young daughter has been part of an immersive language program since she was born. My contention is that with a limited supply of course hours, it would be wiser for those entering the knowledge economy to spend those hours learning about the political or governing systems of other nations or groups of nations. Fluency in a foreign language is a skill that requires serious work; four semesters in college may not result in conversational Chinese ability, but that time could result in a student gaining a clear understanding of how China's government works and its relationship with other countries around the world.

# Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University for its support and guidance for this project. I am especially grateful to James Geary and Ann Marie Lipinski, who were instrumental in helping to shape and refine my research and the resulting recommendations.

For reading early drafts, I thank Amy Eisman at American University, Thom Lieb at Towson University, Maryanne Reed at West Virginia University and Andrew Mendelson at CUNY. They provided invaluable feedback. Delinda Frazier, a graduate student at American, contributed significantly to the research on individual schools. I'm indebted to Jan Gardner, Senior Editor and Jonathan Seitz, Researcher and Reporter at Nieman Reports, and Eryn Carlson, a recent graduate of Northeastern University's journalism school, who were patient editors and attentive fact checkers. Many thanks to Barbara McCarthy, Web Communications Specialist at the Nieman Foundation, for leading the publication design efforts, and to Emily Caufield for cover and page design. As with every project I undertake, I would accomplish little without the dedicated efforts of Cheryl Cooney, Webbmedia Group's Director of Operations.

# Appendix

## **Appendix A**

### **In-Depth Interviews**

In-depth interviews were conducted with the following:

Meredith Artley, Editor In Chief of CNN Digital

Melissa Bell, Vice President of Growth and Analytics, Vox Media Inc.

David Boardman, Dean of the School of Media and Communication at Temple University and ACEJMC President

Trei Bundrett, Chief Product Officer at Vox Media Inc.

John Davidow, Executive Editor in charge of wbur.org

Steve Dorsey, Vice President Innovation and Planning for Cox Media Group's Austin-American Statesman

Amy Eisman, Director, Media Entrepreneurship & Interactive Journalism  
School of Communication at American University

Justin Ferrell, Fellowships Director at the Institute of Design (also known as the d.school) at Stanford University

Michelle Ferrier, Associate Dean for Innovation, Research/Creative Activity and Graduate Studies at Ohio University

Ann Friedman, NYmag.com columnist and freelancer

David Gehring, Vice President of Partnerships at The Guardian News & Media

Andrew Golis, Founder of This.cm

Eric Harris, Chief Business Operations Officer at BuzzFeed

Jacob Harris, former Senior Software Architect at The New York Times,  
now an Innovation Specialist at 18F

Fran Hauser, Partner at Rothenberg Ventures

Anna Holmes, Editor of Digital Voices at Fusion

Jeff Howe, Assistant Professor of Journalism in the College of Arts,  
Media and Design at Northeastern University

Robert Kegan, Professor of Professional Development at the Harvard Graduate School of Education

Thom Lieb, Professor at the Mass Communications and Studies Department at Towson University

Andrew Mendelson, Associate Dean and Professor at the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism

Matthew Miller, Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Eric Newton, Innovation Chief at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication

Eli Pariser, Chief Executive of Upworthy

Maryanne Reed, Interim Dean of the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences and Dean of the Reed College of Media at West Virginia University

Sally Renaud, Interim Chair of the Journalism Program at Eastern Illinois University

Kevin Riley, Editor In Chief of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Jim Schachter, Vice President for News at WNYC

Vivian Schiller, former CEO of National Public Radio

Zach Seward, Vice President of Product and Executive Editor of Quartz

Douglas K. Smith, Founder and Executive Director of the Sulzberger Program

Dick Tofel, President of ProPublica

Matt Waite, Professor of Practice at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

David Weinberger, former Co-Director of the Harvard Library Innovation Lab at Harvard Law School and co-author of “The Cluetrain Manifesto”

## **Appendix B**

### **Undergraduate Journalism and Communications Programs Included in Analysis**

American University

Arizona State University

Ball State University

Boston University

Columbia College Chicago

Emerson College

George Washington University

Howard University

Indiana University

Iowa State University

Kansas State University

Kent State University

Lyndon State College

New York University

Northeastern University  
Northwestern University  
Ohio University  
Oklahoma State University  
Penn State University  
Stony Brook University  
Syracuse University  
Temple University  
University of Alaska Anchorage  
University of Florida  
University of Georgia  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
University of Maryland, College Park  
University of Minnesota  
University of Mississippi  
University of Missouri  
University of Montana School of Journalism  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
University of Nevada, Reno  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
University of Oregon  
University of Southern California  
University of Texas at Austin  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Washington State University  
West Virginia University  
Western Kentucky University

## Appendix C

### Graduate Journalism and Communications Programs Included in Analysis

American University  
Arizona State University  
Boston University  
Columbia College Chicago  
Columbia University in the City of New York

The City University of New York  
DePaul University  
Elon University  
Emerson College  
Florida International University  
Georgetown University  
Indiana University  
Marshall University  
Northeastern University  
Northwestern University  
New York University  
Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT)  
Stanford University  
Syracuse University  
Temple University  
University of Georgia  
University of Maryland, College Park  
University of Missouri - Columbia  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
University of California  
University of Southern California  
West Virginia University

## About the Author

Amy Webb is a futurist and Founder of Webbmedia Group Digital Strategy, a leading consulting firm that researches near-future trends in digital media and technology and answers “What’s the future of X?” for a global client base. She is a Visiting Nieman Fellow at Harvard University and a Lecturer on emerging technology and media at Columbia University. Her upcoming book is about what the future will look like—and what you can do about it in the present.

Amy holds many professional affiliations and collaborates with a number of institutions. Amy was a Delegate on the former U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission and served on the Aspen Institute’s Dialogue on Libraries, where she worked with FCC Chairman Reed Hundt and others on the future of libraries. Every year, Amy lectures about the future of media and technology at a number of universities, which have included Institut d’études politiques de Paris, Temple University, New York University, Tokyo University and National University of Kyiv. In 2016, she is the David Letterman Distinguished Professional Lecturer at Ball State University. She’s also a member of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (Interactive Media Peer Group – Emmy award judge), serves on the Board of Directors for the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and was a two-term Board of Directors member for the Online News Association. She serves on several startup and advisory boards, including the SXSW Accelerator.

Writing about emerging technology, digital media and their impacts/ opportunities is a focus of Amy’s work. She is the tech columnist and a contributing editor at Inc. Magazine, where she writes about the future of technology and business. She regularly contributes to a number of publications, including the Harvard Business Review and Slate, where she writes the “Data Mine” column. In 2013, Amy published Data, A Love Story (Dutton/ Penguin), a bestselling book about the world of online dating, consumer behavior and finding love via algorithms. Data has since been translated for a worldwide market into Chinese, Korean, Turkish and Portuguese and is being adapted for the screen. Her TED talk about Data has been viewed more than 4 million times and has been translated into 31 languages. Her third book, How Did We Miss That? details her vision for the future given our present-day actions. (PublicAffairs, Fall 2016).

Amy originally attended the Jacobs School of Music to study classical clarinet and has an M.S. from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. She also earned Nikyu Certification in the Japanese government-administered Language Proficiency Test and speaks fluently. Amy began her career as a reporter/ writer with Newsweek (Tokyo) and the Wall Street Journal (Hong Kong) where she covered emerging technology, media and cultural trends.