

QUALITY JOURNALISM: THE URGENT NEED JOURNALISTS HAVE FOR LIFE LONG LEARNING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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F: Journalism Learning. 315 D: Quality Journalism

The upheaval of traditional news media in the digital age has also upended the established, well-worn pathways for continuing education and lifelong learning for journalists. A fresh and bolder approach globally is needed to develop more relevant seminars, workshops, longer term, in-residence fellowships, and professional and cultural exchanges in the 21st century.

Universities, foundations, government and non-governmental agencies, businesses and corporations, journalism associations and citizen journalism initiatives can all play significant collaborative roles in enhancing quality journalism through more effective continuing education opportunities for journalists.

Local, regional, national and global perspectives for quality news and information must be addressed within an increasingly complex Internet environment that links together billions of users worldwide and is growing by the hour. The stake holders include experienced, talented journalists needing to retool or upgrade their skills and young people seeking entry into a transformative, digital news world of multi-platform media, interactive responses and social network opportunities still being defined.

The challenge is to do so in the midst of a digital revolution that has struck traditional, legacy news media with earthquake force. Venerable newspapers and magazines have shrunk in size or are disappearing; downsizing has left newsrooms echo chambers of empty desks and shattered careers. The book publishing industry is in disarray. Radio and television news departments are feeling the pressures of an Internet that robs them of their timeliness in delivering the news, just as broadcasting once undercut newspapers or magazines with a faster

speed of delivery than newspapers printed once every twenty four hours, or magazines in weekly or monthly publication cycles.

It was the main stream, traditional news media, especially the daily newspapers during a golden age of double digit profits, that were the primary supporters of continuing education opportunities for journalists. They were willing to finance the costs and free up staff to attend seminars ranging from a day, a few days, a week or more. They even allowed staff to go away for a full academic year in midcareer fellowships such as the Nieman program at Harvard University and its offshoots at Stanford or Michigan State, and to guarantee that their jobs would be there waiting for them upon their return.

Today, with large swaths of the print and broadcast news media figuratively on “life support” it is difficult to see an uncertain news industry barely emerging from the “intensive care unit” phase of its recovery and hope it will find the psychic energy and financial resources to support life-long learning and continuing education initiatives. Yet without these study opportunities quality journalism will erode and those who practice it will find themselves at an increasing disadvantage.

Before suggesting an overall plan to deal with the continuing education needs of journalists and those who aspire to join its highest ranks, it will help to consider the fundamental questions raised by the “Quality Journalism in the Digital Age” conference planners in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies in the Rutgers University School of Communication and Information:

What does the notion of quality journalism mean in the contemporary media environment? Has the definition been changing over time? How should we go about measuring quality journalism? What are the most prominent challenges and opportunities associated with producing and sustaining quality journalism in the contemporary media environment?

Quality journalism encompasses a set of core values that fundamentally do not change over time though the context of how they are applied to the gathering, processing and delivery of

news and information changes continuously. Today's digital environment and the Internet profoundly alter how we assimilate news and information into our lives but we need to keep our eye on the content and not just be hypnotized by the dazzling, technological packaging of how it is delivered.

The news industry can be seen as a coral reef that incrementally builds upon decades, even centuries, of experience and ethical values. It is an aspiring profession without licensing --- and any attempt to license who is a journalist must be firmly resisted in the interest of free expression and a free press. But how we define ethical standards and practices of journalists in a digital age and how we attain quality journalism take on greater importance today.

Within the maelstrom of change taking place in the news industry today we need to stubbornly insist that journalism not deviate from a well-tested code of ethics that prizes accuracy with a prompt correction of errors, fairness, balance, the absence of hidden self-interest or partisan bias and the presentation of all sides of disputed issues. We need a humane gathering of news with a minimum of intrusion for innocent, private individuals who happen to be caught up in the news story as sources but whose privacy deserves respect--- especially in a technological age when everyone seems to have a video and sound recording device in a pocket or on a wrist.

We must insist on better journalism education that supports quality and relevant courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels in our schools, colleges and universities. We need reporters and editors with the skills and knowledge to prioritize the importance of news, use scarce resources wisely and distinguish the important public policy issues in the public interest from trivia.

We need informed journalists with special knowledge to cover the complexities of a global economy, law enforcement and justice, social equality, health and science, education, war and peace. And we require journalists with the unique talents to aggressively pursue investigative and enterprise stories when governments and the private sector would prefer more opaqueness and less transparency.

How we measure quality journalism today is of greater importance as we confront a Niagara Falls cascade of news, information and data when before it was a manageable set of garden hoses

distributing print and broadcast news media, with sufficient time between technological advances to absorb and make sense of the media changes in our lives.

It can be done with both scholars and practitioners of the news media applying carefully developed content analysis techniques and common sense to the question of what constitutes good or bad coverage.

News and media literacy can be taught in the schools from the lower grades through universities so that more of us become informed consumers. Citizen Journalism can be encouraged and supported to actively engage more of the population in a healthier consumption of news. Journals and websites that analyze media performance must be supported and encouraged to widen their bases of concern. And professional journalists' associations must be more aggressive in identifying shoddy work, plagiarism, inaccuracies, fabricated stories and falsehoods that undermine the public trust in the news media.

Journalism traditions and good practices were built over many decades.

In my book, “From Ink on Paper to the Internet: Past Challenges and Future Transformations for New Jersey’s Newspapers” which won the Society of Professional Journalists national award for journalism research I was intrigued by a pattern of gradual, sometimes haphazard development of journalism as a profession with the incremental evolution of standards, ethics and responsibility by a group of newspaper publishers who had to learn on the fly. Over many decades, they were affected by changing technologies; primitive delivery of papers via horseback postal services was replaced by more efficient railroad delivery, and a steady growth of readership from village environs to urban and metropolitan populations with mass audiences took place.

In the mid-18th Century, newspapers evolved from a handful of print shop owners who saw the concept of news and newspapers emerge from the need to keep the presses running in between a variety of print job assignments. Single page, broad sides distributed in taverns, read, shared and commented upon as the colonial population grew more literate, created a hunger for more news and newspapers. The fledgling newspapers played a key role in distributing news and information vital to support of the patriots in the Revolutionary War for independence, with New

Jersey a key battle state and George Washington crossing the Delaware River for a crucial victory in Trenton, with Princeton, Morristown and New Brunswick battles also in play.

The technology of printing advanced with higher speed rotary presses, first steam, then electrically powered, and linotype machines replacing hand set type. More technology led to better inks and paper, equipment to more efficiently cut and bail newspapers. Wood cuts and illustrations gave way to photography. Eventually computerization would take over the entire process of writing, editing, processing and printing the newspaper. Trucks and automobile technology enabled quicker delivery. The telegraph in the 19th century gave speed to the transmission of news as we saw in the reportage of the Civil War in America.

In the mid-19th century, a group created an association of publishers in New Jersey that became the New Jersey Press Association (NJPA), one of the oldest continually operated press associations in the United State. Their initial concern was to force the state legislature to provide a more equitable distribution of legal advertising which was essential to their economic survival and which was then burdened by arbitrariness and political favoritism at the county level.

As the years passed, the NJPA, introduced training and professional development, addressed ethical concerns, developed scholarships for young, aspiring journalists, and in the 1920's brought journalism education courses into Rutgers University, and was a leader in the early establishment of a fledgling journalism department. The Department of Journalism and Media Studies that I founded in 1978 and which became part of the new School of Communication and Information a few years later was born of solid support from the NJPA and individual publishers and broadcasters who wanted a strong journalism department at Rutgers as the state university.

Opportunities for journalists to take part in special training and continuing education was done through the Journalism Resources Institute (JRI) which I founded at Rutgers in 1979 and which in two decades offered programs for over 14,000 journalists and others concerned with a more knowledgeable news media. The NJPA underwrote annual seminars for journalists at JRI in coverage of local government and budget issues.

Press, Bar and Bench seminars brought together judges, lawyers and journalists to find better ways of covering civil and criminal issues and improve timely access to information.

Health and science seminars supported young people preparing for journalism careers. Programs for journalists in newer media technologies, investigative and enterprise reporting evolved. Student interns did research linked directly to the JRI programs and widened their horizons and professional contacts.

With the fall of the Soviet empire after the election win of Solidarity in Poland, I directed JRI programs overseas, creating a media center in Warsaw, a new school of journalism in Krakow at Jagiellonian University, curriculum support in Bosnia-Herzgovina at the University of Sarajevo, journalism training in Serbia, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro in the former Yugoslavia, and new initiatives in Russia.

Over the years, I did assessments of journalism training programs supported by grants from the Knight Foundation, the German Marshall Fund, the Ford Foundation and by the U.S. State Department (and earlier the former U.S. Information Agency) in the United States, and overseas in Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and later in Russia and Belarus. Bill Moyers arranged for the Schumann Foundation to provide us with crucially important seed funding that allowed us to develop many new initiatives in journalism overseas.

More recently, I directed multiple training and international visitor programs for journalists from Central and Eastern Europe, eight programs in the US for journalists from the Middle East, and programs overseas in Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. Funding over the years came from foundation sources, the U.S.State Department, the International Media Fund, the International Broadcasting Bureau of Voice of America, and from a special President's Eastern European Initiative set up in 1989 by the US State Department after the Solidarity election in Poland and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Today's need for a comprehensive review and coordinated development of new approaches to life-long learning and continuing education for journalists and those who aspire to be journalists in this technologically advanced, digital environment of the Internet Age.

We find ourselves in one of the most fascinating and advanced stages in journalism history for the gathering, processing and delivering of news and information . With all the bitter pain and disruption that the Internet and the digital environment caused the traditional news media, especially the newspaper, magazine and book publishing print industries, few would wish the

Internet had never happened. However, there are lessons to be learned from the print publishers and others who embraced the electronic publishing with one arm while pushing it away with the other.

In the 1980s, the idea of electronic publishing began to take hold and I wrote papers, articles for book anthologies and magazines including “Washington Journalism Review” and later its successor, “American Journalism Review” and “Quill” magazine. Then I wrote a book, “New Electronic Pathways: Videotex, Teletext and Online Databases” in 1987 in the Sage CommText Series edited by Everette E. Dennis, then head of the Gannett Center for Media Studies at Columbia University.

Enlightened newspaper publishers such as Knight-Ridder, Dow Jones and Gannett invested in electronic publishing development, as did a variety of others including CBS, BBC, Times Mirror, AT&T, Reuters and Associated Press. Videotex was developed with a stand alone device networked via the telephone that could allow for screen publishing of news. Personal computers were then in their infancy but would soon knock out stand-alone devices as the tool of choice for the interactive selection of words and images on the screen. Teletext was conceived as a one-way screen service using a decoder attached to or built in to the television set that could piggy back the television signal to access text. Popular in England, it fell away just as Videotex did, eclipsed by the personal computer which became the interactive tool of choice for accessing the Internet.

What is striking today was the skepticism of segments of the print publishing world who thought electronic publishing was a passing fad that would sink to the bottom of the media ocean, and the power of the newspapers and magazines did seem invincible at the time. Half-hearted experiments with electronic publishing, and the inevitable reports of their failure, almost seemed to elicit cheers among some publishers who wished the annoying electronic nuisance would just go away. In fact, even some of the publishers who experimented with electronic publishing kept the electronic publishing staff isolated as second class citizens and outside of the newsroom, away from their more elite print staff.

Just a few short decades later, and we see electronic publishing in the ascendancy with hundreds of millions, approaching billions, of people using their smart phones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers as a principal source of news and information. The World Wide Web in the mid-1990s opened the multimedia doors with text, images, video and sound on the screen.

The entry of ever more powerful computers at cheaper prices, broad band delivery and the miniaturization of devices, especially the smart phone, sealed the deal. The legacy print media have watched advertising dwindle, circulation fall precipitously and staffs decimated. In the meltdown, the most hopeful survival points, like random ice floes in an otherwise disappearing horizon of once magnificent glaciers, seem to be online publishing ventures.

Suggestions for new collaborative structures to provide continuing education and life-long learning for journalists and those aspiring to provide quality journalism.

A national commission should be created to consider new initiatives for enhanced continuing education and life-long learning for journalists and those aspiring to be journalists. It should be composed of university, college and secondary school educators who teach journalism, communication and information studies; professional journalists and associations of journalists concerned with quality journalism in print, broadcast and digital formats; organizations already providing training and continuing education for journalists; students preparing for journalism careers; representatives from government and the private sector, foundations, citizen groups which actively contribute time and resources to fostering quality journalism, and representatives of newer and emerging technologies affecting the digital and Internet world .

The commission should develop a comprehensive, over-arching review of continuing education for journalists, document the history of successes and failures to date; recommend bold initiatives and potential funding sources for new approaches to life-long learning for journalists facing tremendous changes to the news media in this digital age.

It can assess future needs, set priorities against a backdrop of limited funding and encourage pilot projects that bring together universities, the journalism associations and representatives from the public and private sectors. Research methodologies which analyze the commission goals, measure the success or failure of pilot programs in the planning, development, execution and post pilot stage need to be an integral, adequately funded component.

There should be a central depository of materials and research findings that can be accessed on the Internet to encourage national and global sharing of this effort. Rather than a costly re-inventing of the wheel, training and educational materials ought to be part of the shared

experience, with adequate protection of copyright, but in a far broader, more generous sharing and distribution of the materials for those who join a consortium of common concerns.

In a time when news media are cutting costs to the bone, sending staff to distant training sites is a growing luxury, and journalists themselves confront the growing stress of job insecurity and feel over-burdened with additional tasks imposed in a complex, multi-platform world. Distance education online and self-directed learning packages using computer driven materials take on added importance and potential. This is especially true of the continuing education and training needs of developing and emerging nations which desperately need more reliable news media and improved information services for their people at lower costs.

Journalism educators should not be afraid to candidly examine their own structures of four year undergraduate bachelor degrees, one or two additional years for master's degrees and up to seven years for doctoral degrees. Students are buried in massive student loan debt and there is a growing rumble of discontent among recent graduates who are jobless and wondering if it was all worth it. Could pilot programs be developed that segment the typical four year undergraduate experience into three years on campus with the fourth year being a series of continuing education, online experiences spread out over time, with the costs included in the original degree billing.

This flexible approach would allow young journalists to upgrade their skills in an extended time frame that more realistically matches up their life-long learning needs with the dizzying pace of technological change in the digital news world, and provides the digital skills needed to remain competitive in the changing job market.

Situational ethics touch on journalistic performance issues that did not even exist two decades ago involving data-mining , leaking of hacked security documents, privacy invasion via online social networks or needed review of plagiarism and copyright violations in a new world of vast Internet information. The trend toward “native advertising” with commercial sponsors allowed to manufacture their own , self-serving content disguised as news staff produced editorial matter, and hiding behind a fig leaf of disclosure certainly needs review.

Some topics regarding continuing education and life-long learning for journalists that might be considered in the pilot projects.

The Internet with its abundant sources of news and information has seemingly knocked down the gates and eliminated the gate-keepers who once defined our access to news. Seemingly because while the gates are down what we find today are grazing pastures and fields of news reseeded with inferior crops, chemically fertilized and controlled by a new digerati with scant knowledge or patience for serious, in-depth, long form journalism on issues of important public policy.

Hundreds of millions of visitors to a website may seem to offset the dwindling number of newspaper or magazine readers or network evening news viewers, but the concern should be how an entire younger generation of pre-teens, teens and young adults in a smart phone or tablet culture are being conditioned to expect their news in post-it-notes, bite size text, 140 character messages, six second videos and interminably cute kitten or puppy escapades. Sensational “click bait” headlines to draw you in only leads to ultimate distrust in a news/information website that is out to lure you into its circus tent, more intent on “eye balls” than brain matter.

A pilot project in response to this, might focus on how to better measure people’s involvement with news and information, how they incorporate it into their lives and how they make choices in what to consume. The news can be served in fast food, economical ways but it can also be prepared more carefully in gourmet restaurant style. That is why in-depth reporting and analysis, the mainstay of quality legacy news media, needs to be supported and current attempts to do so nurtured. Will the future model be foundation or philanthropic support for solid investigative reporting offered by ProPublica, legal coverage by The Marshall Project or a mixture of subscription and foundation support for foreign affairs coverage in Global Post?

There is useful research being done by academic scholars and invaluable, regular pulse-taking done by the Pew Center to track trends in the news media over time as a digital onslaught reshapes the media landscape. Online and print sources such as Columbia Journalism Review, American Journalism Review, Nieman Lab and Nieman Reports, Quill, Poynter, the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, the American Press Institute, Internews, Investigative Reporters and Editors, the International Center for Journalists, the Center for International Media Assistance housed at the National Endowment for Democracy, the publications of the AEJMC (Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication) and many other entities are contributing to our practical knowledge of serious journalism trends.

The pilot project might monitor and summarize the high points of this valuable flow of information from a variety of sources and then pinpoint where there are gaps to be filled. If new paradigms for effectively delivering quality news and information are to be found, we need to sharpen the research tools and invent new ones in this time of extraordinary digital change. The interactivity engages the users/readers/audience into the process of news consumption in striking new ways. The use of social networking to draw in people who might otherwise not know or care about important stories can be invaluable. Young people need to be convinced that it is not simply an exercise in “eat your vegetables”, but that the consumption of quality news is essential to their well-being as informed citizens and future leaders. The influence of respected peers and mature role models can be measured and experimented with.

The pilot project can test out in specific local, regional, national and global settings ways to measure the tangible clues as to what people value most in their news consumption. Is it a measure of the time, attention and financial resources they are willing to expend to access news and information? What is the degree of concentration and retention? What do they value the most and for what do they want to expend their limited time and energy to share knowledge with family and friends, working colleagues and neighbors? What news and information are they willing to fight for even at the risk of personal freedom or personal safety?

A new hybrid of journalism created from the traditional and the technologically advanced.

Another pilot project might emerge from the terrible, morale-breaking experiences of valued traditional journalists who suddenly found their life’s work and dedication to the highest standards of general and specialized reporting and editing devalued, their positions eliminated and unwanted, early retirement buyouts forced upon them.

Add to this, young, inexperienced journalists who were born into a digital era where they are comfortable with a computerized world of news and information but still unsure of their footing when it comes to gathering news and information under extreme deadline conditions. Once, not long ago, these cub reporters could rely upon a farm team structure of community weekly and smaller circulation daily newspapers to develop their skills, move to the next level of larger metropolitan daily papers, and finally the big leagues of a national and international press. It was an ideal environment in which seasoned, older journalists could pass on their experience to

young people in an apprenticeship situation--- not always gentle but very effective. Such opportunities are rapidly disappearing as the weekly and daily press have shrunk in size.

A pilot project might bring together this cadre of older, more experienced journalists with the computer-savvy younger generation for an exchange of knowledge and experience. Data-mining skills bartered for insights in better story construction or improved interviewing skills applied in an ethical manner, for example. Careful editing of copy is endangered in this time of constant deadlines and reporters pressing a key board and sending out their own self-edited copy. The nuances of social networking, second nature to young people, could be passed along to the older journalists.

During an appearance on Professor Richard Heffner's "Open Mind" public television program I once suggested that just as we created a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the worst days of the Great Depression, we might today create a Communication Conservation Corps made up of these seasoned journalists to train and mentor a whole younger generation of journalists eager to perfect their skills.

Once such a program was in place at a selected group of universities it could be expanded beyond a single country into a multinational platform. Those who excel in this effort might include older journalists who could do this while pursuing advanced degrees that might qualify them for full-time teaching positions in colleges and high schools, or mentoring student journalists online.

This hybrid, cross pollinating of older seasoned journalist with younger, computer-savvy , would-be journalists comes at an opportune time when a trend is developing online in which websites that built up vast audiences with shallow, attention-getting "news you can lose" rather than "news you can use" realize they must bulk up their news gathering capacities and not merely depend on aggregating or curating news from other sources. Examples include The Huffington Post or BuzzFeed which is building up its bureaus in cities worldwide and hiring seasoned journalists to make the transition to enriched news offerings.

Citizen journalism and the need to patch up the potholes in coverage.

One of the real tragedies in the decline of the community press and local broadcasting is the diminution of news at the grass roots levels. The more humble but important stories coming from local government and politics, the schools, Main Street economics are more likely to go unreported. The state house bureaus of government once were important sources of news affecting entire regions and megalopolitan areas but in recent years we have seen news bureaus sharply reduced .

In the early 1960's, my first reporting job after graduating from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism was with "The Newark Evening News" in its state bureaus. I had worked as a copy boy at the News in its main headquarters while pursuing an undergraduate degree at Rutgers University-Newark and editing the school paper. The News covered New Jersey with a series of bureaus in the suburbs, outlying state areas and the state house. This combination of local, state and regional coverage gave it a commanding circulation of over a quarter of a million daily circulation and more on Sunday. Nothing seemed to escape the team of reporters and editors in each bureau---separate entities with their own offices connected to the mother ship in Newark by teletype and phone.

Move to the 21st century, and we find the Newark Evening News long gone, and its heir apparent as the largest daily newspaper in the state, the Star-Ledger suffering from deep staff cuts, falling circulation and ad revenue. It is valiantly trying to find a digital footing to keep it viable, part of the Newhouse family of newspapers seeking survival and success.

All this points to the larger issue of how a pilot project might be designed using Citizen Journalism to help fill in the pot holes in local coverage. The universities, community colleges and high schools, and even the grammar schools, would be an excellent point of contact to train young people in local news coverages with citizen produced news on a network of local websites and blogs. Many of our local libraries have sophisticated computer facilities and meeting rooms that might be utilized for a pilot experiment. Certainly the colleges and universities might direct some of their resources toward a citizen journalism initiative, as some already have tried. College students in for-credit internships could work with a wide range of people in a community or neighborhood setting to establish Citizen Journalists initiatives.

There are more robust attempts to create highly localized, online reporting. Patch was a valiant but so far uncertain experiment by AOL to create this. There are other attempts to create

such online entities in key metropolitan areas. We need more research into what works and what does not and how combinations of for-profit and non-profit entities can be created to fill in the gaps of local and statewide coverage.

Extending our global reach.

Many of the things suggested in this paper could and should be considered for export. The United States has been generous in supporting both government and non-governmental programs to assist journalists around the world, especially from emerging and developing nations. I have participated or directed numerous programs supported by the U.S. State Department and its embassies which bring journalists from overseas as international visitors for shorter stays or extended academic programs. Many admirable private programs such as the International Center for Journalists, Internews, or the Nieman program at Harvard of which I am and alumnus have assisted numerous international journalists.

A pilot project might focus on a closer analysis of how well these programs work, how they can expand and how they can assist other institutions wishing to establish similar or collaborative efforts. The cadre of American journalists suggested earlier to work with young, aspiring journalists might also turn its attentions to support a global network of journalists hungry for the opportunity to learn new skills and share experiences via the Internet. Overseas in Europe and elsewhere there are many governmental and non-governmental initiatives to foster study and training opportunities for journalists. A global alliance that brings these efforts into the shared conversation will be invaluable.

Finding financial support.

We must be realistic in understanding that with the news industry undergoing major changes and its financial situation precarious we need to identify additional sources to launch programs. It will be the task of a national commission on continuing education and life-long learning for journalists to apply imaginative solutions to this program. Perhaps the model of National Endowments for the Arts or Humanities can be expanded to include a National Endowment for Journalism and Communication.

Perhaps some form of voluntary donation sign-off on our federal or state tax forms can be used to raise funds for the journalism assistance projects. Surely a country that has spent a

trillion dollars in Afghanistan can find modest seed money to launch programs that further the aims of a free press better skilled to contribute to democratic goals. And then there is always crowd-funding to support specialized journalism projects. The traditional sources of funding through foundations, corporate and business will continue and expand. As we recalibrate the balance of advertising, subscriptions and single copy sales in a digital world, journalism topics that the public values have a chance of finding new private support, some of which can be directed toward training and continued education for journalists.

The comedy show, “Portlandia” on the IFC cable channel once portrayed a local journalist lamenting the loss of his job, complaining that he was doomed to become a “linkalist” rather than a journalist. There is only so much aggregating and curating of other people’s work that can be collected/borrowed/taken from the news and information pool. At some point it will run as dry as a California reservoir unless there are journalists and would-be journalist trained in a healthy environment of continuing education and life-long learning who have the opportunity to create quality journalism.

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