



# VCU

Virginia Commonwealth University  
**VCU Scholars Compass**

---

Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture  
Presentations

Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture

---

2005

## Walking in Step to the Future: Views of Journalism Education by Practitioners and Educators

Ernest F. Martin

*Virginia Commonwealth University, [efmartin2@vcu.edu](mailto:efmartin2@vcu.edu)*

Debora Wenger

Paula Otto

Jeff C. South

*Virginia Commonwealth University, [jcsouth@vcu.edu](mailto:jcsouth@vcu.edu)*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/masc\\_present](http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/masc_present)



Part of the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

---

Downloaded from

[http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/masc\\_present/1](http://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/masc_present/1)

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Richard T. Robertson School of Media and Culture Presentations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact [libcompass@vcu.edu](mailto:libcompass@vcu.edu).

Walking in Step to the Future:  
Views of Journalism Education by Practitioners and Educators

Ernest F. Martin, Jr.  
Associate Professor, School of Mass Communications  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
P.O. Box 842034, Richmond, VA 23284-2034  
Telephone: 804-827-3733; FAX: 804-828-9175  
efmartin2@vcu.edu

Debora H. Wenger  
Associate Professor, School of Mass Communications  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
P.O. Box 842034, Richmond, VA 23284-2034  
Telephone: 804-827-0250; FAX: 804-828-9175  
dhwenger@vcu.edu

Jeff C. South  
Associate Professor, School of Mass Communications  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
P.O. Box 842034, Richmond, VA 23284-2034  
Telephone: 804-827-0253; FAX: 804-828-9175  
jcsouth@vcu.edu

Paula I. Otto  
Assistant Director, School of Mass Communications  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
P.O. Box 842034, Richmond, VA 23284-2034  
Telephone: 804-827-3709; FAX: 804-828-9175  
piotto@vcu.edu

This study was conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Mass Communications, in conjunction with the Radio-Television News Directors Association and Foundation and the Associated Press Managing Editors.

Paper submitted to the  
Radio-Television Journalism Division  
2005 AEJMC Convention  
San Antonio

## **ABSTRACT**

### ***Walking in Step to the Future: Views of Journalism Education by Practitioners and Educators***

*This study, based on an Internet survey of 317 educational administrators, television news executives, newspaper editors and online executives during first quarter 2004, contrasts views about preparation of students for current and future jobs by showing gaps between what employers' value most in job applicants and what educational programs are providing. Second, it addresses newsroom challenges that are shaping the industry and journalism education.*

***Walking in Step to the Future:  
Views of Journalism Education by Practitioners and Educators***

***Introduction***

*Journalism is undergoing tremendous change as technology and business practices move the industry to convergence of newspapers, television and the Internet. Today, both journalism educators and practitioners are in a unique and challenging position.*

*... Changes in the media are sure to alter the status quo in the classroom and in the newsroom. A stronger partnership between the classroom and the newsroom is needed. Unfortunately, because of the skepticism of both groups, the alliance has never reached its full potential.*

*The alliance is not needed to validate the importance of either the academy or the profession. The alliance is needed to protect and promote journalism. It should not be necessary to march in lock-step to realize that educators and journalists are on the same side. ...*

*The journalism tent is big enough for many orientations. We are not threatened by the journalism tent growing too big. We are threatened by the prospect of it becoming too small. ...*

*In the next decade, our democracy will depend on an informed public. That public will continue to need news gatherers and news explainers.*

*By the end of the next decade, journalism classrooms and newsrooms likely will look different, perhaps dramatically different. ...*

*It is ludicrous for practitioners and educators to operate so apart from one another. The relationships vary from state to state, but as a rule, very little collaboration beyond job references ever takes place. The smart people in the academy and the profession need to figure out how to improve that in the next decade. (Charles Overby, 1999)*

*It is against this backdrop that we look at views of journalism education by educators and journalism practitioners. Educators and practitioners are constantly walking forward into the changing future – simultaneously constrained by challenges of the daily operation, emboldened by the future horizon and grounded in current industry practice.*

### **Previous Research**

The question “What can universities contribute to the education of journalists?” continues to engender debate (Kirtz, 2002). Glasser (2002), addressing the periodic flare-up of this question, says:

No one benefits from a discussion mired in the vocabulary of ‘theory versus practice,’ ‘academics versus professionals,’ ‘education versus training,’ or – to remind everyone how old and tired this debate has become – ‘chi squares versus green eye shades.’

At the same time, perceived needs of practitioners and educators, informed by challenges posed by new economic, technological and social changes, place the discussion into new contexts.

In 1997, Ketchum Public Relations conducted a survey of media executives about journalism education and issues in the media. In that survey, media executives stressed the importance of reporting, interviewing, ethics, government affairs and current events as especially important areas for undergraduate journalism education (Lindenmann, 1997).

Other recent studies have looked at various of the aspects of convergence. Huang et al. (2002) examined practitioner concerns about skills news professionals need to learn in their current positions. Toward the top were good writing, multimedia production, new technology, critical thinking, computer-assisted reporting and visual production.

Bulla (2002) examined the impact of convergence on contemporary working journalists’ job routines and skills development and their suggestions about what journalism educators should be teaching their students.

Assessment of the educational needs of students is a never-ending process. The Freedom Forum’s Winds of Change study of journalism education (conducted by the Roper Center at the

University of Connecticut) interviewed journalism educators, new journalists and newsroom recruiters and supervisors (Medsger, 1996).

A variety of thoughtful pieces on journalism education appears in multiple venues.

William Woo (2003) wrote about the purpose of journalism, and journalism education, going beyond reporting and writing.

Some institutions may turn out excellent practitioners of craft. Others may produce graduates rich in historical, social, and theoretical understanding. But what does it matter if the owners of America's media are indifferent to these qualities?

The great task for journalism educators, in addition to providing practical training and academic breadth, is to equip their students with a firm sense of the public trust: how it developed, what it means to America, how it manifests itself or is betrayed in the work of journalists and news organizations. Journalism programs, departments, and schools need to become the places where such concepts are nurtured, protected, and ceaselessly advocated.

### **Research Questions**

In the context of 2005, we ask journalism educational administrators, television news executives, newspaper editors, and online executives questions addressing the following areas:

1. How aligned are educators and practitioners on the important skills for students entering journalism for the first time?
2. How effective are university programs in training for the essential skills?
3. How aligned are educators and practitioners on the importance of particular general education areas for journalism students?
4. What are the significant challenges in journalism relating to audiences, business, diversity, technology, resources and budget?
5. In what ways can journalism schools assist in addressing various challenges?
6. How should journalism and journalism schools view blogging?

7. How supportive are media companies in backing newsroom staffers in legal disputes involving First Amendment issues?

### ***Method***

*This study is based on an Internet survey of national samples of educational administrators, television news directors, newspaper editors and online executives. The survey field dates were Jan. 12-March 8, 2004. The protocol was approved by the VCU's Institutional Review Board. Initial e-mail invitations were sent to each sample, with two reminder e-mails. The questionnaire was self-administered online.*

*The sample of educators was drawn from the schools listed in the AEJMC directory, with e-mail addresses verified by searching university Web sites. The response rate for educators was 27 percent (91 returned from 336 eligible respondents). Eligible respondents were defined as those whose e-mailed invitations did not "bounce back" as a "disconnected" addresses. Educators accounted for 29 percent of the total respondents of 317. The characteristics of returned educator sample is:*

- *51 percent undergraduate only; 49 percent undergraduate and graduate programs.*
- *67 percent journalism and other mass communications programs; 8 percent journalism only; 25 percent other.*
- *40 percent ACEJMC accredited; 60 percent non-accredited.*
- *2 percent fewer than 50 students; 32 percent 50-199; 30 percent 200-499; 27 percent 500-999; 9 percent 1,000 or larger.*
- *20 percent hold the title dean or director; 61 percent head or chair; 19 percent other.*
- *18 percent designate their curriculum as highly converged; 39 percent self-designate their program as moderately converged; 29 percent as somewhat converged and 13*

*percent as not converged. In the questionnaire, we define a converged curriculum as one that teaches all journalism students how to generate news content for print, broadcast and online.*

- *For the educators, 38 percent are in the Southeast; 24 percent in the West; 25 percent in the Midwest; 14 percent in the Northeast.*

*The newspaper sample was drawn from the “Managing Editor” e-mail addresses in Bacon’s Information Inc.’s database of daily newspapers. The response rate was 9 percent (84 of 955 eligible respondents). The newspaper sample accounts for 27 percent of the total sample.*

- *89 percent of the respondents in the newspaper sample have the title of managing editor; 11 percent other.*
- *49 percent of the newspaper sample comes from papers with circulation below 25,000; 23 percent from 25,000 to 49,999; 18 percent from 50,000 to 99,999; 8 percent from 100,000 to 499,999; and 2 percent from 500,000 or more.*
- *For the newspaper sample, 21 percent are in the Southeast; 27 percent in the West; 38 percent in the Midwest; 13 percent in the Northeast.*

*The television sample was drawn from the “News Director” e-mail addresses in Bacon’s Information Inc.’s database of television stations. The response rate was 10 percent (65 of 635 eligible respondents). The television sample accounts for 21 percent of the total sample.*

- *89 percent of the television sample hold the title of news director; 11 percent other.*
- *19 percent of the TV sample came from market size 1 to 25; 19 percent from 26 to 50; 30 percent from market size 51 to 100; 21 percent from markets 101 to 150; and 11 percent from markets 151 or smaller.*
- *For the television sample, 36 percent are in the Southeast; 27 percent in the West; 22 percent in the Midwest; 11 percent in the Northeast.*

*The online sample was drawn from the “Online Managing Editor, Online Editor” e-mail addresses in Bacon’s Information Inc.’s database of daily newspapers and television stations. The response rate was 15 percent (77 of 512 eligible respondents). The newspaper sample accounts for 24 percent of the total sample.*

- *40 percent of the online sample hold the title of online managing editor; 60 percent other.*
- *74 percent of the online sample self-identify their organization as a newspaper; 12 percent an online organization; 5 percent a television station and 9 percent other (generally combination).*
- *27 percent of the online sample had fewer than 50,000 monthly unique visitors to the site; 12 percent 50,000 to 99,999; 39 percent 100,000 to 499,999; 9 percent 500,000 to 999,999; and 13 percent 1,000,000 or more.*
- *For the online sample, 33 percent are in the Southeast; 31 percent in the West; 15 percent in the Midwest; 21 percent in the Northeast.*

*A summary of response rates are below. We know that non-response has been a serious problem with online surveys for quite a while, and rates have recently been plummeting. The response rates are low, but not unusual for recent non-permission based or non-opt-in panel sampling. The eligible non-responders introduce unknown bias into the results.*

| <b>Sample</b>    | <b>Eligible</b> | <b>Returned</b> | <b>% of Total</b> | <b>Response Rate</b> |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Educator</i>  | 336             | 91              | 28.7              | 27.1                 |
| <i>Newspaper</i> | 955             | 84              | 26.5              | 8.8                  |
| <i>TV</i>        | 635             | 65              | 20.5              | 10.2                 |
| <i>Online</i>    | 512             | 77              | 24.3              | 15.0                 |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>2,438</b>    | <b>317</b>      | <b>100.0</b>      | <b>13.0</b>          |

## Findings and Discussion

### Research Question 1:

#### **How aligned are educators and practitioners on the important skills for students entering journalism for the first time?**

(See Table 1)

It is hard to find a skill that journalism educators or practitioners do not deem important for students to acquire before entering the job market. Even the skill ranked lowest in importance among the 14 tested (gathering/editing audio) received a mean score of 3.64 for educators and a 3.36 for practitioners in 2005 – on a five-point scale. 2004’s study found similar importance for 13 items, with the lowest in importance mean score of 3.64 for educators and a 3.35 for practitioners. The lower ranked skills, the ability to gather and edit audio and video, ranked well above average in importance to everyone surveyed with the exception of the print journalists, who weighed in with a mean score of 2.90 and 2.82 respectively.

Several skills have high levels of agreement among educators and practitioner segments. The skills of basic journalistic writing, ethics, research, and collaboration are not substantially different for various segments. As one educator respondent put it, “We need to provide a foundation of writing, reporting and interviewing that ensures students will be able to approach news assignments in a professional and ethical manner. THEN we can add the technical stuff.”

However, there appears to be substantial lack of agreement among educators and practitioner segments as to the importance of various skills – especially those related to convergence journalism. On a five point scale, with 5 being higher, in the 2005 sample:

- Writing across media platforms is of highest importance for educators (4.28) and online (4.39) – with the newspaper mean at 3.55. A similar pattern occurred in 2004.

- Multimedia story planning is also of highest importance for educators (3.95) and online (4.04) – with the TV mean at 3.27.
- Creating and designing graphics is more important for educators (3.74) than the practitioner average (3.38).
- Skill of covering multicultural communities has greater importance for educators (4.30) than practitioners in general (3.99).

The disconnect between educators and practitioners over the significance of multimedia story planning and writing across media platforms is apparent in the open-ended responses as well. One newspaper respondent noted, “J-schools should not be training print reporters to shoot video any more than prospective TV anchors are expected to be able to write 30 inches. The skill sets are different, and while the convergence phenomenon is still in vogue, hiring people because they are strong in a limited number key areas will always lead to higher competency in key positions than those who are hired because they have "ability" (which, in and of itself, can be a dangerously low standard) across multiple platforms.”

Some journalist segments find certain skills of greater importance than educators. Newspaper practitioners rate reporting skills of higher importance (4.96) than educators (4.76). Newspaper respondents also rate interviewing skills (4.81) higher than educators (4.72). They are closely aligned with educators on the importance of basic journalistic writing, ethics, research, and collaboration. Television journalists are significantly stronger in rating the importance of gathering and editing video (4.25) compared with educators (3.79) and gathering and editing audio (3.90 / 3.64). Online journalists are higher than educators and other journalists in rating the importance of skills in writing across media platforms (4.39 / 4.28) and multi-media story planning (4.04/3.95).

**Research Question 2:**  
**How effective are university programs**  
**in training for the essential skills?**  
**(See Table 1)**

The more troubling news for educators is how far off the mark practitioners think schools are when it comes to teaching students the skills evaluated by the survey. In both 2004 and 2005, educators score themselves below a 3.0 (2.89 in 2004; 2.73 in 2005) on just one skill – multimedia story planning. In contrast, practitioners score educators below a 3.0 on 10 of the skills evaluated in both 2004 and 2005. Practitioners do give educators a better than average grade on basic journalistic writing, reporting, ethics and interviewing – the skills designated as most important in the survey. However, educators rank themselves at least three-quarters of a point higher than practitioners do on all of those skills.

There are obviously many possible factors contributing to this disconnect. Perhaps the industry's expectations of what schools can accomplish are set too high. Few programs allow more than 40 credits to be completed within the major. If those courses were taken all at once, that would be just three intense semesters of journalism instruction. Or it may be that journalism schools must do more to build relationships with the profession. When practitioners say certain skills are important, what does that mean in terms of instruction? What aspects of reporting, ethics and interviewing need to be included in the curriculum? By creating a more extensive, ongoing dialogue with journalism professionals, educators may be able to do much to close the effectiveness gap revealed here and in other similar research.

Interestingly in both 2004 and 2005, broadcast journalists find the schools least effective overall – ranking them lowest among practitioners on eight skills: basic journalistic writing, reporting, ethics, interviewing, research skills, creating/designing graphics, computer-assisted reporting and copyediting. Broadcast journalists are relatively closely aligned with educators on

the importance of basic journalistic writing, reporting and interviewing – yet they perceive the biggest disconnect in effectiveness. It is possible that programs steeped in a tradition of print reporting may be failing to address some of the unique concerns of reporting and interviewing for broadcast journalism.

One broadcast respondent was willing to share some of the responsibility for the perceived ineffectiveness of journalism education as a whole: “I am extremely disappointed in the preparation of many journalism students. Either the schools have been ineffective in emphasizing the importance of knowing all aspects of journalism or the students, themselves, feel they don't need all those skills to succeed. I blame those of us who have experience in the business by not spending more time with the interns and many of the professors who haven't spent enough time in a television station to successfully prepare their students for the "real world".

Online journalists graded the schools most harshly on four skills: writing across media platforms, multimedia story planning, gathering/editing video and gathering/editing audio. Given the nature of online journalism, it seems appropriate that the practitioners associated with this platform set the standards on these skills very high.

This is data that may inspire more introspection on the part of journalism schools and programs. Are practitioners grading educators too harshly, or are educators getting complacent about their programs and ceasing to evolve to meet the needs of an ever-evolving industry?

### Research Question 3:

#### How aligned are educators and practitioners on the importance of particular general education areas for journalism students? (See Table 2)

Practitioners and educators agree that journalism schools should require students to take a variety of general education courses in order to be prepared for the workplace. As was the case with the 2004 survey results, only one of the items included in this question generated a mean response rate below 4.0 when one compares responses for educators and all practitioners combined. However, there continue to be notable differences when one compares what educators consider the most important general education courses to what practitioners deem the highest priority.

#### Ranking of Importance of Course Work by Educators and Practitioners, 2004 and 2005

| Skill                             | Educator<br>2004 | Educator<br>2005 | Practitioner<br>2004 | Practitioner<br>2005 |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Current Events                    | 3 (4.35)         | 2 (4.45)         | 2 (4.58)             | 1 (4.55)             |
| Governmental Affairs              | 2 (4.39)         | 4 (4.42)         | 1 (5.51)             | 2 (4.45)             |
| Computer Skills                   | 4 (4.32)         | 6 (4.12)         | 3 (4.37)             | 5 (4.27)             |
| History                           | 5 (4.31)         | 2 (4.45)         | 4 (4.35)             | 3 (4.36)             |
| Political Science                 | 6 (4.14)         | 5 (4.27)         | 5 (4.29)             | 4 (4.28)             |
| Liberal Arts                      | 1 (4.67)         | 1 (4.59)         | 6 (4.08)             | 6 (4.01)             |
| Management &<br>Business Practice | 7 (3.77)         | 7 (3.95)         | 7 (3.88)             | 7 (3.82)             |

There continues to be a significant difference between educators' and practitioners' rankings of the most important coursework. The category of Liberal Arts, which educators ranked as most important in both 2004 and 2005 (2004 mean = 4.67; 2005 mean = 4.59), was ranked near the bottom in importance by practitioners both years (2004 mean = 4.08; 2005 mean = 4.01). One educator respondent was passionate about the issue, "To my mind a solid liberal arts program of study could benefit the intellectual curiosity of all students. More so, I believe

students interested in the field of journalism need a broad exposure to foreign languages and culture, the literature of American journalism and history.”

Educators’ strong belief in a liberal arts background may be linked to standards of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. There may also be a misunderstanding by practitioners of what is meant by liberal arts courses.

One notable change in practitioner rankings between 2004 and 2005 is the importance of computer skills from third most important in 2004 (mean = 4.37) to fifth most important in 2005 (mean = 4.27) in 2005. In 2005, on-line and television practitioners rank computer skills slightly higher than the overall practitioner ranking, at 4.31 and 4.32 respectively.

In 2005 practitioners continue to rank current events and governmental affairs as No. 1 and 2. Among practitioners, 77 percent of television journalists rank current events as very important and 63 percent rank governmental affairs as very important, compared to 63 percent of newspaper journalists who rank governmental affairs as very important and 51 percent of whom give governmental affairs a very important ranking. Governmental Affairs fell to fourth most important in the 2005 rankings among educators, but the mean actually rose between 2004 and 2005 (2004 mean = 4.39; 2005 mean = 4.45), indicating that educators agree with practitioners that coursework in these two areas is important.

**Research Question 4:**

**What are the significant challenges in journalism relating to audiences, business, diversity, technology, resources and budget?**

(see Table X)

The survey listed eight issues facing the news industry and asked respondents to rate their significance. From the 2004 survey to 2005, there were few shifts in how respondent subgroups viewed the challenges facing journalism. Mean scores rarely changed by more than 0.10. The handful of exceptions included how online news editors viewed the challenge of recruiting a diverse staff: In 2004, they gave that challenge a mean score of 3.96 (just below “Significant”); for 2005, the mean score was 3.56 (closer to “Neutral”). In contrast, recruiting a diverse staff registered as a bigger concern for television respondents in 2005 than in 2004. In 2004, television news executives gave that challenge a mean score of 3.67; in 2005, the mean score was 3.88.

Educators continued to consider the emphasis on profits as the No. 1 challenge facing the journalism industry. Practitioners continued to view a declining audience as the top challenge. Here is how educators and practitioners ranked the challenges presented in the 2005 survey:

| <u>Educators</u>                      | <u>Practitioners</u>                  |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Emphasis on Profits                | 1. Declining Audience                 |
| 2. Declining Audience                 | 2. Lack of Newsroom Staff & Resources |
| 3. Recruiting Diverse Staff           | 3. Emphasis on Profits                |
| 4. Lack of Newsroom Staff & Resources | 4. Declining Quality                  |
| 5. Declining Quality                  | 5. Job Applicant Qualifications       |
| 6. Covering Multicultural Communities | 6. Recruiting Diverse Staff           |
| 7. Keeping Up with New Technology     | 7. Keeping Up with New Technology     |
| 8. Job Applicant Qualifications       | 8. Covering Multicultural Communities |

There were interesting variations among the practitioner subgroups. Here is how they ranked the challenges this year:

| <u>Newspaper</u>                      | <u>TV</u>                             | <u>Online</u>                         |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Declining Audience                 | 1. Lack of Newsroom Staff & Resources | 1. Emphasis on Profits                |
| 2. Lack of Newsroom Staff & Resources | 2. Declining Audience                 | 2. Lack of Newsroom Staff & Resources |
| 3. Emphasis on Profits                | 3. Emphasis on Profits                | 3. Declining Audience                 |
| 4. Recruiting Diverse Staff           | 4. Declining Quality                  | 4. Keeping Up with New Technology     |
| 5. Job Applicant Qualifications       | 5. Job Applicant Qualifications       | 5. Declining Quality                  |
| 6. Declining Quality                  | 6. Recruiting Diverse Staff           | 6. Job Applicant Qualifications       |
| 7. Keeping Up with New Technology     | 7. Keeping Up with New Technology     | 7. Recruiting Diverse Staff           |
| 8. Covering Multicultural Communities | 8. Covering Multicultural Communities | 8. Covering Multicultural Communities |

Online news editors' concerns about the emphasis on profits may reflect the new realities of Web operations. In the past, many online news organizations have been allowed to operate outside the budget constraints of their legacy media peers. They often received a grace period to grow the business. That grace period may have ended, and now online news operations are under pressure to turn a profit.

Other interesting, perhaps even distressing, observations may be made regarding the challenges on the lower end of the scale. Practitioners continued to rank "covering multicultural communities" as the least of their concerns. While "recruiting a diverse staff" ranked as a mid-level concern for educators and newspaper editors, it rated as a much lower concern for television news executives and online news editors.

**Research Question 5:**

**In what ways can journalism schools assist in addressing various challenges?**

**(See Table X)**

The survey listed seven ways “journalism schools might help address the challenges facing the journalism industry.” Respondents were asked how important or unimportant those approaches would be.

Again, there were only a handful of shifts from 2004 to 2005. Newspaper editors gave “require courses on media management and business practices” a mean score of 3.74 (closer to “Important” than to “Neutral”) in 2004; that dropped to 3.38 in 2005. Conversely, educators were more likely than before to see teaching media management and business practices as a solution for the industry: They gave that option a median score of 3.39 in 2004 but 3.68 in 2005.

In 2005, educators and practitioners as a whole ranked in exactly the same order the ways journalism schools could assist the industry:

| <u>Educators</u>                          | <u>Practitioners</u>                      |
|---|---|
| 1. Basic Journalism Instruction           | 1. Basic Journalism Instruction           |
| 2. Hands-on training                      | 2. Hands-on training                      |
| 3. Recruit Diverse Student Body & Faculty | 3. Recruit Diverse Student Body & Faculty |
| 4. Report Across Multiple Platforms       | 4. Report Across Multiple Platforms       |
| 5. Multicultural Communities – Diversity  | 5. Multicultural Communities - Diversity  |
| 6. Media Management & Business Practices  | 6. Media Management & Business Practices  |
| 7. Certify Competency in Computer Skills  | 7. Certify Competency in Computer Skills  |

There were slight variations among the practitioner subgroups. Here is how each subgroup ranked the ways journalism schools could help the industry:

| <u>Newspaper</u>    | <u>TV</u>           | <u>Online</u>       |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Basic Journalism | 1. Basic Journalism | 1. Basic Journalism |

| Instruction                               | Instruction                               | Instruction                               |
|---|---|---|
| 2. Hands-on training                      | 2. Hands-on training                      | 2. Hands-on training                      |
| 3. Recruit Diverse Student Body & Faculty | 3. Report Across Multiple Platforms       | 3. Report Across Multiple Platforms       |
| 4. Multicultural Communities – Diversity  | 4. Recruit Diverse Student Body & Faculty | 4. Recruit Diverse Student Body & Faculty |
| 5. Report Across Multiple Platforms       | 5. Media Management & Business Practices  | 5. Multicultural Communities - Diversity  |
| 6. Media Management & Business Practices  | 6. Certify Competency in Computer Skills  | 6. Media Management & Business Practices  |
| 7. Certify Competency in Computer Skills  | 7. Multicultural Communities – Diversity  | 7. Certify Competency in Computer Skills  |

Clearly, both educators and practitioners believe that academia could best help the industry by emphasizing basic journalism instruction and hands-on training.

One newspaper editor wrote that journalism schools should provide “more real-world experience. ... there is too much weight given to theoretical rather than applied journalism.”

Another wrote: “Focus on the fundamentals – accuracy, writing skills, reporting and interviewing skills, and how to find the story in the most mundane assignment. ... Get back to the nuts and bolts! I see too many new journalists who don’t understand the importance of spelling names correctly, asking for titles, understanding an issue, being able to ask the follow-up questions.” An online editor added, “Teach them good, solid journalism skills. The other stuff can be taught on the job, and will change rapidly over time anyway. Make them good journalists and the rest will fall into place.” A television news executive wrote: “Don’t fret so much. Just teach the damn kids to write.”

**Research Question 6:**  
**How should journalism and journalism schools view blogging?**  
(see Table X)

2004 has been called “The Year of the Blog.”<sup>i</sup> During the year, “blog” was the “most looked-up term” on Merriam-Webster’s Web site<sup>ii</sup>, which defines blog, or Web log, as “a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments and often hyperlinks.” In 2004, the Democratic and Republican national conventions for the first time granted press credentials to bloggers, and the White House has issued press credentials to its first blogger.

Blogs are influencing the mainstream media in many ways. More newspapers have started to include story ideas and content inspired by blogs<sup>iii</sup>, for example. In addition, reporters and editors at a growing number of newspapers, ranging from *The New York Times* to the *Greensboro News & Record*, have started blogs. Academia also has responded to the blogging phenomenon. In Fall 2002, the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley created the first journalism course in blogging<sup>iv</sup>.

There has been considerable debate over what ethics bloggers should follow with regard to truth-telling, privacy, conflicts of interest and other traditional journalism values and issues. Nick Denton, the publisher of an irreverent blog named Wonkette.com, said blogs have different ethical standards than the more traditional media. “I think it’s implicit in the way that a Web site is produced that our standards of accuracy are lower,” he told *The New York Times*.<sup>v</sup> “Besides, immediacy is more important than accuracy, and humor is more important than accuracy.”

In response, a prominent blogger and journalist, Jonathan Dube, proposed “A Bloggers’ Code of Ethics”<sup>vi</sup>. “Responsible bloggers should recognize that they are publishing words publicly, and therefore have certain ethical obligations to their readers, the people they write

about, and society in general,” said Dube, who modified the Society of Professional Journalists’ Code of Ethics for the blog world.

In light of the popularity and controversies surrounding blogging, the 2005 survey by the VCU School of Mass Communications asked journalism educators two questions about blogging.

**At what point does blogging (the act of constantly updating a Web page with new commentary and links about a particular topic) rise to a level that can be called journalism?**

Educators and practitioners generally agreed that blogging becomes journalism “Only when journalistic standards of accuracy, accountability and independence are applied to the blog.” This response received a mean score of 4.16 (between “Agree” and “Strongly agree”) from educators and 3.96 from all practitioners combined. Newspaper editors (with a mean of 4.05) and television news executives (3.98) were more likely than online news editors (3.67) to believe that blogs represent journalism only if they follow traditional journalistic ethical standards.

The survey also asked whether “Blogs can only be considered journalism when they are produced by a professional journalist.” Educators and practitioners somewhat disagreed with that statement. The statement received a mean score of 2.53 from educators (between “Neutral” and “Disagree”); it received a mean score of 2.56 from all practitioners combined (with a 2.53 from newspaper editors, a 2.85 from TV news executives and a 2.27 from online news editors.) The results suggest that the respondents tend to believe that non-journalists can produce blogs that qualify as journalism; online news editors were more likely than other groups to hold that opinion.

Finally, the survey asked respondents to consider the statement “A true blog can never be considered journalism because blogs by their very nature must include commentary and opinion..” Most respondents agreed with that statement, but a significant minority disagreed. The statement received a mean score of 3.11 (closer to “Neutral” than to “Agree”) from educators and a 3.08 from all practitioners combined. Newspaper editors gave the statement a mean score of 3.08 and TV news executives, a mean score of 3.37. The mean score was 2.73 for online news editors – meaning most of them disagreed with the statement. In other words, online news editors were the only group to believe that a blog can qualify as journalism even if it includes commentary and opinion.

The survey also asked: **How should schools of journalism and mass communications deal with the blogging phenomenon in their curricula?** Respondents could select more than one answer to that question.

Only 5 percent of both educators and practitioners said that concerning blogs, schools should “Ignore them. This is a fad and will eventually go away.” About 3 percent of newspaper editors, 9 percent of television news directors and 5 percent of online news editors felt that way.

About 90 percent of educators and 91 percent of practitioners said schools should “include discussion of blogs and the ethical implications of them in existing courses.” That feeling was shared by 93 percent of newspaper editors, 88 percent of television news directors and 90 percent of online news editors.

About 15 percent of both educators and practitioners said schools should “Teach students the skills they need to be bloggers themselves.” About 12 percent of newspaper editors, 16 percent of television news directors and 23 percent of online news editors gave that response.

Educators were less likely than practitioners to endorse a separate course on blogging. About 16 percent of educators and 30 percent of practitioners said schools should “Create a

blogging course that deals with the skills and theory behind blogging.” That response was given by 29 percent of newspaper editors, 33 percent of television news directors and 31 percent of online news editors.

In their open-ended comments, some educators and practitioners blasted blogging. “I am greatly troubled by bloggers and the declining importance of journalism if too much support is given to too much opinion reporting,” one educator wrote. A newspaper editor added, “Blogging is a waste of time. Teach editorial writing instead.”

But others said journalism students should learn about blogs – if only to mine them as a source of information. “As a journalist, there is a need to apply critical thinking skills to source information. Blogs are sources (in the same way corporations are citizens). Journalists have to know how to handle them – not write them,” a newspaper editor wrote.

#### **Research Question 7:**

#### **How supportive are media companies in backing newsroom staffers in legal disputes involving First Amendment issues?**

(see Table X)

This year’s survey also asked questions about the First Amendment. In the past year, several reporters have been jailed or threatened with legal action for refusing to reveal the names of confidential sources. In August 2004, for example, *Time* magazine writer Matthew Cooper and *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller were held in contempt of court for refusing to disclose confidential sources in a federal grand jury investigation about who revealed the identity of undercover CIA agent Valerie Plame<sup>vii</sup>. Cooper and Miller are among more than 30 reporters being asked to reveal sources in federal courts, according to Lucy A. Dalglish, executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press.

The survey asked respondents: **In the hiring of reporters, how important is knowledge today about the First Amendment and its applications, i.e., the rights and responsibilities of**

**a free press, freedom-of-information laws, shield laws, and the challenges to a free press, for example?**

About 80 percent of both educators and practitioners answered “Very important.” The mean score was 4.82 (closer to “Very important” than to “Important”) for educators and 4.71 for practitioners. All of the practitioner subgroups had similar mean scores.

The survey also asked: **How important is it that journalism schools teach students about the First Amendment as an underpinning of democracy, about the rights and responsibilities of the media, and how to address potential legal issues such as confidential sources/shield laws?**

Again, both educators and practitioners answered “Very important.” The mean score was 4.87 for educators and 4.79 for practitioners (with all subgroups giving similar scores).

But differences arose when the survey asked about media employers’ support for staff members in First Amendment disputes. Practitioners were asked: **In your newsroom, how likely is it that your employer would back you in a legal dispute with the government and/or the courts over a Free Press/First Amendment/FOI/confidential source issue?** Educators were asked: **In a newsroom today, how likely is it that an employer would back a reporter in a legal dispute with the government and/or the courts over a Free Press/First Amendment/FOI/confidential source issue?**

Educators are less likely than practitioners to believe that employers will support reporters in First Amendment controversies.

Educators answered the survey question with a mean score of 3.51 (between “Neutral” and “Likely”). Practitioners had a mean score of 4.58 (between “Likely” and “Very likely”). Newspaper editors had a mean score of 4.71; television news executives, 4.47; and online news editors, 4.36.

Put another way, about 69 percent of the practitioners said it was “very likely” that their employer would support them in a First Amendment dispute. (That included 79 percent of newspaper respondents, 57 percent of TV respondents and 55 percent on online respondents.”) Only 14 percent of educators thought employers were “very likely” to back a reporter in a First Amendment dispute.

### ***Conclusion***

*This study surveyed 317 journalism educators, print, broadcast and online journalists using an Internet survey. Response rate within the groups ranged from 8.8 percent (newspaper journalists) to 27.1 percent (educators) for an average response rate of 13.0 percent. The data shows that there continues to be a need for better collaboration between practitioners and journalism educators.*

### **Specific Survey Findings:**

- Educators and practitioners generally agreed on the most important skills for students entering journalism for the first time: basic journalistic writing, ethics, research and collaboration skills.
- For the second year in a row, educators give themselves much higher scores on doing a good job of preparing future journalists than the scores they receive from the practitioners; however, practitioners do give educators a better than average grade on basic journalistic writing, reporting, ethics and interviewing skill development.
- Online journalists and educators place significantly more importance on the convergence skills of writing across media platforms and multimedia story planning than broadcast or newspaper respondents.
- There is disagreement about the most important courses outside of the journalism curriculum. Nearly all educators rank liberal arts courses as very important or important. Practitioners rank liberal arts courses near the bottom in importance and rank current events and government affairs as the two most important areas of general education study.

- Educators and practitioners agree that schools should include discussion of blogs and their ethical implications within the existing curriculum.
- Declining audience, lack of newsroom staff and resources and the emphasis on profits are seen as the three most significant challenges to the industry by practitioners. For educators, recruiting diverse staff pushing lack of newsroom staff and resources out of the top three in their rankings.
- Practitioners and educators agree that schools can provide the most significant help to the industry in the area of basic journalism instruction and by requiring more hands-on training opportunities.

**Areas for Future Studies:**

- Exploring what is at the heart of the difference between how well the academy believes it is preparing students and how practitioners are grading the academy, with a goal of developing a better understanding of the industry's expectations (and whether or not they are reasonable) and taking a closer look at whether curricula are evolving to meet the ever-changing needs of the industry.
- Determining what types of academic-industry partnerships might be most effective in developing new journalists who are prepared to meet the challenges faced by newsrooms today and in the future.
- Examining why broadcast journalists are so closely aligned with educators on what skills are important for new journalism, but also the harshest critics of the job journalism schools are doing.

This is the kind of study that needs to be repeated because of the continually changing media landscape. The researchers anticipate longitudinal tracking of these issues will reveal

more concrete solutions to the challenges facing the journalism industry. We cannot walk in step to the future until we achieve some kind of consensus on what that future should look like and how best to arrive.

## References

- Brynildssen, Shawna (2002). A review of trends in journalism education. ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication Digest #178. EDO-CS-02-09, December 2002. <http://reading.indiana.edu/ieo/digests/d178.html>
- Glasser, Theodore L. (2002) What Difference Does a Journalism Education Make? <http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/debate/forum.1.essay.glasser.html>
- Huang, Edgar, Davison, Karen, Shreve, Stephanie, Davis, Twila, Bettendorf, Elizabeth, and Nair Anita (2002?) Facing the challenges of convergence: Media professionals' concerns of working across media platforms. Department of Journalism and Media Studies, University of South Florida St. Petersburg. Working paper.
- Kirtz, Bill (2002) Don't Academize Columbia J-School, Editor & Publisher, August 20, 2002  
[http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1614078](http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1614078)
- Lindenmann, Walter K. (1997) Views of print and broadcast media executives toward journalism education: Results of a nationwide survey conducted for the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Mass Communications and The Associated Press Managing Editors, October. Working paper.
- Medsger, Betty (1996) Is journalism different? Journalism Education, the First Amendment Imperative, and the Changing Media Marketplace.  
<http://www.mtsu.edu/~masscomm/seig96/medsger/medsger.htm>
- Overby, Charles (1999). Alliance needed between journalists, educators. Freedom Forum, September 15, 1999 <http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=6650>
- Woo, William F. (2003) Journalism and serving the public trust. Global Issues, February.  
<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itgic/0203/ijge/gj06.htm>

---

<sup>i</sup> Mitchell, Greg (2005). It's True: 2004 Really Was the Year of the Blog. Editor & Publisher. Jan. 03, 2005. Retrieved from [http://www.mediainfo.com/eandp/news/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1000744323](http://www.mediainfo.com/eandp/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1000744323) on March 27, 2005.

Also: Roberts, Paul (2005). 2004: Big Year for Blogs. PC World. Jan. 03, 2005. Retrieved from <http://www.pcworld.com/news/article/0,aid,119110,00.asp> on March 27, 2005.

Also: Gallagher, Sean (2004). 2004: The Year of the Blog?. eWEEK. Nov. 23, 2004. Retrieved from <http://blog.ziffdavis.com/gallagher/archive/2004/11/23/3683.aspx> on March 27, 2005.

<sup>ii</sup> “Blog” picked as word of the year (2004). BBC News. Dec. 1, 2004. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4059291.stm> on March 27, 2005.

<sup>iii</sup> Dube, Jonathan (2005). Readers ask newspaper why stories on blogs aren't in publication. CyberJournalist.net. March 4, 2005.. Retrieved from <http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/001953.php> on March 27, 2005.

<sup>iv</sup> Hunter, D. Lyn (2002). Invasion of the “blogs”: Growing popularity of weblog publishing spurs creation of J-school class. Retrieved from [http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2002/08/05\\_blog.html](http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2002/08/05_blog.html) on March 27, 2005.

<sup>v</sup> Bosman, Julie (2004). First With the Scoop, if Not the Truth. April 18, 2004. The New York Times. Retrieved from Lexis-Nexis on March 27, 2005.

<sup>vi</sup> Dube, Jonathan (2005). A Bloggers' Code of Ethics. Cyberjournalist.net. April 15, 2003. Retrieved from <http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/000215.php> on March 27, 2005.

<sup>vii</sup> Bonner, Jessie (2005). Journalists Facing Jail Time Call for Federal Shield Law to Protect Reporters. Kansas City InfoZine. March 16, 2005. Retrieved from <http://www.infozine.com/news/stories/op/storiesView/sid/6508/> on March 27, 2005.