

“Information Technology”

**A report from the Subcommittee
on Educational Strategies
and Technological Change**

appears on the following pages

Information Technology: Implications for the Future of Journalism and Mass Communication Education

Final Report of the Subcommittee on Educational Strategies and
Technological Change Prepared for the AEJMC Task Force
on Teaching and Learning in the New Millennium

by *John Pavlik, Columbia University*
Gary Morgan, Oxnard College
Bruce Henderson, University of Colorado

Introduction

The Educational Strategies and Technological Change Subcommittee was asked to examine the implications of emerging information technology for the future of journalism and mass communication education. John Pavlik of Columbia University and Adam Powell of The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, both members of the subcommittee, wrote a white paper on this topic as a preliminary report, which was published in January 2000, as part of the Presidential Report "AEJMC and ASJMC: Remembering our Past ...Anticipating our Future."

Building on this paper, the following is the final report of the subcommittee, offering a set of five recommendations for the future of JMC education.

Journalism and Mass Communication for the Digital Age

In journalism and mass communication, no matter how much things change, some things should remain the same. Among the things that should never change are the following:

- defining what constitutes a great story
- relying on reliable, known sources
- checking and rechecking the facts
- using balance, fairness and impartiality in presenting the facts
- asking tough questions
- adhering to high ethical standards.

But some things will inevitably change, for better or for worse. Among the changes are the tools that the modern journalist and communication professional will use in today's e-world to practice modern journalism and mass communication (JMC). These tools are being transformed in fundamental ways.

The changes are occurring in at least five broad areas: 1) acquisition tools, or tools for news gathering and reporting; 2) tools for storage of information, especially multimedia content, and how it is indexed and retrieved; 3) process-

ing, production or editorial tools; 4) distribution or publishing tools; and 5) presentation, display or access tools.

Together, these changes have at least four dramatic sets of implications for JMC in the following: 1) the content, or storytelling, of JMC; 2) the ways that JMC professionals do their work; 3) the structure, management and culture of JMC organizations and industries; and 4) the relationships between JMC organizations and their publics. These issues are detailed in the white paper referred to above.

Recommendations

This final report offers the following set of recommendations for the future of JMC education.

We recommend that programs in JMC education:

- Work toward re-conceptualizing and re-organizing their curricula to emphasize cross-media JMC education, rather than media-specific education. This will enable programs to emphasize the traditional components of JMC excellence that cut across media and that embrace new media. As Nora Paul of the Institute for New Media Studies at the University of Minnesota suggests (comments at the "New Media Summit," August 12, 2000, AEJMC Annual

Convention, Phoenix, Ariz.) JMC educators should begin using new adjectives to describe their curricula. Rather than "print" or "broadcast" journalism, she contends that terms such as "text" or "visual" JMC would make more sense.

- Offer content specializations rather than concentrations along the lines of media types. In other words, a JMC program should consider offering news concentrations in areas of coverage specialization (e.g., environmental reporting, public affairs reporting, arts reporting, business and financial reporting, health and science

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reporting, technology reporting, etc.), rather than news editorial (i.e., print), broadcast, etc.

- Make a commitment to support instructional programs with appropriately updated technology infrastructure. While some institutions may have already made this commitment, many lie a long way from the “state of the art” in technology.

To best serve efforts to teach a technologically literate student group, the technology infrastructure must be kept up-to-date and functional. But a modern technology infrastructure is not enough. JMC education also must make a commitment to support ongoing technology training for current educators and educators of the future.

- Bridge the industry / academy gap that exists in JMC. Establishing more communication and even collaboration will facilitate both better JMC education and JMC professional practice. JMC students and faculty can gain better access to new technology, which will most likely be adopted first in industry. In addition, such

alliances provide a natural path for launching professional careers for students.

- Consider the rapidly-evolving environment of higher education. New technology and new media are spurring dramatic change in higher education, whether in the form of distance learning, intellectual property ownership or technologies in the classroom. JMC education, just as it has for technologies such as radio and television, should be in the forefront of discussion and debate over the implications of these current changes.

These recommendations provide several advantages when matched with some of the accreditation requirements of the ACEJMC. Standard 3, Curriculum, states that JMC “courses should be offered to ensure that students learn to gather, analyze, organize, synthesize and communicate information to audiences in formats appropriate to particular forms of journalism and mass communications and systems of delivery.” (See standard 3, <http://www.ukans.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/STANDARDS.HTML>)

In addition, some of the courses a student might take in a content specialization approach would not be “professional” courses limited by the 90/65 accreditation rule. Such specializations would encourage students to take courses

outside the JMC curriculum that would have direct bearing on their JMC specialization.

A growing number of leading JMC educators and JMC professionals are increasingly convinced that the approach proposed here makes sense and will likely produce the types of JMC professionals the industry will need in the years ahead.

Consider what New York Times Co. Chairman Arthur O. Sulzberger Jr. told the attendees at the annual conference of the American Society of Newspaper Editors gathered in Washington, D.C. in April 2000: "It's not the paper in newspaper that defines us. It's the news in newspaper."

Other major news providers also are headed in this same direction:

- Reuters, the world's largest news provider, announced in early 2000 that it was investing some \$800 million to help transform its entire operation into an Internet company.

- The Tribune Company, one of the largest news organizations in the United States with various newspapers and broadcast news outlets, has created a central newsroom that cuts across media boundaries. Reporters gather the news using a variety of media acquisition tools and the news is then produced for distribution via a variety of distribution channels,

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including print, broadcast and Internet. CNN and Bloomberg have created similar combined newsrooms.

- The Financial Times, one of the world's premier business and financial news organizations, has created an integrated print/online newsroom. "The only way organizations will have their online and print journalists considered the same in terms of status will be if they share common terms and conditions," says Paul Maidment, editor of the Financial Times' FT.com. "We've created a completely integrated newsroom that works across print and online, so we don't have FT.com journalists and ... newspaper journalists. We just have FT journalists. We believe very strongly that what we produce every day is FT journalism." (The Guardian, March 20, 2000) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/>

Similar views are increasingly held in other areas of the communication professions, including advertising and public relations, as well as in the media entertainment industries.

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Conclusions

Developments in digital technology are increasingly blurring the boundaries between the formerly distinct worlds of print and broadcast. Most visibly, the growth of the Internet and World Wide Web have led to the emergence of extensive journalism and mass communication in the online world, featuring all forms of mediated communication, including text, graphics, images, audio, video and interactivity. More than this, however, new media technology is influencing all aspects of journalism and mass communication (JMC), for better or for worse, with the production and distribution of all forms of JMC becoming increasingly digital.

As a result, JMC education has a unique opportunity to take a leadership role in how JMC is conceptualized and taught and how the JMC industry operates in the 21st century and beyond. We, as educators, have an opportunity to build the foundation of a renaissance in JMC. We can focus our curricula on teaching students to be journalism and mass communication professionals, independent of any specific medium. We can teach our students to work effectively across print (text), video, audio and interactive media types. We can teach our students the

principles that cut across all media, such as critical thinking, excellent storytelling and ethics.

Epilogue

Note: Bruce Henderson has created a threaded discussion forum on new technology and its implications for journalism and mass communication education. The address is: <http://www.newmedia.colorado.edu/aejmc>. You are invited to participate! This threaded discussion also contains an online copy of this report.

Educational Strategies and Technological Change Subcommittee members:

John Pavlik, subcommittee chair, Columbia University; **Gary Morgan**, Oxnard College; **Bruce Henderson**, University of Colorado at Boulder; **Deb Aikat**, University of North Carolina; **Lisa Beinhoff**, Emporia State University; **Eddith Dashiell**, Ohio University; **Jan Dates**, Howard University; **Barry Hollander**, University of Georgia; **Dan Lattimore**, University of Memphis; **Jim Marra**, Temple University; **Adam Powell**, The Freedom Forum.

Resources for Teaching Web Courses

The Internet and other new technology offer today's students exciting learning opportunities, but professors need to know how to effectively adapt that technology to their teaching styles in order for students to get the most out of their learning experience. AEJMC is helping its members face the challenge of adapting new media to classroom instruction with its web site of relevant links to resources to help professors create, revise or improve their web-based courses.

"Resources for Teaching Web Courses" is the project of the 1999 Subcommittee on Educational Strategies and Technological Change, one of two subcommittees of AEJMC's Task Force on Teaching and Learning in the New Millennium. Linked to the AEJMC home page, this site includes annotations and http addresses for a variety of communication-related links that focus on web page design and Internet use in the classroom. Professors can access this web site to find helpful links to Internet resources to help them add web-based instruction to their reporting, communication research, advertising or public relations courses.

The links range from sites such as About.com (<http://www.about.com>), which helps students who have trouble grasping the concept of Boolean syntax, to Plagiarism.org (<http://www.plagiarism.org>), an online detection service designed to help professors fight plagiarism from the Internet.

The site also includes links to examples of how other journalism educators are incorporating the Internet into their writing and reporting courses. One example is "On-line sources for J233/Infogathering" (<http://www.scripps.ohiou.edu/j233/>), the web site for the Information Gathering course taught at the E. W. Scripps School of Journalism, Ohio University-Athens. This site contains links to general and specialized electronic databases students need to be familiar with in order to conduct efficient, thorough research on a given topic.

Journalism educators can access the "Resources for Teaching Web Courses" site at http://aejmc.org/pubs/web_courses.html.

Eddith Dashiell
Ohio University