

# Head of the Class: A Study of What United States Journalism School Administrators Consider the Most Valuable Educational Tenets for Their Graduates Seeking Careers at U.S. Legacy Newspapers

Adam Pitluk

**Abstract**—In a time period populated by legacy newspaper readers who throw around the term “fake news” as though it has long been a part of the lexicon, journalism schools must convince would-be students that their degree is still viable and that they are not teaching a curriculum of deception. As such, journalism schools’ academic administrators tasked with creating and maintaining conversant curricula must stay ahead of legacy newspaper industry trends – both in the print and online products – and ensure that what is being taught in the classroom is both fresh and appropriate to the demands of the evolving legacy newspaper industry. This study examines the information obtained from the result of interviews of journalism academic administrators in order to identify institutional pedagogy for recent journalism school graduates interested in pursuing careers at legacy newspapers. This research also explores the existing relationship between journalism school academic administrators and legacy newspaper editors. The results indicate the value administrators put on various academy teachings, and they also highlight a perceived disconnect between journalism academic administrators and legacy newspaper hiring editors.

**Keywords**—Academic administration, education, journalism, media management, newspapers.

## I. INTRODUCTION

JOURNALISM school administrators and key faculty have had to implement and emphasize curriculum changes over the last two decades to indicate to current and prospective students, as well as to legacy newspaper industry practitioners and pundits, that they were aware of the shift from print to digital newspaper consumption. As a result, many schools ended up “blowing up the curriculum” [8, p.133]. These moves facilitated that journalism school administrators believe they have their collective fingers on the pulse of the legacy newspaper industry’s ever-changing digital and social media needs, and they are preparing their students accordingly [31]. Sometimes, however, the wants of the legacy newspaper industry do not coincide with the director of journalism academic administrators. According to the principles of the established foundations like Knight, McCormick, Ethics and Excellence in Journalism, Scripps Howard, Brett Family, and Wyncote Foundations, journalism schools that do not update their curriculum and faculties to reflect media nuance in the digital age will find it difficult to raise money from foundations

interested in the future of news [29], [31], [42].

This research shows that journalism school academic administrators are not reaching out to managers and editors in the legacy newspaper industry in order to ask about what skills they should be imparting on their students. Additionally, journalism school administrators are not soliciting feedback regarding the performance of their new-hires. On a more basic level, these same administrators are not requesting a wish-list of courses that the legacy newspaper hiring editors would like to see taught. Moreover, the two groups that are the respective guardians of their fields are not having the conversations with their counterparts to ensure that the vitality and integrity of the profession are championed by recent journalism school graduates.

This research helps to identify criteria and parameters of industry needs and academic teachings based on qualitative responses from journalism school academic administrators [32], [17]. Since some journalism programs that were studied are either housed in or live alongside mass communication, communication, or media programs, for the purposes of this research, the various departments will be used interchangeably or referred to collectively as “journalism” departments.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

While the newspaper industry continued to experience intense periods of fluctuation and as it continued to wrestle with management/labor muscle spasms, the academy also made a course correction regarding what was being taught to journalism students. Additionally, the process of journalism school accreditation and whether it was a help or a hindrance when it came to attracting and training students based on a set of accepted guidelines came under harsh scrutiny [40], [19].

As the newsroom changed, the academy changed as well, and a more prevalent position was taken on the role of internships/externships/experiential learning as a preparatory measure for students [16]. However, while many journalism programs encouraged an internship or externship, not many journalism programs changed their curriculum to make them mandatory [40]. Some universities had been exploring issues around the changing media industry and its impact on journalism education since the mid-1990s, and that research picked up in the first half

Adam Pitluk is an assistant professor at Coastal Carolina University, Conway, SC 29528 USA (phone: 843-349-2342; e-mail: apitluk@coastal.edu).

of this century [12], [39]. However, 2005 was when changes were measurably present across a number of journalism schools [39]. A 2005 study [12] reported that by 2005, 60% of the U.S. journalism schools were preparing students to work across multimedia platforms (print, online, video, social media), and an online multimedia survey [39] documented curriculum innovation in convergent journalism education across the U.S. six years later. In essence, the academy was faster out of the gates to change with the times than the industry, although those changes were not universally recognized as the educational standard until 2015, almost two decades after the mainstreaming of the Internet [3], [4], [54].

Journalism schools have integrated convergent journalism to varying degrees, from reworking one or two subjects to a full-scale overhaul of journalism curriculum [38], [39]. Indeed, journalism schools are tracking positively in academic and commercial polls regarding its curriculum overhaul to match cultural, societal, and industry transformation (although the industry fundamentally resisted change in the early part of 21<sup>st</sup> century). For more than a decade, research [1], [37], [41] has shown a subtle disconnect between the journalism skills learned in journalism schools and the needs of the professional workforce. This is by no means because of a lack of effort on the part of educators. Quite the contrary: As [34] determined, although 60% of journalism schools in the United States were redesigning their curricula to include courses that prepared students for producing news across multiple platforms and among multiple disciplines, once a program became committed to a particular curriculum, journalism educators and administrators recognized that the new curriculum could not be set in stone but must be able to adapt to industry changes [39]. The rise of new technologies presented a conundrum to many journalism schools and their various programs struggling with the choice of whether to invest sweat equity in new skills classes or to revamp existing classes [11]. This paradigm continues to this day. Moreover, it butts up against a hostile environment toward journalism and journalists, and many parents over the last 10 years have been reticent to send their children to earn expensive journalism degrees in college when the legacy print newspaper field was shrinking and its integrity was under attack [7], [19]. Therein lies a question that needs to be studied further: How are journalism programs to implement a curriculum that must be fluid and adaptable to industry wants and needs? Likewise, when should that curriculum be completely overhauled versus tweaked? [11]. The change-agency momentum of American journalism programs was studied and determined to be slowing down, according to researchers at Michigan State University, as early as 2012. A national study of U.S. journalism program directors conducted by [7] showed that the majority of program directors agreed that training in writing and reporting is still considered the bedrock of journalism but knowledge about visual communication has become an increasing priority. After that, however, the same respondents disagreed on which specific courses take precedence for all journalism students [6], [7]. This disagreement forces a focus on the disconnect that drives it. “The academy always strives to offer the best education to their

students to become the next Pulitzer Prize winner, but sometimes it is hard to know when, or even if, a curriculum should be changed” [7].

Administrators’ calls for innovations in journalism education are often veiled as calls for institutional preservation [19]. Many academic journalism administration advocates concur that change is necessary if journalism’s core tenets and democratic values are to survive [18], [19]. One such lens through which this challenge can be viewed is disruptive innovation. Disruptive innovation is defined as an innovation that creates a new market and value network and disrupts and then displaces an established market and value network [15]. Often, these advocates invoke a simplified version of the theory of disruptive innovation to presume that established legacy newspapers need to anticipate market-driven and technological changes if they are to preserve journalism’s public value [15], [19]. The onus is therefore on the journalism schools to keep up with the industry by training the next wave of reporters to persevere. However, the perception of academic administrators, as will be documented and described in the “results” section, is that conversations between them and legacy newspaper hiring editors are infrequent and in the case of this research, virtually nonexistent.

A survey of 134 journalism program directors in the U.S. showed that of the above professional competencies, only “media ethics and law” and “reporting” belong to the core of journalism education for a majority. “Mass communication research” is mentioned by only 30%, “critical thinking” by 29% and “media sociology of news” by 1% [7]. The authors see the schools as caught in the middle when trying to accommodate new technologies. It would appear that those skills enter the programs at the expense of general intellectual and professional content [24]. However, because this was a quantitative content analysis and not a qualitative study with the option for respondents to elaborate on their answers, the journalism school directors were pigeonholed into responding to set choices that may or may not have encompassed the entirety of the department’s mission.

In 2014, [53] conducted a content analysis – which coincidentally was the only research of its kind – of all employment opportunities posted by the Top 10 American newspaper and broadcast journalism companies between 2008 and 2009. They coded more than 1,400 postings to determine the most desirable skills and attributes for job candidates. They saw an observed change over time, particularly concerning an overriding emphasis on web, multimedia, and social media skills. However, those skills that related to one of the above-mentioned professional competences played almost no role when media institutions recruited those journalists [53], [54]. Almost all skills referred to technical or practical abilities and experiences. They concluded that: “educators would do well to get ahead of the industry need by preparing students who are ready to step into leadership roles in the area of social media and mobile delivery” [53, p.23].

As a follow-up, [54] conducted a study aimed at isolating the specific skills and attributes required of journalists seeking employment in today’s newsrooms. The authors were interested

in both the enduring traditional abilities required by accredited journalism schools and the emerging areas of expertise necessary to succeed in journalism careers [54]. They performed a quantitative content analysis of job postings of the Top 10 broadcast and Top 10 newspaper companies in the country, predicated on a 2015 Pew Research report, which ranked companies by revenue. Analyzing the postings by job title, the 10 most sought-after positions out of more than 1,800 postings were reporter (n = 330), producer (n = 134), web writer (n = 88), photographer (n = 72), internships/nonpaid positions (n = 71), web producer (n = 68), anchor (n = 66), editor (n = 61), executive producer (n = 43), and assignment editor (n = 40) [26], [27]. However, a limitation is that their quantitative study had to package various tangible and intangible skills like interpersonal skills, presentation skills, and demeanor in order to present them in a comprehensible way on the survey. Coding for “job type” involved creating broad categories based on the job duties described in the postings [53], [54]. “Multiple platform” positions, defined as those that reference as many as 20 cross-platform skills and attributes in a single advertisement, was the largest job type in the study, with 48.4% (n = 537) postings falling into the category [53], [54]. The problem is that such a Frankenstein-esque position would naturally be the largest job type, as the phrasing makes it a catchall for some 20 positions. This answer does not entirely distill the individual qualities that hiring editors are looking for, as the majority of respondents register on the outside of anything that was asked in the survey.

The existing quantitative research that looks at the intersection of the industry with academy shows that the profession and the academy are in constant flux.

The research conducted for this study further explores that intersection from a qualitative perspective in order to do a deep dig into the answers provided by journalism academic administrators. This study takes a snapshot of societal and cultural norms in the journalism classroom in 2018-2020 by speaking to the very people who are tasked with shaping the journalism educational system. By identifying an intersection of the information, this study provides information that will be beneficial for academic institutions when employing an ever-changing curriculum that aims to prepare those students interested in careers in the legacy newspaper industry [25], [28]. The goal is for this study to lead to other research adaptable by scholars and implemented at an institutional level regarding the process by which educators instruct students and prepare them for careers in legacy newspaper journalism, particularly because legacy newspapers and the foundations composed of their representatives have openly and notoriously called on university presidents and journalism school administrators to change the journalism curricula to meet industry needs [10], [13], [31], [47].

This study’s goal is to research the qualities that make a journalism student attractive as a new-hire to a legacy newspaper hiring editor, then highlight journalism school curriculum variances in order to determine if what is being taught is indeed what hiring editors are looking for. Conversely, this research looks at whether there is adequate communication

between legacy newspaper hiring editors and journalism academic administrators so that the two entities can co-evolve in order for recent journalism school graduates to have the required tools for a newspaper job upon graduation. The data unearthed by this qualitative study helps to address these concerns.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses the following research questions:

- *RQ 1:* What are the most important tenets and skills that journalism school administrators believe students need to learn by the time they graduate journalism school?
- *RQ 2:* By what parallel skills and qualities (grades, participation, outside experience [internships/externships]) do administrators define a successful academic career?
- *RQ 3:* What distinguishes academic administrators’ graduating students from those of other programs to make their graduating student attractive to a newspaper hiring editor?
- *RQ 4:* What do these parallel skills and qualities say about the collective value that journalism school administrators place on a journalism degree above any other degree that makes a journalism school graduate hireable?

The predominant theory by which this research was structured was grounded theory. The research questions were intentionally broad so that the interviewee could speak freely about the broad topic. Grounded theory involves the discovery of theory through singular data collection and analysis [34]. In particular, grounded theory’s focus is on inductively constructing theory through methodic gathering and analysis of data [33], [34].

Theories attempt to explain not just isolated elements of a phenomenon, but rather, all aspects of a phenomenon [5]. References [14] and [31] maintained that theory that is grounded in data would enable researchers to explore new areas that had not previously been covered or explored by existing theories.

The researcher wanted the research to be grounded in data, which was collected from journalism academic administrators to explore the phenomena. As such, the grounded theory approach brings value to our data to answer the questions of this study. Since grounded theory is not just a theory but rather a methodological approach to justify why researchers rely on data to do draw conclusions, it was apropos for this qualitative study. Moreover, grounded theory enabled this research to leave the door open for other theories and additional research.

The theoretical lens through which this study was viewed was Astin’s theory of student involvement [4]. Astin’s theory of student involvement states that a student who is socialized with campus goings-on and who involves himself/herself with as much academically-oriented work both on and off campus will be the more well-rounded student and will receive the broadest type of college education [4]. Essentially, the more work a student does outside of the classroom, the more his or her experiences will help him/her both inside the classroom and with intellectual and personal development.

#### IV. METHOD

This research collects data from groups of journalism academic administrators through semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviewing. A qualitative interview is a flexible and powerful data gathering tool for collecting detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviors, as well as when the researcher wants to explore new issues in depth [9]. In particular, the in-depth interview relying on semi-structured formats provides flexibility with researchers to ask follow-up questions predicated on the answers given to the broad research questions. Additionally, semi-structured in-depth interviews allow the researcher to ask a number of prepared interviewer questions so that the interviewer cannot be singularly planned and totally scripted in advance but must be prepared to improvise in a careful and theorized way [55], [46], [48]. Since this study aims at exploring perspective and thoughts of journalism academic administrators on what the ideal recent college graduate new hire is prepared to do at a legacy newspaper, the researcher believes that semi-structured interviews enable this study to explore what specific skills and criteria various academic administrators think are most important. Such a topic has not been investigated thus far.

##### *Sampling/Participant Recruitment*

For this study, journalism academic administrators who shape the curriculum for their respective college or university journalism program were chosen. The journalism academic administrators we pursued were from the collegefactual.com list of the 2019 Best Journalism Colleges in the United States. There are many lists of journalism school rankings available to a web-searching public, but we chose [56]'s list for two reasons. First, it is the first list that comes up in a web search for "Top Journalism Programs," thereby distinguishing this list as having the highest SEO (Search Engine Optimization) of all journalism school lists. Second, collegefactual.com's [56] published methodology is among the more sophisticated of all of the other ranking lists.

According to [56]:

There are approximately 13,890 students graduating with a degree in Journalism every year. This helps make it 38th most in-demand from the 384 total college majors we have data on. Journalism is ranked 87 out of 121 college majors for graduate pay. This means it is around the low end for salary potential, but you can improve your chances of a high-paying career by finding a superior school and pursuing an advanced degree [56].

Administrators who were listed as part of the top 70 journalism schools/programs were contacted for an interview by either Skype, FaceTime, or telephone. Of the 70 administrators contacted, 16 interviews were conducted. All listed academic administrators were contacted by email twice, the first with the initial query to participate in this research study, and the second reminding them that they were contacted earlier (usually between 5-to-9 days after first email was sent) to see if they were interested in participating. After we made two efforts of contacting the academic administrators in waves of 20, we moved to the next 20. We stopped after 70 because

saturation was reached. All participants agreed that we could use their names and institutions in the research.

#### V. RESULTS

The results of the four research questions yielded five major themes and five minor themes. Below are the key answers to the research questions along with significant representative quotes from journalism academic administrators.

- RQ 1: What are the most important tenets and skills that journalism school administrators believe students need to learn by the time they graduate journalism school?

The various journalism school administrators listed a range of different skills as most important in the pursuit of a journalism degree. Those skills that tracked at the top were ones that used the following terms: ethics/values/communications law 100% (n = 16); news skills/writing/reporting 100% (n = 16); curiosity/analysis/synthesis/critical thinking 81% (n = 13); technology/social media/coding/multimedia 75% (n = 12).

One of the top-ranked journalism programs, according to collegefactual.com [56] was the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University (ranked #8). At George Washington University, journalism is a major within a department, but it is not a school unto itself. As such, journalism is folded into the liberal arts sequence. Frank Sesno, Director of the School of Media and Public Affairs, approached the question of needed skills for a journalism student from this perspective.

Students should have the skills that a liberal arts education teaches: Analysis, synthesis, critical thinking. They should be able to navigate their way through a changing media marketplace. Clearly, there are other skills that are easily definable. They need to be great communicators so they can connect with sources and they need to be good information gatherers. And good writers, that should be first and foremost. I don't care what medium you're in, you have to be able to write. –Frank Sesno, Director of the School of Media and Public Affairs, George Washington University

Sesno said that critical skills like ethics should be ingrained from the start and part of the DNA of every professional, responsible journalist. Furthermore, journalism entrepreneurship is also an important intangible skill, and learning the business side of journalism in particular is part of a well-rounded liberal arts education. Additionally, Sesno stressed the twin skills of interviewing and listening as canons of a George Washington University journalism education. Listening and communicating what one hears is a fundamental part of being in media and public affairs, he said, yet it has become something of a lost art that must be revived. "At a time of such polarization in our country, journalism is under attack and we're being defined by identity politics. Listening becomes something that reporters should be very thoughtful about." Sesno said that the research skills that are imparted to journalism students – and by association, the research skills that are held by the faculty of those journalism schools – can not only help professionals in the newspaper industry, but in the entire media industry. However, those skills are brought to bear

in journalism school, and then honed over time.

At the University of Colorado, Boulder, the School of Journalism and Mass Communication was shuttered in 2015 in order to pave the way for the College of Media, Communication and Information. The University of Colorado, Boulder, maintains its ACEJMC accreditation status and its department, according to Chair Dr. Elizabeth Skewes, allows for journalism students to be exposed to other media platforms before they graduate. However, at the core of a CICU education are basic journalism fundamentals.

There's a lot of push in journalism schools now to make sure that upon graduation, the kids are walk-in-the-door ready with all kinds of technology skills. Those are important, but fundamental reporting skills and curiosity are still at the top of the list. Technology is secondary. Too many schools think that students need to learn everything about technology and I don't think so. Having multiple skills – just one of them – editing and something else so you can say: "I do that, too," that's enough. I don't think you need to know everything. – Dr. Elizabeth Skewes, Chair of the College of Media, Communication and Information, University of Colorado, Boulder

One of the higher-ranked journalism departments, California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly, #19), takes an opposing view as it pertains to technology as part of the curriculum. Professor Mary Glick is the chair of the journalism department in the College of Liberal Arts at Cal Poly. She agreed, along with the other 15 journalism academic administrators, that basic writing and reporting skills are paramount in a journalism education. However, she said that in this day and age, technology skills are principal for a journalism student to have, both from a scholarly perspective, and from the perspective of attracting would-be employers. To that end, Glick said that it is not simply enough to know the theoretical concepts of technology and their applications, but journalism graduates in 2020 should know how to implement contemporary technological advancements into the craft of writing and reporting.

As far as skills go, I think students need to be able to tell stories in whatever way audiences are prepared to receive them. Students need to be agile with changing technological skills. They need to learn video explainers, the kinds of things that digital native sites would employ. ... Technologies and abilities within those technologies depend on what's coming down the pike. For instance, we are looking at drones for storytelling, we're experiment with 3-D or virtual reality storytelling; we're looking at what is being used in society now and how our students can move the industry forward. ... We're trying to incorporate technology into various classes we already teach in order to stay ahead of the curve. – Professor Mary Glick, Journalism Department Chair, California Polytechnic State University

- RQ 2: What is an academic administrator's definition of a successful college career?

The majority of journalism academic administrators interviewed said internships/externships/experiential learning

(n = 15), or 94% were the most important. Moreover, 81% (n = 13) added the term "clips" to the definition of a successful academic career in journalism, derived by the experiential learning criteria. Only one academic administrator replied that a student's GPA was the most important element of his or her academic career, and none of the respondents said extracurricular activities/campus involvement (explained to those who asked for a qualifier as student government, student clubs, fraternity/sorority life, athletics, or any additional outside interests that were not required for their degree). When asked to determine the second place finisher, GPA tracked slightly higher with eight respondents.

Of the 94% of journalism academic administrators who said that internships/externships/experiential learning was the defining element of a successful journalism career, 73% (n = 11 out of 15 respondents) said that they would consider involvement in the student newspaper to fulfill this criterion.

Another metric worth noting is that although 94% of academic administrators responding said that internships/externships/experiential learning is the most important condition of a successful journalism career, only three of the programs represented by interviewed academic administrators make an internship/externship/experiential learning course mandatory for graduation. The rest of the programs encourage students to have at least one internship by the time they graduate, but they can graduate without one.

Dean Ann Brill from the William Allen White School of Journalism & Mass Communication at the University of Kansas said that legacy newspaper hiring editors frequently inquire about KU students that have clips and experience. The University of Kansas William Allen White School of Journalism & Mass Communication is one of the few programs represented in the study that requires an internship to graduate, and they are similarly one of the few programs that offer a course for writing and editing for the student newspaper, *The University Daily Kansan*, for credit. Dean Brill said that experience and clips are necessary for students to not only operate effectively in their first newspaper job out of college, but the clips one generates while working a beat are invaluable, so much so that even though the student newspaper offers one such option to achieve academic credit, most KU journalism students voluntarily pursue at least one additional internship.

Newspaper hiring editors are coming here looking for students with as much experience as possible. Most of our students have two internships by the time they graduate. Newspaper editors don't have a whole lot of time to gradually teach students how to do their job. Newsrooms aren't that big anymore. The main questions editors are asking of new hires are: Where have you worked, and what can you do? Can you cover a story? ... It's not a requirement [at KU] to do two internships. We post 500 jobs and internships, and not just in news media. We also benefit from our proximity to major local papers in Topeka or Kansas City. – Dean Ann Brill, William Allen White School of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Kansas

In Athens, Georgia, Dean Charles N. Davis from the

University of Georgia's Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication addressed the question of prioritizing grades, internships/externships/experiential learning, and extracurricular activities by recognizing that a high GPA does not necessarily define a successful journalism education. He pointed to the fact that the Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication has long had a reputation for producing students that are walk-in ready for their first newspaper and broadcast jobs out of college, though he said that it is only within the last five to seven years that Grady changed the curriculum so that graduates are walk-in ready for positions across a wide array of media disciplines. He attributed a change in curriculum and the knocking down of silos so that Grady graduates are comfortable working in "Journalism with a capital J," meaning any field of journalism and not a specialized track like news/editorial, broadcast, public relations, or advertising. It all starts with experiential learning, he said, and the intangible quality of adaptability that internships and externships foster. However, Dean Davis recognized that internships and externships are but a component of a successful journalism education. He said Grady's curriculum harnesses the skills and competencies one gains from an internship/externship and incorporates them in the classroom.

The most important skill a student can learn in journalism school is the ability to adapt well enough to be able to say "yes" to whatever they are asked to do. That means print, broadcast, and digital. We're trying to train digital athletes. Digital Swiss Army Knives. We're training students to have enough chops in enough areas to be comfortable saying "yes." In order for that to be the case, the curriculum has to be experiential at its heart. We worked really hard on all of our reporting, editing, and video production courses to make sure that everything is hands-on. ... I'd put grades way down on the list [of a successful academic journalism experience]. It's the experiences and the hands-on experiential learning that is not just important, but critical in journalism education. That way, the academic enterprise begins to look a lot like the out-of-classroom enterprise. You can get a lot of hands-on experience in our classrooms. – Dean Charles N. Davis, Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Georgia.

Worth noting is that the Grady College at Georgia was one of the first to scuttle the decades-old journalism education silo model, which was when a student declared a concentration once admitted to the school: news/editorial, broadcast (radio or TV) [45], [49], and in schools that had them, advertising or strategic communications. According to Dean Davis, Georgia's response to the Internet-disrupted media landscape was to do away with concentrations, or "silos" and requires that students take courses across multiple media platforms. Many other journalism programs at correspondingly large R1 universities followed Georgia's lead.

- RQ 3: What are some distinguishing characteristics of your journalism school/program?

The 16 academic administrators interviewed pointed to varying characteristics that distinguish their programs from

other journalism schools and departments. There were few detectable patterns among the schools. Descriptors used to define a university's program or a department's distinguishing impact on a journalism student were "experience" (n = 12), "opportunities" (n = 10), "learning" or "learning laboratory" (n = 7), "empowering" (n = 4), "real" (n = 3), and two administrators said their journalism programs are most well-known for "data journalism" and "coding" (n = 2), and one administrator said "winning" (n = 1). (Administrators were allowed to list as many descriptors as they wanted.)

In the Midwest, a program that boasts a 100% hiring rate of journalism students within six months of graduation since 2012 (with the lone exception being 2013, when there was a 99% hiring rate) is the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. That number bucks the national average of students who are hired directly out of college to do jobs that require a bachelor degree, which averages only 53% 9560. Moreover, Dean Kathleen Richardson said she can sit in her office with a prospective student and his or her parents and guarantee that student an internship while enrolled at Drake. That, she said, is as much a trademark of the Drake University School of Journalism and Mass Communication degree as is Drake's commitment to social media and technology reporting classes.

There are a lot of media in Des Moines so 100 percent of our students get internships, and in that way, we get feedback on how they're progressing with their education. Literally all of them get internships. We have more internships than we have students. We have a very close relationship with Meredith Corporation, the big magazine company here, and the students have an opportunity to be over there for 20 hours a week. I think that is the most extensive relationship where we have intense feedback. ... I feel we're a couple of steps ahead of what the industry is doing. Five years ago, when we redid our curriculum, instead of having the students in their silos, we got them all together and they all now work on multimedia websites and work on stories around the Midwest so a story will have a videographer and a photographer and a writer. That's not unusual in the industry, but it is in academia. In some respect, we're doing things that the average community newspaper doesn't have the time or the resources to do. That, in turn, makes us unique. – Dean Kathleen Richardson, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Drake University

Another unique feature of Drake's program is that students are prepared to do any entry level job in journalism by the time they graduate, and they are taught to think critically about the jobs that do not exist yet. "Here's my little elevator pitch for students interested in journalism: The job that they will get when they graduate probably doesn't exist now," Richardson said. "I hear that the newspaper industry is kind of in survivalist mode. Parents want my reassurance that I'm giving their child the skills necessary to be successful in life and in journalism."

Another program that identifies itself with data journalism and coding is the College of Media at the University of Illinois. Professor Brant Houston serves as the chair in investigative and

enterprise reporting at University of Illinois and said that there has never been a higher demand for students with computer assisted reporting and data skills as there is right now. Houston, who spearheaded Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) for over a decade, said that he often receives calls from newsrooms looking for people with those skills. He said that although the first request of hiring editors recruiting recent graduates is for sound writing and reporting skills, the second most asked question is: What data skills do they have [22], [36]? That question is followed by a series of other questions: Can they move around the web? Can they design webpages? Do they know social media? Can they code? Houston said that he has advice for academic administrators that he believes will help them make journalism students marketable upon graduation, like some of the students from the University of Illinois [51]. "If you want to produce a sound student to get into journalism at a higher level quickly, they need to know not only how to do stories, but how to do distribution; they have to have basic data analysis skills and understand a bit of coding – enough to do things like web scraping and cleaning of data. They can specialize in more but they should understand the basics of data visualization."

- RQ 4: Why is a journalism degree valuable for a recent college graduate?

All academic administrators (n = 16) said that journalism does still have a place in college and university education. The various terms and expressions they used to qualify why journalism was still a viable major or concentration were "truth" or "honesty" or "integrity" or "free press" at 100%; "communication" or "communication skills" or "writing skills" or "verbal skills" at 88% (n = 14).

Two administrators provided answers that were decidedly different than those of the other administrators but worth noting. One administrator from a school with a journalism concentration within a larger department said he believes journalism skills are valuable but does not believe actual journalism schools are necessary. Another administrator said that a journalism degree is relevant because the critical thinking it teaches is a way of training students how to be self-employed and not beholden to a corporation for a career.

Dr. Debora Wenger is an assistant dean in the School of Journalism and New Media at the University of Mississippi. Her research specialization is journalism in the digital world and media management. She said in addition to writing and communication skills, transformational skills a student learns in journalism school make the degree a practical one for when they enter the profession.

Students self-select. So to answer this question, I'll say that I think based on foundational and transformational skills, foundational skills are still valued in the profession and we believe that they're critical. They are a major part of the experience. Writing nearly always bubbles up to the top of the list whether you're talking to editors or educators. What frustrates me is that writing is way more diverse and nuanced than ever before. When you say "writing," people know what they're thinking of writing to mean: writing for print or writing for online or writing for

broadcast, but they may not all be defining it in the same way. ... Here at the University of Mississippi, we require our students to learn how to take photographs and to produce video, so those transformational skills are important and data skills are emerging as valuable. We're seeing in job postings in legacy newspaper companies that they're looking for those transformational skills on top of the writing, reporting, and research skills ... all of which make a journalism degree have value. – Assistant Dean Dr. Debora Wenger, School of Journalism and New Media, University of Mississippi

At Texas Christian University's Bob Schieffer College of Communication, Journalism Chair Dr. Uche Onyebadi said he understands why journalism schools' and journalism degrees' practicability have been questioned in recent years. TCU's Schieffer College of Communication adapted in kind, and Dr. Onyebadi introduced a new curriculum in 2017 that incorporates a capstone called the Signature Learning Activity [35]. This activity, he said, adds value to a journalism degree because it allows students to have interaction with alumni peers and undergo a peer review while still enrolled, which in turn leads to internships and jobs. In that regard, he said, a journalism degree offers practical experience but also leads to valuable industry connections [44], [50].

"With this degree, you don't have to be a prisoner to a job and you don't have to send out 500 applications when you graduate," said Journalism Chair Dr. Uche Onyebadi from the Bob Schieffer College of Communication at Texas Christian University.

- Other interview findings: lack of academy/industry communication

Academic administrators believe that there is a lack of communication between them and legacy newspaper hiring editors in regards to the academy extending or adapting curriculum around industry wants and needs. Of the 16 academic administrators in journalism schools and programs interviewed for this research, 94% (n = 15) said there is a disconnect, either real or perceived. 50% of administrators (n = 8) said that the conversations they have with legacy newspaper hiring editors are centered around particular recruits or general questions about the aptitudes of students who are about to graduate. 50% of the academic administrators (n = 8) made comments to the effect that legacy newspaper hiring editors do not believe the academy can help them with their readership and circulation numbers. All administrators interviewed (n = 16) said that the newspaper industry is in "trouble" or is "struggling" or is "dying", despite some newspapers showing circulation gains and increased readership. One dean made a singular point that even though journalism schools on the micro level and universities on the macro level are inclined to be the perfect environment for legacy newspaper hiring editors to run experiments on what they can do to attract readers in the coveted 18-to-34-year-old demographic, the fact that they do not is a missed opportunity [30], [44]. One administrator said that the academy is too slow to change and adapt, which is why legacy newspaper hiring editors, forced to change on the fly since the internet revolution, do not have time to wait for the

academy to research and publish findings or initiatives [43], [52].

There are a couple of things that academia brings to a dialogue with newspaper editors: 1) The audience we're working with is the audience these media companies need to be able to reach in order to increase their circulation; 2) We're already set up to test things. We can run experiments to realize what works and why it works. That ongoing dialogue is necessary but for whatever reason, it is challenging. I don't think the relationship will be fixed in a couple meeting before a conference or by getting a small group of big wigs and academics together for a dinner in New York. It has to be more systematic than that so we can find academic professional partnerships. – Dean Scott Titsworth, E. W. Scripps School of Journalism, Ohio University

## VI. DISCUSSION

This semi-structured qualitative interviewing format yielded some patterns that explain what academic administrators view as the benchmarks of a quality journalism education [32].

Administrators from the various colleges and universities who participated in this research indicated that the following terms were of the highest priority for a journalism student to learn: ethics/values/communications law 100% (n = 16); news skills/writing/reporting 100% (n = 16); curiosity/analysis/synthesis/critical thinking 81% (n = 13); technology/social media/coding/multimedia 75% (n = 12). The majority of journalism academic administrators interviewed said internships/externships/experiential learning (n = 15), or 94% were the most important element of a journalism education as it pertains to attracting employment opportunities upon graduation. Of those 15 academic administrators, 73% said that they would consider involvement in the student newspaper to fulfill the internship and clip criteria. In addition, 81% (n = 13) used the term "clips" to describe a successful academic career in journalism. One academic administrator replied that a student's GPA was the most important element of his or her academic career, and none of the respondents said extracurricular activities/campus involvement.

Descriptors used by academic administrators to define a university's program or a department's distinguishing impact on a journalism student were "experience" (n = 12), "opportunities" (n = 10), "learning" or "learning laboratory" (n = 7), "empowering" (n = 4), "real" (n = 3), and two administrators said their journalism programs are renowned for "data journalism" and "coding" (n = 2). One administrator said "winning" was the distinguishing impact on recent graduates (n = 1).

The various terms and expressions academic administrators used to qualify why journalism was still a viable major or concentration were "truth" or "honesty" or "integrity" or "free press" at 100%; "communication" or "communication skills" or "writing skills" or "verbal skills" at 88% (n = 14).

94% (n = 15) of academic administrators said there is a disconnect, either real or perceived, between the academy and the newspaper industry. 50% of administrators (n = 8) said that

the conversations they have with legacy newspaper hiring editors are centered around particular recruits or general questions about the students' aptitudes who are about to graduate. 50% of the academic administrators (n = 8) made comments to the effect that legacy newspaper hiring editors do not believe the academy can help them with their readership, business model and/or circulation numbers. All administrators interviewed (n = 16) said that the newspaper industry is in "trouble" or is "struggling" or is "dying".

## VII. LIMITATIONS

Although saturation was met in these in-depth qualitative interviews, and recognizing that the data set is small relative to the number of journalism schools in the United States, the researcher endeavored to provide thick description. Thick descriptions are deep, dense, and detailed accounts that produce the feeling for readers that they have experienced the events being described [20], [52], [42]. Therefore, considering the broad audience for this research consists of journalism practitioners and journalism educators, through thick description, credibility has been established through a narrative account of the situation facing academic administrators.

Finally, a distinct group mentioned throughout this study, but a group that was not studied, is the collective group of recent journalism school graduates. This is an obvious group for future research, as both quantitative and qualitative research can help triangulate whether the strategies and synergies of legacy newspaper hiring editors and academic administrators are affecting this new group of future career newspaper journalists.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Among the various findings of this research, a principal outcome was uncovered. Regardless of which skills academic administrators believe are most important, all of the results point to overriding (and now empirical) data that suggest that there is a communication disconnect on the part of legacy newspaper hiring editors and journalism academic administrators. Responses from academic administrators say that newspaper editors have failed to reach out. It is time for a longitudinal and sustainable dialogue, certainly among the journalism programs that track the best in the eyes of newspaper practitioners, and also for journalism programs and their city's local and regional publications. Journalism schools are seeing increased enrollment. Taken together, for the newspapers and journalism schools that partner together, there is tremendous potential to become go-to sources of news and information for readers, while allowing students to learn in a working laboratory.

This research contributes to the advancement of science because it monitors the rate of change and the speed in which it is occurring for the academy [21], [23]. This research also pinpoints actual skills that the newspaper industry can expect from recent journalism school graduates at this particular moment in time. Principally, this research broadcasts the disconnect between legacy newspaper hiring editors and journalism academic administrators for the first time, thereby



transforming the perception into reality.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Adams, J. W. (2008). Industry guidance could help J-programs prepare print majors for convergence. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 29, 81-88.
- [2] Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 211-36.
- [3] Anderson, N. (2018). A Trump effect at journalism schools? Colleges see a surge in admissions. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/a-trump-effect-at-journalism-schools-colleges-see-a-surge-in-admissions/2018/09/16/18497156-b2b2-11e8-a20b-5f4f84429666\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.38a22031fef8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/a-trump-effect-at-journalism-schools-colleges-see-a-surge-in-admissions/2018/09/16/18497156-b2b2-11e8-a20b-5f4f84429666_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.38a22031fef8)
- [4] Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(4), 297-308.
- [5] Baran, S. J. & David, D.K. (2012). *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, ferment, and future*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth
- [6] Blom, R., Bowe, B. J., & Davenport, L. D. (2018). Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications Accreditation: Quality or Compliance?. *Journalism Studies*, 1-14.
- [7] Blom, R. & Davenport, L. D. (2012) Searching for the core of journalism education: Program directors disagree on curriculum priorities. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 67(1): 70–86.
- [8] Blom, R., Davenport, L. D., & Bowe, B. J. (2012). Reputation Cycles: The Value of Accreditation for Undergraduate Journalism Programs. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 67(4): 392–406.
- [9] Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). Conducting in-depth interviews: A guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input. Retrieved from [http://dme4peace.org/sites/default/files/Boyce\\_In%20Depth%20Interviews.pdf](http://dme4peace.org/sites/default/files/Boyce_In%20Depth%20Interviews.pdf)
- [10] Bunce, M. (2017). Management and resistance in the digital newsroom. *Journalism*, 1-30. Retrieved from <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/16440/1/Management%2520and%2520resistance%2520in%2520the%2520digital%2520newsroom.pdf>
- [11] Carpenter, S. (2009). An application of the theory of expertise: Teaching broad and skill knowledge areas to prepare journalists for change. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 64(3), 287-304.
- [12] Castaneda, L., Murphy, S., & Hether, H. J. (2005). Teaching print, broadcast, and online journalism concurrently: A case study assessing a convergence curriculum. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 20(1), 57–70.
- [13] Chandra, A., & Kaiser, U. (2015). Newspapers and magazines. In *Handbook of Media Economics* (Vol. 1, pp. 397-444). North-Holland.
- [14] Chan-Olmsted, S. (2006). A primer in strategic management for media firms. In S. Chan-Olmsted (Eds.), *Competitive Strategy for Media Firms* (pp. 13-37). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- [15] Christensen, C. M., Skok, D., & Allworth, J. (2012). Breaking news: Mastering the art of disruptive innovation in journalism. *Nieman Reports*, 66(3), 5–20.
- [16] Claussen, D. (2009). How one would really “blow up” a J-school curriculum. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 64(9), 133-136.
- [17] Claussen, D. S. (2016). Book Review: Content is King: News Media Management in the Digital Age by Gary Graham, Anita Greenhill, Donald Shaw, and Chris J. Vargo, eds. Retrieved from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1077699016670908g>
- [18] Cohen, N. S. (2015). Entrepreneurial journalism and the precarious state of media work. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 114(3), 513-533.
- [19] Creech, B., & Nadler, A. M. (2018). Post-industrial fog: Reconsidering innovation in visions of journalism’s future. *Journalism*, 19(2), 182-199.
- [20] Creswell, J. & Miller, D. (2000). Determining validity and qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 125-130.
- [21] Cullen, T. (2014). News editors evaluate journalism courses and graduate employability. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 24(2), 209-224.
- [22] Dickson, T., & Brandon, W. (2000). The gap between educators and professional journalists. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 55(3), 50-67.
- [23] Dickson, T., & Brandon, W. (2000). Media criticisms of US journalism education: Unwarranted, contradictory. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 1(8), 42-58.
- [24] Donsbach, W. (2014). Journalism as the new knowledge profession and consequences for journalism education. *Journalism*, 15(6), 661-677.
- [25] Ekdale, B., Singer, J. B., Tully, M., & Harmsen, S. (2015). Making change: Diffusion of technological, relational, and cultural innovation in the newsroom. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 92(4), 938-958.
- [26] Fuchs, C. (2017). *Social media: A critical introduction*. London: Sage.
- [27] Gade, P. J. (2004). Newspapers and organizational development: Management and journalist perceptions of newsroom cultural change. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 6(1), 3-55.
- [28] Gade, P. J., & Lowrey, W. (2011). Reshaping the journalistic culture. In W. Lowrey., &
- [29] P. J. Gade (Eds.), *Changing the news: Forces shaping journalism in uncertain times* (pp. 22-42). New York, NY: Routledge.
- [30] Giles, B. (2007). Plowing new ground in journalism education. *Nieman Reports*, 61(3), 3-47
- [31] Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- [32] Goodman, R. S., & Steyn, E. (2017) *Global Journalism Education in the 21st Century: Challenges and Innovations*. Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved from <http://knightcenter.utexas.edu/books/GlobalJournalism.pdf>
- [33] Harris, T. (2015). Grounded theory. *Nursing Standard*, 29, 32-39
- [34] Huang, E., Davison, K., Shreve, S., Davis, T., Bettendorf, E., & Nair, A. (2006). Bridging newsrooms and classrooms: Preparing the next generation of journalists for converged media. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 8, 221-262.
- [35] Kuban, A. J. (2014). Journalism educators, their students, and local media practitioners: A case study exploration. *Journal of Case Studies in Education*, 6(1), 1-19.
- [36] Lacy, S., Stamm, M., & Martin, H. (2014). Short-run decisions threaten papers’ long-run viability. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 35(4), 6-20.
- [37] Lepre, C., & Bleske, G. L. (2005). Little common ground for magazine editors and professors surveyed on journalism curriculum. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 60(2), 190-200.
- [38] Lowrey, W., Daniels, G. L., & Becker, L. B. (2005). Predictors of convergence curricula in journalism and mass communication programs. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 60(1), 32–46.
- [39] Lin, M. (2012). Multimedia journalism and social media journalism: A journalism instructor’s observation and thoughts. Retrieved from <http://mulinblog.wordpress.com>
- [40] Lynch, D. (2015, February 19). *Above & beyond: Looking at the future of journalism education*. Retrieved from <https://www.knightfoundation.org/features/journalism-education>
- [41] Mattern, J. L. (2003). Developing a well-worn path between classroom and workplace through managed experiential learning. *North Dakota Journal of Speech & Theatre*, 16, 30-34.
- [42] Newton, E., Bell, C., Ross, B., Philipps, M., Shoemaker, L., & Haas, D. (2012). An open letter to America’s university presidents. *Knight Foundation*. Retrieved from <https://knightfoundation.org/articles/open-letter-americas-university-presidents>
- [43] Picard, R. G. (2004). Commercialism and newspaper quality. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 25(1), 54-65.
- [44] Price, J. (2012). Journalism education versus profession: Who has lost touch? Retrieved from <file:///Users/apitluk/Downloads/TLForum2014IndustryneedsandtertiaryjournalismeducationViewsfromnewseditorscopy.pdf>
- [45] Russial, J. (2009). Growth of multimedia not extensive at newspapers. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 30(3), 58-74.
- [46] Schudson, M. (1981). *Discovering the news: A social history of American newspapers*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- [47] Sendén, M. G., Lindholm, T., & Sikström, S. (2014). Biases in news media as reflected by personal pronouns in evaluative contexts. *Social Psychology*, 45(2), 103-157.
- [48] Singer, J. B. (2011). Journalism and digital technologies. In W. Lowrey., & P. J. Gade (Eds.), *Changing the news: Forces shaping journalism in uncertain times*. (pp. 214-229). New York, NY: Routledge.
- [49] Sridhar, S., & Sriram, S. (2015). Is online newspaper advertising cannibalizing print advertising?. *Quantitative Marketing and Economics*, 13(4), 283-318.
- [50] Tandoc, E. C., & Jenkins, J. (2017). The Buzzfeedification of journalism? How traditional news organizations are talking about a new entrant to the journalistic field will surprise you!. *Journalism*, 18(4), 482-500.
- [51] Tufekci, Z. (2008). Can you see me now? Audience and disclosure regulation in online social network sites. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 28(1), 20-36.
- [52] Underwood, D. (1995). *When MBAs rule the newsroom*. New York, NY:

Columbia University Press.

- [53] Wenger, D., Owens, L., & Thompson, P. (2014). Help wanted mobile journalism skills required by Top U.S. news companies. *Electronic News*, 8(2), 138-149.
- [54] Wenger, D. H., Owens, L. C., & Cain, J. (2018). Help wanted: Realignment journalism education to meet the needs of Top U.S. news companies. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 73(1), 18-36.
- [55] Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing: Biographic narrative and semi-structured methods*. London: Sage.