

A UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA JOURNALISM EDUCATION:
A SURVEY OF TEN GRADUATES OF
THE CLASS OF 1982

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in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for a
Master of Arts, Journalism
April 20, 1987

To the dedicated faculty of the University of Arizona journalism
department and all its future students.

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

An education is not a diploma on a wall or a couple of letters placed before or after a name. It is not taken and set aside as separate from the rest of life, as in "When I get out of school, I'm going to start my life." This sounds as if getting an education is a worthless exercise; mere toil for the young until they are of working age. An education is the foundation not only for a career, but for many aspects of life. Since education cannot be accepted in a void, it should not be given in a void. Students should not be sent out the door on graduation day to the strains of "Pomp and Circumstance" and promptly forgotten. The education given should serve them well in life, but it is difficult to tell if they have not been asked.

It is not certain if the graduates of the University of Arizona journalism program have been surveyed before. In the interest of keeping information recent, ten members of the class of 1982 have been surveyed to evaluate their education and how it is serving them today, five years later.

The debate rages as to what kind of education they should have received in the first place. Two of the graduates said there should be no journalism degree, but a general studies degree with courses in newswriting (5 & 7). One graduate said the program was so skills oriented that it verged on a vocational school (10). In education circles, cries of "trade school" and "they can write but know nothing of the world and cannot think" mix with "ivory tower" and "they know journalism theory but can't construct a lead."

This paper will set forth the views of the graduates and educators and attempt to draw conclusions based on their comments.

SECTION TWO: VIEWS ON JOURNALISM EDUCATION

Journalism education has evolved over the past century from a copy boy breaking into the business after being sent out to cover the big fire to master's and doctorate degree programs at state universities. It is still debated which method is better: journalism school or "OJT," on-the-job training. "A college degree is virtually required for an editorial position in the news media (22, p. 10)." This section will display opinions, spanning 45 years, of the education needed to be a good journalist and as well as what education journalism schools should be providing.

Before an education begins, the student should have some characteristics of a journalist. In 1941, Professor Curtis MacDougall listed, "inquisitiveness, personality and tact, nerve, integrity, educational background, nose for news, accuracy and speed (p. 16)." "The will to work at tasks that are sometimes frustrating and often rewarding," said John Hohenberg in 1973 (p. 11).

Educational background is not a personality trait yet is listed as a characteristic of a journalist. What kind of education should a journalist have? Roy Fisher, journalism professor at University of Missouri, states:

When I took newswriting at Kansas State University some 40 years ago, I learned that a news story has four W's--who, what, when and where. Now, we've added a W for why and an H for how. That's the beginning of a discipline (19, p. 6).

In his 1981 text, Hodgson states that journalists are trained to interpret for their readers the whys and hows of stories (p. 14). Writing skills are not enough to do the job. Reporters must be educated in a broad sense (22, p. 9). Journalism is not considered a profession because there is no training in:

A specifically organized body of knowledge as a pre-requisite to journalism as distinguished from a general liberal arts education. Special skills and techniques are learned on the job rather than in professional schools such as law or medicine (16, p. 530).

"What more people should realize is that a journalism education is a liberal arts education with something more added," said Gerald M. Sass, personnel director for Gannett Newspapers (22, p. 11). A journalism program is a "sampler of life in the communications world," said Everette Dennis, of the Gannett Center for Media Studies (19, p. 55). But it is essential that the student should have a strong emphasis in science, the languages, humanities, social sciences and the arts, Dennis said (19, p. 55). M.L. Stein, professor, California State University, Long Beach, calls a getting a journalism education an advantage because one learns "the skills and techniques of writing and

editing and getting a sound liberal arts education at the same time (p. 11)."

The students evidently do not realize what a bargain they are forgoing. Professor Patten once observed that his department at the University of Arizona seemed to always have a group of what he called "serious young journalists" who preferred journalism coursework and working on the school newspaper to the exclusion of all other classes. MacDougall observed this phenomenon in 1941:

The traditional liberal arts argument for a broad base of fundamental general education is an adult argument. It's the way grownups see it, looking back. It has little appeal for the eager youngster anxious to get at the work of his choice (p. 558).

The lack of appeal in a liberal arts education is manifested in student performance. Paul A. Atkins, a journalism professor, states that editors he surveyed think graduates are not well-informed about current events, general knowledge or geography (p. 12). Paul F. Parsons, also a professor, says journalism classes cannot make up for missed classes in liberal arts, but professors should try (18, p. 14). Parsons and Atkins urge journalism departments to add a current events course or work current events into subject matter whenever possible. "A professional program in journalism is part training, part education, and both parts are essential to the whole. The trick is to strike a happy balance between the two parts (19, p. 4)."

A component of many journalism programs is the academic or theory course offerings in mass media and society, communications and the law, ethics, history of journalism in America, and communications theory and method. These courses are designed to outline the evolution of journalism and its role in American society "Ethics shouldn't be intuitive or off-the-cuff. Students should think about the logic and the trade-offs (19, p. 7)." A basis for ethical standards can be taught. If the mechanics are taught without the theory, "we are divorcing ourselves from the university itself and drifting into a narrow vocationalism (18, p. 4)." "The 'trade school' label that some persons slap on J-schools is undeserved (22, p. 11)." At most universities, journalism classes are only 25 percent of degree credits; the rest are liberal arts. But there are complaints of the ivory tower syndrome.

Students get plenty of theory and experience covering fraternity parties. They are not prepared to cover day-to-day governmental and or political activities. By and large they, can't spell worth a damn. Can't or won't open a dictionary. They should learn the ABC's of the profession and to hell with all the theory and advocacy bull (11, p. 37).

Parsons supports the theory as well as the practice of journalism. He states that the core of journalism is writing and clarity; logic and grace are essential (p. 4). Henry Justin Smith, Chicago Daily News, gave these three tips early in the century.

1. Write! Write all the time, any kind of stuff. Never give the pen a rest. Later, try to get on the re-write desk of a paper, with some terrible go-getter shooting names and addresses at you and the edition just going to press. 2. Hang around the fellows who know how to write. 3. Read everything that interests you (17, p. 523).

"A sure grasp of the English language, the basic tool of journalism," is another requirement, said Stein, in 1979 (p. 16). He defends journalism schools, saying that they produce most of the men and women working in the mass media today. Editors prefer this system because they do not have training facilities and are forced to depend on journalism schools to give them graduates who are ready to work. Sharon M. Murphy, dean of Marquette University's College of Journalism, said in 1986 that journalism schools are "turning out a number of well-trained and skilled graduates (21, p. 10)." But there are still complaints:

There is little culling for obviously unqualified and inept persons who will never make the grade. Don't force working editors to cull them out after accepting their diplomas as proof of knowledge. Colleges would much better serve the journalism profession by weeding out the chaff (11, p. 37).

If newspapers are getting bad graduates, Murphy replies, "perhaps the hiring is not done as wisely as it ought to be (21, p. 10)."

To summarize, there seems to be a basic personality type suited to journalism, and the editors wish those who are unsuited to be weeded out at the undergraduate level. In addition, they expect a journalism education to turn out graduates who can write above all, and have a basic grounding in liberal arts, whether

the students want it or not. The question is are journalism schools achieving this end? Is there too much theory or too much vocational training? It is difficult to judge, there are strong opinions on each side. MacDougall asked the same question 46 years ago. "Will the newspapermen of tomorrow be jack-of-all-trades or specialist? (p. 521)" Dr. John H. Findley, editor of the New York Times in the early part of the century, mourned the demise of the all-round expert and thought colleges should produce:

All-round men and women prepared at the opening of King Tut's tomb, who know the World Series champions and the presidential election returns of the last ten years, who can do plane geometry and understand the Theory of Relativity (16, p. 521).

"Journalists and journalism schools will have to find a way to close the gap between academe and the profession (12, p. 13)." MacDougall urged working journalists to support the schools.

They need the kind of support now that sticks through thick and thin, the kind that sees beyond temporary or immediate or local shortcomings to a system of training and education fully the equal of any system ever known (p. 570).

The University of Arizona Journalism Department

The goals of a journalism education at the University of Arizona are formally expressed in the course catalog the class of 1982 entered under, Journalism, The University of Arizona Record, 1977-1978, 1978-1979.

The study of journalism is designed to help the student develop an objective respect for ideas and to keep an open mind. Toward this end, the department offers instruction in the basic newsgathering and writing skills necessary to begin a news career, plus instruction aimed at giving the student an overall sense of the various media and their roles in society (p. 258).

The department also "strongly advise(d)" students to minor or double major in economics, English, writing or literature, history, politics, a modern language, anthropology, psychology or sociology. Those who did not major or minor in English are required to take nine additional hours of English writing or literature in addition to freshman composition courses (p. 259).

SECTION THREE: HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

To devise the survey questionnaire, consideration was given to what information graduates of five years ago could convey that would be of value to the journalism department now and in the future. A list of questions was drawn up and discussed with Professor Patten. They evolved into the survey below.

1. Why did you enter the University of Arizona and the journalism program?

2. In what case did the journalism department or the University live up to your expectations or not live up to your expectations?

3. What were you required to learn that is useless now? Worthwhile now?

4. Please discuss your perspective on journalism skills classes compared with general liberal arts classes. What do you rely on daily? Were you prepared for ethical problems?

5. What were you prepared for and not prepared for when you graduated?

6. What would you change to improve the quality of education at the University of Arizona or the department of journalism?

The questions were designed to be open-ended to encourage the graduate to talk at will and generate as many thoughts as possible. The interviewer was silent as much as possible, limiting comments to clarification of the questions, if asked. The urge to mention thoughts from other interviews was also

resisted. This was an attempt to keep each interview purely from the mind of the respondent and not an accumulative thought process from each prior interview.

Ten graduates from the class of 1982 who were still using their education in their everyday work and living in Arizona were chosen as interview subjects. A list of alumni with Arizona addresses was compiled from the alumni files in the journalism department office. The original plan was to find ten graduates working in print journalism in Arizona, but this was impossible. Professor Patten stated the parameters could be changed to include people working in public relations and related fields. He said it was permissible because not every journalism school graduate works on a newspaper. Choices were also limited by geography. The search was limited to Arizona for travel convenience.

Three of the interviews, Emil Venere, Catherine Bergin and Lisa Shover were conducted on the telephone. Unfortunately, this was necessary because four interviews were scheduled in Phoenix for one day, and Bergin and Vernere could not be contacted in time to set an appointment. Venere is difficult to contact and Bergin is often out of town on business. The appointment with Shover was missed because of a misunderstanding in the directions to her office. She had other commitments that day and could not reschedule for later in the day. Using the telephone did not diminish the quality of the interviews but did perhaps cause them

The make-up of the interview group was, therefore:

-Six men and four women

-Six work in the Phoenix area, four in Tucson

-Five working journalists on dailies

Gary Crooks, pagination editor, Phoenix Gazette
John D'Anna, assistant city editor, Tempe Daily News
Simon Fisher, reporter, Tempe Daily News
Cynthia Hubert, medical reporter, Arizona Daily Star, Tucson
Emil Venere, Police reporter, Mesa Tribune

-Five working outside journalism

Two public relations officers
William Fearneyhough, St. Joseph's Hospital, Tucson
Lisa Shover, Pinnacle Peak Land Company, Scottsdale

One marketing and business communications publisher
Alexander Phillip, owns own business, Tucson

One liaison between vision care health plan and optometrists
Catherine Bergin, National Vision Care, Phoenix

One typographer
Cynthia Callahan, University of Arizona, Tucson

-Eight Bachelor of Arts degreeholders

-Two Master of Arts degreeholders

The Master's degree graduates were necessary to make up the required ten subjects and the program consists of the same skills courses that the undergraduate program does.

SECTION FOUR: SURVEY RESULTS

For purposes of clarity and objectivity, the report on survey results will be written in the order the questions were asked.

1. Why did you enter the University of Arizona and the journalism program?

Eight responses indicated the person was in the area at the time he was ready to begin college, usually through family relocation or being a Tucson resident, and deciding to come to the University with no real forethought. However, Shover, public relations director, entered the University of Arizona "primarily because of the journalism department and the academics of the University."

As far as reasons for entering journalism, Hubert wanted a "fun, exciting, exotic career" besides teaching in which to use her English aptitude. Both Filip, in business communications, and Fearneyhough, public information officer, had worked for several years in the information branch of the armed services. "I liked writing and wanted to see if I could make a living at it," said Fisher. D'Anna received the "bait and switch" treatment. He took Journalism 151: News in Mass Communication on the advice of his political science adviser. "He told me it was a good class. He told me it would be easy. Just be sure I did not take Professor Manglesdorf." D'Anna returned at the end of the semester to tell

his adviser about the class. "You were right, it was a good class. But it wasn't easy. I had to work my butt off to get a 'B' from Manglesdorf. I'm changing my major to journalism."

2. In what case did the journalism department or the University live up to your expectations or not live up to your expectations?

In the live up/not live up category for the University: "The University as a whole is very impersonal. I did enjoy it in an academic sense (3)." "I got a good, well-rounded education (10)." One graduate transferred from Arizona State University and was pleased with the academic atmosphere at the University of Arizona (21). "I expected a good job after my education, and I got it (14)." "I learned how to beat the system at the University, how to get by with doing as little as possible (6)." "It's really what you put into it (21)." One graduate had been very active in student government and left the University of Arizona "much more confident and competent. I'm a big fan of the University (2)."

In the live up/not live up category for the journalism department: One graduate stated she had no concept of what to expect. The department taught her everything she knows (14). "All of a sudden I was in there doing it and never expected anything (6)." "I expected to get a chance to get work published. It was an appealing thought to leave with clips (2)." "I've compared my clips to those of other schools. The quality of writing at the University of Arizona is unmatched among the state universities

(21)." "You learn the specifics of writing, the fine points, the basics (25)." "I never wished 'they had taught me this or that'

(10)." One student felt abandoned:

I had more interaction with the professors in the department. But class counseling felt like a factory mill. Not a lot of input and support in delving into what my intrests were. Looking back, it did affect my decision not to go into journalism. At the end of four years I felt my options were pretty limited as a journalist. I thought I could only be a reporter on a daily newspaper (3).

"It is a shame that the radio/television department and the journalism department do not work closely together. The kids learn the how to produce a news show in RTV but have to come over to journalism to learn to write. It's ridiculous (7)." Hubert, Shover and Fisher, said they thought the department should show students other ways to use their education besides daily journalism, including business and public relations. D'Anna disagreed. "Non-serious students (those who do not want reporting as a career) should be weeded out. It can be detected fairly early on and all it does is waste people's time (6)."

3. What were you required to learn that is useless now? Worthwhile now?

In the useless category: "There was not much that was useless. Press and Society was not as relevant as it could be (10)."

"Wasn't there a history class? That was useless, I don't remember a thing about it (3)." Another student vaguely recalled John Peter Zenger but did "understand it was important to know that stuff

(14)." Another graduate, an assistant city editor, had a different view:

We get Northwestern University master's degrees in here all the time who don't have any skills but are great on theory. Columbia, too. They can tell you all about Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon papers and all that crap. They do not have the basic skills and cannot go out and report a story (6).

In the useful category: "It's real tough to say that you spent time in class that was wasted. I think people can waste time in class (9)." "When we get someone from the UA, they may not be the best writer or reporter in the world, but they can sure put the five W's into a coherent organizational framework (6)." "Reporting Public Affairs was frustrating at the time, but it was actually the most valuable. It was the closest to real life journalism experience (14)." "One graduate thought the Associated Press stylebook quizzes were "crazy" but found out every paper uses it (5). "That little nitty-gritty stuff, the earlier you learn you got to do it, it makes the difference whether you get a paycheck or a grade for doing a good job. When it's a paycheck, you learn to dot your i's and cross your t's (9). D'Anna said, "Middle initials are a part of that, it's good discipline and it can't hurt."

Another graduate, reporter on a daily, differed:

The principle of using middle initials is ridiculous. They insist on using every middle initial you come across. It is something you'll never use when you get out. I saw people calling all over five or ten minutes before deadline, freaking out about something that is so unnecessary. So take out the damn middle initial, it's not important (25).

Every graduate made positive comments about working on El Independiente and The Tombstone Epitaph. "It is important and necessary experience (25)."

4. Please discuss your perspective on journalism skills classes compared with general liberal arts classes. What do you rely on daily? Were you prepared for ethical problems?

Journalism writing skills and a liberal arts education "go hand in hand. I use all of it every day. I'm a jack-of-all trades (6)." "One wouldn't be nearly as strong without the other. You would be producing a partial product. Half a way of looking at things (21)." "You have to have a broad background to do well (14)." A daily journalist said that five years as a reporter is like getting a second general studies degree (10). "You could teach a person with a strong liberal arts background to be a reporter better than you could do the opposite with someone who doesn't know what is going on in the world (5)." If an editor does not know what is happening, he does not know when his reporters make mistakes (5). "You have to have liberal arts so you can ask the right questions (14)."

Four graduates said they thought they should have had more useful liberal arts courses. "I wish I had taken some criminal justice studies. That is an area where I felt deficient (10)." "You can graduate from the University of Arizona journalism program without any economics and I think there is something wrong with that (5)." "I was forced to take more business courses because I

was an economics minor. But I could have gotten out without it (2)." "Every story has to do with business or economics (6)." "Students should take some business classes because you never know when you are going to have to manage a group of people (2)."

"The training is geared toward reporting so much it was almost like a vocational school. It is very difficult to train daily reporters along with all of those who might not be interested in newspaper work (10)." But those who did not enter daily journalism still benefitted from their education. "The classes were very, very practical. I know better word usage and grammar (3)." "Journalism taught me how to find out what I didn't know (2)." "It makes you more aware of things (21)." "My education has provided me with a way of never being bored. It makes me more interesting and I enjoy life more (2)."

On the question of ethics: "I can't remember one class on it. Maybe a little bit of libel law (25)." Another graduate thought the department "did a good job (5)." "Ethics classes are black and white. Through education and experience you should know it's not like that (6)." "I don't think you're ever totally prepared until you're confronted with it (14)." "I was amazed to find that the other students did not know there were bad people in the world (9)." "I wasn't prepared. I was a little surprised at the way people really were (2)." The program does not provide a guide for journalists working on small papers, where the reporter is not insulated from the public (10). "Common sense has to be the

overriding guide (6)." "It is a matter of judgment (5)." "I've turned down a full bottle of booze, but I have accepted a drink. You have to choose where you make your stand. You can get silly about it (6)." The program taught Shover "you are so much better off with if you just go with the truth." One graduate said it was difficult to maintain high standards:

When you go out there you believe you have the moral high ground. But people sometimes make mistakes due to deadline pressure. The quality of your work is not what you thought it would be. So many hands in the pot messing with it that you're not going to get out what you think is right. You have to be prepared to make a lot of compromises. In a lot of ways it's a dirty business (10).

5. What were you prepared for and not prepared for when you graduated?

In the prepared category: "I could cover anything (6)." "I was prepared for working with people and communicating effectively (2)." "I was prepared through some of my adverse situations at school to talk to all kinds of people (2)."

In the unprepared category: "I spent the whole first year out of school being mad. I was completely unprepared for the job search (2)." Crooks, a pagination editor, said he went to his first job and could barely lay out a page when his boss assumed he could do so. "When I was on El Independiente, one person did it all the time (6)." He said he made it through the first day and read up on it in a hurry. D'Anna said he was unprepared for the work load being an adjustment from the large blocks of time available during school to finish projects. "How do you prepare to go on an interview? Do you

prepare questions? How much time should be allotted? What types of questions should be asked? Interview skills in general need to be taught (5)." Another graduate said there should be an interviewing skills class (25). "I was not prepared for newsroom politics. I did not understand how newrooms work. The first time someone stole a story out from under me, I was really upset, but did not know what to do (6)."

6. What would you change to improve the quality of education at the University of Arizona or the department of journalism?

Everybody had very individual suggestions, based on their experiences at the University and their careers. Fearneyhough said editorials in the Epitaph should be re-instated along with the Editor-in-Residence program. He counted his editorship in Tombstone as one his most valuable experiences. He lived in Tombstone for an entire semester and was able to follow stories continuously by keeping in closer contact with the residents. He was able to give reporters more valuable leads on new stories instead of the obvious ones that all the students seem to do, he said.

A more extensive internship program was suggested by Filip. He would like to see them in fields other than journalism. He would also like to see a beefed-up independent study program for graduate students. Hubert suggested more classes centered "around guest speakers who have been in the trenches." That would be "much more powerful than reading it out of a book."

Two students mentioned what they called weakness in photojournalism (7 & 24). "It should be mandatory for all journalism students (7)." The lack of layout skills was mentioned also (5 & 7). Bergin said she would have liked an opportunity for more varied reporting in areas such as business and medicine. Fisher said his study tour to England with Professor Chanin was a "trememdous experience."

Part-time professors are "not as rigorous and integrated into the department as full-time professors are (10). Professors should be more excited about journalism:

With some professors, it felt like they were being professors because they were tired of being journalists. When they are excited, it makes you excited at the same time. If they're excited and you're not, maybe you should change careers. Some were bad, no heart and soul into it. Others were tremendous. They would stop and talk more than I wanted to because I might not be prepared. They would push you, and that's good. With others, if you didn't do well, you didn't do well and tough luck. Those kind didn't give me a reason to like journalism (5).

"References from professors mean a lot. I think professors should do more to help students get jobs. They should scour the job market around the country to help (14)." Clips are crucial also (14).

Another graduate mentioned how difficult it is to study journalism if the student does not have a car. He took public transportation for many of his stories and it did not always work well. He said he was constantly missing deadlines (10). "I think they should be warned about the car situation (10)."

SECTION FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

The survey indicated that the ten graduates were satisfied with their University of Arizona education. They felt their education was well-rounded and they use it in their personal life. To improve a bachelor's degree, more courses could be added in business, economics and political science. These courses would enable them to have a more practical background for journalism writing as well as enable them to move into the business world easier if they wished. Their opinions meshed with those of educators who support a liberal arts background. It is interesting to note that the four students who mentioned it did not enjoy learning about the background of their own major in the Press and Society class (2, 3, 6, & 10).

The survey indicated that the journalism department taught strong writing skills. Courses such as Reporting Public Affairs, El Independiente and Tombstone Epitaph serve students well with clips and practical experience in newsgathering and writing. The suggestions called for improving writing skills by spending more time on interview techniques and editing. Photojournalism may need to be suggested more to students as well as layout.

Five students asked for diversification in the department. The focus seems to be on writing, since everyone mentioned that as one thing they definitely learned. Public information is now being offered as a class, so the department is already beginning

to respond to the fact that not all journalism graduates work for daily newspapers. The fact five of the graduates did not remain in print journalism says three things. One, they felt the field was not for them. An assistant city editor said he was very competitive and thought the department should encourage that (6). "The hours are long in journalism and you devote a lot of energy to the job to the exclusion of all else (10). By contrast, a public relations director said she was not that driven to pursue journalism but benefited from her education in it (21). Two, journalists do not get paid very much. Only journalists worry about selling out, said one graduate. "You don't see kids in the business school worrying about that. They want to go out and make some money (10)." Three, it reflects well on their education if they were able to successfully switch to a related field by using their journalism education. This indicates that a journalism education is not just writing a lead. It teaches students to think, write and analyze with clarity and meaning. The trade-school versus liberal arts debate will end when educators and students realize this.

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