Media criticisms of US journalism education: Unwarranted, contradictory

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Media Criticisms of US Journalism Education: Unwarranted, Contradictory

The authors surveyed members of the Newspaper Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and a random sample of daily newspaper editors to determine whether they agreed about the competencies emphasized in U.S. college journalism programs and the types of knowledge and skills that were important for beginning journalists at the end of the 20th century. The authors found the two groups differed significantly about the emphases of college journalism programs but were in considerable agreement about the skills and abilities needed by journalism graduates and the types of knowledge that new journalists need. They also found significant differences among opinions held by both groups for some topics.

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Journalism education in the United States has found itself under attack not only from professional journalists but also from journalism educators themselves as being both unnecessary and a failure. Serafini (1984), for example, asked in an article in The Quill, the publication of the Society of Professional Journalists, “Does, in fact or theory, the very concept of a ‘school’ of journalism make any sense?” (p. 24). He answered his question by stating, “There is no need for journalism education in its present form” (p. 28).

More recently, Berkman (2000), a journalism educator, wrote: “Journalism education today is in a state of rapid decline.” He stated that “reform will not come from within, because those who are ‘within’ have a vested interest in maintaining the present system whose very flaws are what makes its perpetuation and expansion possible.”

Medsger (1996) warned of “winds of change,” which, she wrote, could “profoundly change the nature of journalism education – could even eliminate journalism as a distinct area of study” (p. 5). She criticized journalism education’s “increasing
disconnection from journalism” resulting from the growth of the theoretical side of media-related studies at the expense of the practical side. Medsger wrote: “This growing disconnection also probably left the profession adrift and alienated from journalism education in ways that would have been less likely without the takeover by communication studies” (p. 62).

Such a takeover of U.S. journalism education by communication studies was predicted more than 30 years ago by Highton (1967), who stated: “Newspapering is becoming a sidelight, if not an afterthought, of many journalism schools.” He said that journalism educators were bitterly split into two camps, the “green eyeshades” and the “chi-squares” – also called the “communicologists.”

Twenty years after Highton’s article, Lovell (1987), wrote about the assumed triumph of the “chi-squares”: “In recent years, in their quest for academic respectability, some journalism deans, chairmen and professors have come to demonstrate a detachment if not a disdain for the profession that serves as the basis for their studies” (p. 22).

At the same time journalism education was being attacked for being too theoretical, it was being criticized for remaining too vocational. The National Center for Business and Economic Communication of American University, for example, stated that “in the largest sense, the education of journalists after 75 years has been a dismal failure” and that “journalism schools are sneered at as mere trade schools” (Cowdin, 1985, p. 16).

Similarly, the Project on the Future of Journalism Education concluded that “the general state of journalism and mass communication education is dismal” (Project, 1987, p. 1), and Dennis (1987) questioned whether the practical approach was the best alternative for journalism schools. He charged that journalism education “appears to be on the ragged edge of being so hopelessly outdated that its usefulness may soon be severely questioned” (p. 80).

Despite the attacks on journalism education for being both too vocational and too theoretical, Copple (1985) stated that “the communication age is pushing the practicing professionals and journalism educators closer and closer together.” He added, however, “Can we stand the proximity? Or are we going to rush out for more academic deodorants?” (p. 20).

Comments by Robert Giles, then editor and publisher of the Detroit News, concerning a study done by the American Society of Newspaper Editors implied the feeling of ill will was mutual. He stated: “Looking at journalism education through the eyes of editors . . . one finds signs of dissatisfaction that should be troubling to both ASNE and the educators” (ASNE, 1990, p. 1). The ASNE
undertook the study, according to Giles, because “while the editors continue to hold firmly to traditional values about journalism schools, new trends and pressures for change are moving across campuses everywhere” (p. 1). Similarly, Alridge (1992), warned that journalism schools might fall victim to “academic Darwinism” if they don’t “make themselves more relevant” to the profession (p. 30).

Critics charge that the internal debate over what journalism education should be has left the field in a state of uncertainty. For example, Ledbetter (1997) reported that “American journalism schools are in the midst of a years-long crisis, struggling to define their very purpose” and that “journalism educators are floundering, brooding, unsure of how, and what, they should teach or whether they should even exist” (p. 74).

Such attacks on journalism education in the United States call into question the extent to which journalism educators and professionals agree about what journalism education should be doing and, therefore, whether journalism education is meeting the needs of the profession of journalism at the start of the 21st century.

Mencher (1990) stated that attacks on journalism education were coming from four directions: editors who didn’t like the quality of journalism graduates, colleagues in other fields who considered journalism schools as trade schools, journalists who stated that journalism education was not relevant to the practice of journalism, and other journalism faculty.

Professional journalists’ attitudes

Bagdikian (1990) found three problems with journalism schools. The most serious was an “increasing fuzziness in the lines that separate sequences in journalism from those in public relations, advertising and mass communications theory” (p. 32). The second was “irrationality in faculty appointments”: the “silly” requirement that faculty have a Ph.D. rather than professional experience. The other problem was the low salaries paid by newspapers, which make it difficult to get people into journalism.

Some research has looked at demands media professionals have made on journalism education. Fedler (1993) listed eight of the major demands made on media education: (1) faculty members with more professional experience; (2) a greater emphasis on good teaching; (3) a greater emphasis on the practical skills needed to prepare students for work in the newspaper industry; (4) a greater emphasis on the liberal arts; (5) more rigor; (6) less emphasis on
communication theory courses; (7) less emphasis on techniques that can be learned on the job; and (8) less emphasis on Ph.D.s and research as requirements for faculty members (p. 2).

A major study of journalism education in the United States was undertaken by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (1990). It found that only 4 percent of editors gave journalism schools an “A” based upon the quality of their recent hires, that half of the editors didn’t care whether their new hires had a journalism degree, and that editors rated recent journalism graduates the lowest in skills editors considered most important: reporting, spelling and grammar, and journalism ethics.

In his analysis of the 1990 ASNE study, Dickson (1996) concluded, despite anecdotal evidence to the contrary, that editors tended to rate the abilities of journalism graduates above those of graduates in other fields. He also found differences between editors depending upon the size of their newspaper. For example, he found that editors at small newspapers were more interested in graduates with basic journalism skills, but editors at larger newspapers were more interested in new hires with a more broad-based background.

The Associated Press Managing Editors (Ceppos, 1994) surveyed its members and concluded that thinking analytically, presenting information well, understanding numbers in the news, listening to readers, and writing concisely were the five competencies editors thought recent graduates should have.

Medsger (1996) reported that most newsroom recruiters and supervisors thought journalism education needed to improve a great deal. Respondents were most likely to state that higher standards in writing courses, more emphasis on critical thinking skills and on students gaining wide general knowledge, and more faculty with extensive background in professional journalism as things that would improve journalism education.

**Journalism educators’ attitudes**

One of the pressures for change on journalism education in the United States was the report of the Project on the Future of Journalism and Mass Communication Education (Project, 1984), sponsored by the University of Oregon School of Journalism. It called for journalism and mass communication education to move away from industry-oriented sequence programs and toward providing “more generic mass communication study” and courses to serve students with a variety of career interests.

A task force of the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communications and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication noted a few years later that
Only 8 percent of jobs taken by media graduates were in reporting for the print or broadcast media. The task force co-chair, Ed Mullins, concluded that such “statistics show us the folly of narrow, industrial-based training for our students” (Mullins, 1987, p. 4).

Similarly, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Vision 2000 Task Force (AEJMC, 1994) concluded that media education was preparing students only for entry-level professional jobs and that the emphasis on skills courses was keeping media-related programs from developing academically. It stated that “the separation of journalism and mass communication units from their industrial moorings” was becoming “increasingly defensible” (p. 21).

Fedler, Counts, Carey, and Santana (1998) found that faculty members who taught professional media courses were more likely to have media experience than faculty who taught conceptual media courses. They concluded that their findings did not support those by Medsger (1996) that journalism programs had gone too far in favoring a doctorate over professional experience in hiring and promoting faculty.

Comparisons of Educators’ and Journalists’ Attitudes

Some research has compared attitudes of journalism educators and professional journalists. Starck, Schwartz and Sabine (1976) asked the opinions of 40 news executives and 37 journalism educators concerning the importance of 10 types of knowledge, 12 competencies, and 13 qualities of a journalist. Editors and educators agreed about the most- and least-important knowledge and competencies that journalists should have, though they were in slightly less agreement about the important qualities of a journalist.

Gaddis (1981) found that daily newspaper editors and heads of accredited news/editorial sequences agreed on slightly over half of the items on his survey pertaining to the quality of journalism graduates, the role of journalism education, professionalization of journalism education, and the preferred organization of journalism schools.

Dickson and Sellmeyer (1992a) found some agreement between administrators of mass media programs and newspaper editors about what journalism schools should provide their graduates. However, their responses from the two groups were significantly different for 15 of 21 topics. Dickson and Sellmeyer (1992b) reported that 74 percent of media administrators stated that having more media professionals on the faculty was a priority for journalism education, whereas only 46 percent stated that more
faculty with doctorates was a priority.

What little research that has been done on the subject suggests that despite the criticism of journalism education from media professionals, journalism educators and professional journalists have a number of similar views about what journalism education should be doing. The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which U.S. newspaper editors and educators at the end of the 20th century agreed about the content of journalism education at the end of the 20th century.

We obtained a random sample of all daily newspapers in the United States from Editor & Publisher, a trade journal. Because no list of educators involved in newspaper journalism education in the United States was available, we surveyed members of the Newspaper Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Because we did not think all members of the division necessarily would be involved in journalism education, we asked respondents who did not teach journalism courses or were not sufficiently knowledgeable about newspaper journalism education to return the survey after checking the appropriate blank.

The questionnaire consisted of questions suggested by previous studies and reports about journalism education. Questions concerned what newspaper journalism educators saw as the role of journalism education and the extent to which educators and professionals agreed on the competencies emphasized by college journalism programs, and the type of knowledge, skills, and abilities needed by a beginning journalist at the start of the 21st century.

We sent surveys to a random sample of 383 AEJMC Newspaper Division members and 501 daily newspaper editors for a total of 884 surveys. We sent follow-up letters to try to obtain the best possible response rate. As of the cutoff date, questionnaires were returned by 167 AEJMC Newspaper Division members (44 percent) – of which 142 submitted a completed survey and 25 noted that they did not teach journalism-related courses or were not sufficiently knowledgeable to respond – and 149 newspaper editors (30 percent).

For questions concerning emphases of journalism programs, respondents used a 1-to-5 scale with 1 meaning disagree strongly and 5 meaning agree strongly. For questions concerning knowledge and skills/abilities needed by beginning journalists, respondents used a 1-to-5 scale with 1 meaning not important at all and 5 meaning essential.

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to analyze the degree of association between the two groups' responses, and t-tests for independent samples were used to find significant
differences between the two groups. Stepwise multiple regression was used to identify those characteristics that resulted in differences between respondents within each group. For all tests, the 95% confidence level was used. We devised five research questions:

RQ1: Do U.S. newspaper journalism educators favor a practical approach to journalism education at the end of the 20th century?

RQ2: Do editors of U.S. daily newspapers and newspaper journalism educators agree about what the emphases of college journalism programs should be?

RQ3: Do editors of U.S. daily newspapers and newspaper journalism educators agree about the types of skills and abilities that are important for a beginning journalist at the start of the 21st century?

RQ4: Do editors of U.S. daily newspapers and newspaper journalism educators agree about the types of general knowledge that are important for a beginning journalist at the start of the 21st century?

RQ5: What independent variables were significantly related to differences in U.S. newspaper editors’ and newspaper journalism educators’ attitudes about journalism education?

Findings

Just over one third of editors responding (34.5 percent) were from newspapers with a circulation of less than 10,000, another 28.4 percent were from newspapers with a circulation between 10,000 and 25,000, and 37.1 percent were from newspapers with a circulation of more than 25,000. Slightly more than three fourths (77.9 percent) were male.

Somewhat over half of the editors (54.8 percent) held an undergraduate degree in journalism, another 36.2 percent held a degree in a field other than journalism, and 9.0 percent did not have a college degree. In addition, 15.7 percent of the editors had a graduate degree. Nearly one third of them (32.2 percent) were under 40 years old, 42.5 percent were between 40 and 50 years old, and 25.3 percent were 50 or older.

Just over three fourths of the educators (78.4 percent) were from public institutions. Somewhat less than one third of the institutions (29.1 percent) had an enrollment of 10,000 undergraduate students or less, 36.6 percent had between 10,000 and 20,000, and 34.3 percent had more than 20,000.

Nearly two thirds (65.9 percent) were male. Whereas 8.6 percent were under 40 years of age, 37.1 percent were between 40 and 50, and 54.3 percent were 50 or older. Just over two thirds of the educators (68.3 percent) had a doctorate, 28.8 percent had a
master’s degree, and 2.9 percent had a bachelor’s degree. Somewhat more than one third (38.2 percent) had taught at the college level for 10 years or less, one third (33.8 percent) had taught from 11 to 20 years, and 28.0 percent had taught more than 20 years.

Only 1.4 percent of the educators had no professional news experience, and about one quarter (25.7 percent) had 5 years or less. Just over one third (34.3 percent) had 6 to 10 years of news media experience, 15.7 percent had 11 to 15 years of experience, and 22.9 percent had more than 15 years of experience.

Concerning the first research question – whether print journalism educators agreed about the role of journalism education – we found that most educators thought that journalism education should be practical, and most thought that it should be seen as a separate field rather than merged with other media-related fields of study.

We asked three questions concerning the importance of various types of practical experience for a beginning journalist at the start of the 21st century. Nearly all journalism educators (86.6 percent) stated that professional media internship experiences were very important or essential, and another 11.1 percent stated that they were important. Most of the educators (83.7 percent) also stated that a practical experience with media-related technology was very important or essential, and another 11.8 percent stated that it was important. Slightly more than two thirds of educators (68.9 percent) stated that work on school news medium was very important or essential, and another 23.7 percent stated that it was important. Fewer than 8 percent of the journalism educators stated that any one of the three types of practical educational experiences was not very important.

We also asked the educators the extent to which journalism educators when developing and assessing curriculum should be concerned about whether their students have the entry-level skills professional journalists want. More than three fourths of them (77 percent) stated that journalism educators should be concerned quite a bit about whether their students had entry-level professional skills. Another 21.6 percent of educators stated that they should be concerned a moderate amount, and only 1.4 percent stated that they should not be concerned.

We also asked whether journalism should be seen as part of a larger media-related field of study. Somewhat less than half of the educators (40.7 percent) stated that print journalism should be seen as part of a larger media-related field of study. Just over a third of educators (34.8 percent) stated that it should be seen as partially integrated with broadcast journalism, and about a
fourth (24.5 percent) stated that it should be seen a separate field of study entirely.

Table 1 shows the results relating to the second research question: journalism educators’ and professional journalists’ level of agreement concerning various emphases of college journalism programs. The correlation between the two groups’ ratings of the seven emphases was positive but not statistically significant. Although both groups rated two emphases (practical research about media industries and higher-level abilities rather than entry-level skills) as least important, only one emphasis (thinking analytically) was among both groups’ top three.

Table 1: Respondents’ Level of Agreement With Various Emphases of College Journalism Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emphasis</th>
<th>Editors</th>
<th>AEJMC</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize community-oriented reporting</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>7.90</td>
<td>&lt;.0001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize practical over theoretical courses</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>&lt;.0001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize higher-level ability over entry-level skills</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>-3.41</td>
<td>.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize ethical conduct and media responsibility</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>-2.44</td>
<td>.015*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize role journalist plays in a democracy</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>-2.35</td>
<td>.019*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize thinking analytically</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>-2.25</td>
<td>.025*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize practical research about media industries</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>-1.42</td>
<td>.156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1 = disagree strongly; 2 = disagree somewhat; 3 = undecided; 4 = agree somewhat; 5 = agree strongly; N = 149; educators: N = 142 r = .585, r^2 = .342, df = 5, p>.05

*Significant at <.05, **Significant at <.01, ***Significant at <.001

As Table 1 also shows, responses by editors and educators were significantly different for six of the seven competencies.
Editors were significantly more likely to want two practical topics (community-oriented reporting and practical courses rather than theoretical ones) to be emphasized. Educators were significantly more likely to want four theoretical topics emphasized: higher-level abilities rather than entry-level skills, ethical conduct, the journalist’s role in a democracy, and thinking analytically.

Table 2 lists responses related to the third research question, which concerned the level of agreement between editors and educators about the types of skills and abilities that are important for a beginning journalist at the start of the 21st century. The two groups’ ratings of the nine skills and abilities were positively correlated with a value of 0.763, which was statistically significant.

Table 2:
Respondents’ Ratings of the Importance of Various Types of Skills and Abilities for Beginning Journalists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills and Abilities</th>
<th>Editors</th>
<th>AEJMC</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing well</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>-5.08</td>
<td>&lt;.0001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to readers</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>&lt;.0001***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility with technology</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>-2.49</td>
<td>.013*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the community</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.014*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating orally</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.017*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking analytically</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>-1.61</td>
<td>.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to multicultural society</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
<td>.267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving ability</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>-0.95</td>
<td>.344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting information well</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>-0.76</td>
<td>.450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 1 = not important; 2 = somewhat important; 3 = important; 4 = very important; 5 = essential; N = 149; educators: N = 142; r = .763, r² = .582, df = 12, p < .02
*Significant at <.05, **Significant at <.01, ***Significant at <.001

As Table 2 shows, the difference between ratings was statistically significant for five of the nine types of skills and abilities. Editors were significantly more likely to state that listening to readers, understanding the community, and communicating orally were important. Educators were significantly more likely to state that writing well and being able to use technology were important. One type of ability made both groups’ top three: presenting information well. They also agreed
on the importance of thinking analytically, sensitivity to a multicultural society, and problem-solving ability.

Table 3 shows the results of the fourth research question, which concerned whether educators and editors agreed about the importance of various types of general knowledge for a beginning journalist. Again, we found overall agreement between the two groups. Their ratings of types of knowledge were highly correlated with a value of 0.981, which was statistically significant. Newspaper editors and newspaper journalism educators listed the same five types of knowledge as the most important of the 14 choices, and they listed them in the same order: 1. an understanding of a journalist’s responsibility to the public; 2. an understanding of the ethics of journalism; 3. a knowledge of current events; 4. a broad general knowledge; and 5. a knowledge of government.

The difference between the two groups’ ratings was statistically significant for five of the 14 types of knowledge. Interestingly, even though editors were significantly less likely that

| Knowledge of international affairs | 2.78 | 3.31 | -5.28 | <.0001*** |
| Knowledge of second language      | 2.12 | 2.63 | -4.57 | <.0001*** |
| High GPA                          | 2.09 | 2.50 | -4.04 | <.0001*** |
| Knowledge of statistics           | 2.72 | 3.00 | -2.65 | .009**    |
| Understanding ethics of journalism| 4.53 | 4.34 | 2.18  | .030*     |
| Knowledge of economics            | 3.07 | 3.22 | -1.72 | .087      |
| Understanding of resp. to public  | 4.58 | 4.45 | 1.55  | .122      |
| Knowledge of history              | 3.47 | 3.60 | -1.34 | .183      |
| Broad general knowledge           | 3.92 | 4.03 | -1.30 | .195      |
| Knowledge of geography            | 3.30 | 3.39 | -0.95 | .341      |
| Knowledge of business             | 2.91 | 2.98 | -0.67 | .504      |
| Knowledge of government           | 3.82 | 3.85 | -0.34 | .730      |
| Knowledge of math                 | 2.96 | 2.94 | 0.22  | .825      |
| Knowledge of current events       | 4.07 | 4.09 | -0.20 | .844      |

Note: 1 = not important; 2 = somewhat important; 3 = important; 4 = very important; 5 = essential; editors: N = 149; educators: N = 142; r = .981, r^2 = .963, df = 12, p<.001
*Significant at <.05, **Significant at <.01, ***Significant at <.001
educators to state (as shown in Table 1) that emphasizing ethical conduct and media responsibility was an important emphasis of college journalism programs, editors were significantly more likely than educators to state that an understanding of the ethics of journalism was important for beginning journalists. Educators were significantly more likely to state that knowledge of international affairs, knowledge of a second language, a high grade point average, and knowledge of statistics were important.

Concerning the fifth research question, we looked at each topic for which we found differences between editors and educators to determine areas in which editors were in disagreement and areas in which educators were in disagreement. We tested the importance of eight independent variables for editors and nine for educators.

The editor variables were newspaper circulation, whether he/she had a degree in journalism, whether he/she had a graduate degree, whether he/she had had a media internship in college, whether he/she had worked on a school news medium, length of time working in the professional news media, age, and gender. The educator variables were type of institution, undergraduate enrollment, number of undergraduate majors, whether the program is accredited, amount of professional news media experience, highest degree earned, length of time as a teacher at the college level, age, and gender.

We found several statistically significant differences concerning emphases of college journalism programs (Table 1). For the six emphases for which we found significant differences between editors and educators, we found significant differences among editors for two. The larger the newspaper, the less likely the editor was to support emphasizing community-oriented reporting (Multiple $R = .2265$, $F = 7.676$, $p = .0063$). Females gave greater support to emphasizing ethics and responsibility than did males ($R = .2707$, $F = 11.225$, $p = .0010$), and editors with a degree in journalism and mass communication also were more likely to favor emphasizing ethics ($R = .3159$, $F = 7.818$, $p = .0006$).

We found differences among educators concerning three of the six emphases of college journalism programs. The more professional media experience that the educators had had, the more likely they were to favor emphasizing practical over theoretical courses ($R = .2320$, $F = 7.000$, $p = .0092$). The longer the educator had taught, the more likely he/she was to support emphasizing higher-level ability over entry-level skills ($R = .1814$, $F = 4.151$, $p = .0438$), and educators at institutions accredited by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications were more likely to support emphasizing higher-level abilities ($R = .2805$, $F = 5.167$, $p = .0070$).
Female educators were more supportive of ethics and responsibility than were males ($R = .2013, F = 5.237, p = .0238$), and the older the educator the less likely he/she was to support the teaching of ethics and responsibility ($R = .2677, F = 4.746, p = .0103$).

We also found statistically significant differences concerning types of skills and abilities for beginning journalists (Table 2). For the five types of skills and abilities for which we found significant differences between editors and educators, editors differed significantly on two. Editors with a journalism degree were more likely to state that a beginning journalist’s facility with technology was important ($R = .2144, F = 6.844, p = .0099$). The more professional media experience the editor had, the less likely he/she was to see understanding the community as important ($R = .1866, F = 5.125, p = .0251$).

Educators differed significantly about the importance of two of the five types of skills and abilities. The larger the institution, the less likely the educator was to see writing well as being important ($R = .2055, F = 5.556, p = .0203$), and the longer the educator had been teaching at the college level the more likely he/she was to see writing well was important ($R = .2835, F = 5.464, p = .0053$). Also, the greater his/her professional news media experience, the more likely the educator was to state that understanding the community was important ($R = .2513, F = 5.429, p = .0044$).

We also found differences concerning types of knowledge that are important for beginning journalists (Table 3). Editors differed significantly on three of the five questions concerning types of knowledge for beginning journalists for which we found differences between editors and educators. The greater the newspaper’s circulation, the more likely the editor was to state that knowledge of international affairs was important ($R = .2445, F = 9.025, p = .0031$) and a knowledge of a second language was important ($R = .3000, F = 14.046, p = .0003$). The longer the editor had worked in the news media, the more important he/she thought the student’s grade point average was ($R = .2307, F = 8.130, p = .0050$), and females were more likely to see a high GPA as being important ($R = .2932, F = 6.6131, p = .0018$).

Educators differed significantly on four of five questions concerning types of knowledge for beginning journalists for which we found differences between editors and educators. The longer the educator had taught, the more likely he/she was to think knowledge of international affairs ($R = .1877, F = 4.567, p = .0346$), knowledge of a second language ($R = .2041, F = 5.433, p = .0214$), and knowledge of statistics ($R = .2657, F = 9.568, p = .0024$) were important. Also, the more teaching experience ($R = .2405, F = 7.675, p = .0065$), the more likely he/she thought a high
GPA was important.

We found that practical training for beginning journalists was still a priority of newspaper journalism education at the end of the 20th century, and we found considerable agreement between newspaper journalism educators and newspaper editors about the nature of journalism education. Though educators are more interested in the theoretical aspects of journalism education than newspaper editors are, educators and editors agree overall on the types of general knowledge that college journalism graduates need and the importance of various journalistic skills and abilities that graduates should have.

Among the most interesting findings were that both editors and educators were lukewarm about the importance of practical research related to media industries, something valued by the “chi-squares.” Another was that females thought ethics was more important than did males. And even though educators were more interested in emphasizing ethics in journalism programs than were educators, editors were more likely to think that beginning journalists should be knowledgeable about ethics. We also found that whether their program is accredited has little effect on educators’ attitudes about the content of newspaper journalism education.

We found a high level of agreement on the importance of skills and abilities that have been promoted by various media and scholarly commissions: such as thinking analytically, being sensitive to a multicultural society, having problem-solving ability, and being able to present information well. Some differences were unexpected. For example, educators were significantly more likely to state that journalism students needed an ability to write well, something that educators have been attacked for not stressing adequately. Also, editors were significantly more likely than educators to favor listening to readers and understanding the community, areas in which educators might be expected to take the lead.

Editors and educators were not always of one mind. Such things as amount of teaching experience, amount of news media experience and gender of educators and the size of their institution are important variables related to educators’ opinions about journalism education. And we found that such things as having a degree in journalism, amount of news media experience, and newspaper size were significantly related to editors’ attitudes about journalism education and what young journalists should know.

This study suggests that much of the criticism by professional journalists of U.S. journalism education as being irrelevant is unwarranted. If both groups agree on so many of the
important skills, abilities and knowledge base needed by new journalists, why do professional journalists continue to attack journalism instruction as “desperate futility” and journalism educators as “foundering, brooding, unsure”? Certainly, much of the problem is practitioners’ misunderstanding of journalism education. Also, reports of media educators calling for a “generic curriculum” for all media-related fields and for separating mass media education from its “industrial moorings” may also be part of the reason for the misperception. Journalism and mass communication education in the United States has grown much broader than education for journalists. It includes such fields as public relations and advertising, which are often in conflict with journalism education because those fields don’t value objectivity and stress persuasion rather than information.

Another problem is the nature of journalism. As much as educators might want to see journalism as a profession that requires a college degree if not an advanced degree, many editors have risen to the top of their field without a journalism degree or even without a college degree. They argue that much of what it takes to be a good journalist, such as a nose for news, cannot be taught but have to be in the journalists’ genes. They think most journalistic skills can be learned on the job, but they search for new hires who can begin their careers with minimal supervision.

Journalism education finds itself in a quandary. If journalism education is too vocational, professional journalists sneer at it as being a trade school. If it’s too theoretical, professional journalists sneer at it as being too academic and not pertinent to the preparation of working journalists.

U.S. journalism educators appear to be battening down the hatches against the “winds of change” feared by Medsger (1996). Journalism education in the United States likely will continue to have to weather the storm of criticism, much of it contradictory and unwarranted. Meanwhile, educators and editors should learn more about each other. Educators may find they won’t need the “academic deodorants” after all, and if professional journalists are helping to improve journalism education, they will have less time to spend predicting its imminent demise.

References


