

Review of the B.A., B.S. in Journalism

Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: 09.0401
Journalism

The B.A., B.S. in Journalism program is housed in the School of Communication within the College of Arts and Sciences. The school also offers a B.A., B.S. in Communication Studies; a B.A., B.S. in Mass Media; a B.A., B.S. in Public Relations; minors in communication studies and mass media; and a M.A., M.S. in Communication. The B.A., B.S. in Journalism program was authorized by the Illinois Board of Higher Education on November 20, 2003, as a stand-alone degree program based on a concentration within the B.A., B.S. in Mass Communication program. This is the first comprehensive review of the B.A., B.S. in Journalism program on the eight-year program review cycle.

The B.A., B.S. in Journalism program at Illinois State University is one of six undergraduate programs at Illinois public universities assigned CIP code 09.0401 by the Illinois Board of Higher Education. As with the other five programs, enrollment in the journalism program at Illinois State has declined in recent years, from a high of 221 in fall 2010 to 161 in fall 2014. The declines are consistent with declining employment in the field due largely to rapid technological change. In 2014 a substantial redesign of the journalism program at Illinois State was completed to reflect changes in the discipline and field and, in part, to reverse enrollment decline.

The B.A., B.S. in Journalism program and the three other undergraduate programs in the School of Communication were collectively recognized in 2014 as the top undergraduate communication program in a 13-state region by the Central States Communication Association.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Self-study process. The approach used by the School of Communication in the previous program review cycle served as a guide for compiling the program review self-study reports for the school during the current program review cycle. The school organized its efforts this cycle so program review self-studies for all programs of the school, including Radio Station WGLT, were compiled collaboratively in spring 2015. Program coordinators began planning the self-study process in late September 2014, starting with a program review orientation meeting facilitated by the Office of the Provost and with discussions among faculty and staff regarding data collection. Faculty and staff involved in the self-studies met multiple times each month beginning in fall 2014 and continuing into spring 2015. By the end of the fall 2014 semester, plans for data collection were complete. During the spring 2015 semester, a digital library of data and documents was established for use by all programs, and drafting of the self-study reports began. This review of the B.A., B.S. in Journalism program may best be regarded as an extension and continuation of the review and update of the program that has been ongoing for the past three years, in which the views of faculty, staff, alumni, students, and working journalists were sought with the aim of radically redesigning the curriculum in line with changes in the news industry.

Program curriculum. The curriculum of the B.A., B.S. in Journalism program is a liberal arts curriculum that emphasizes research and seeks to educate students in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to develop into competent and ethical mass communicators and to pursue careers in the news industry or advanced study. Students benefit from coursework and lab experiences that together support the theoretical framing of the news media and the practical and production skills of the news. School-sponsored media assets through which lab experiences are offered include two radio stations (WGLT and WZND), a television station (TV-10), a newspaper (the *Vidette*), and a social media research center (the Social Media Analytics Command Center). The curriculum emphasizes a broad skill set while educating students in such burgeoning areas as news literacy and media convergence theory, which draws from economic, business, and technology theories to account for the increasing degree to which news media are integrated. Care has been taken by program faculty to balance new and emerging skills with the teaching of vital, traditional journalism abilities such as accuracy, interviewing, and grammar. The need to prepare students for specific roles within the news industry has prompted program faculty to design a more flexible curriculum. After

taking required courses, students may shape their own program of study to suit their career choices by selecting five courses from a group of professional application courses and two courses from a group of professional theory courses. Although the program has no sequences, students may work toward a Certificate of Excellence in their chosen specialization.

Program or academic unit faculty. All faculty members in the B.A., B.S. in Journalism program have substantial career experience in the news industry. This is the result of a deliberate strategy that makes extensive professional experience a central requirement for any new faculty hire. At the same time, tenure track faculty members are extremely active in scholarship and research, including researching the impact new concepts, trends, and technologies are having on both the news industry and on journalism education. The faculty maintains a supportive environment for knowledge expansion by involving students in research activities and media production. Since the last program review, faculty members in the Journalism program have collectively published 14 books or book chapters, have published more than 50 journal articles, have presented more than 100 times at professional conferences, and have been recognized through numerous awards for teaching, research, or service.

Program goals and quality indices. The mission of the B.A., B.S. in Journalism program is to educate students in the broad range of skills involved in gathering, analyzing, processing, and presenting written, audio, visual, and multimedia communication as part of the work of journalism; to educate students in the concepts and issues surrounding journalism; and to aid the students in developing into intelligent, ethical, and civic-minded members of the news industry and of society. Program goals may be divided into two groups: those focused on student learning and those focused on faculty productivity. Student learning goals include helping students gain the basic skills and practices of print, broadcast, and online newsgathering, writing, presentation, and dissemination and helping students become both responsible practitioners and critical consumers of the news media by achieving an understanding of the legal, ethical, and theoretical aspects of the profession. Faculty productivity goals include striving to stay abreast of new technologies and concepts in the field and to incorporate those advances into the classroom; encouraging and preparing students to pursue their journalism education outside of class; and building strong connections with news organizations across Illinois, thus providing a liaison between students and professionals. Quality indices used to compare the program with aspirational programs include curriculum structure and content, facilities such as media labs, and co-curricular opportunities for students.

Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process. An important element of the B.A., B.S. in Journalism program revision introduced in 2014 was the creation of more effective assessment tools and methods aligned with the updated program structure and with the new skills and concepts being taught in the program. Program faculty expects these assessment tools to be in place by early 2016, even if further adjustment to them may be needed as the revised program is implemented. Three main assessment mechanisms are being used: portfolios of assignments and other student work, a survey administered to students at the beginning and end of the program to evaluate their experiences in news work and to assess their grasp of communication and journalism theories, and Certificates of Excellence to guide, track, and help evaluate student progress and achievement in specialized areas of journalism. In addition, the external awards and honors received by students in the program through their experiences in the media assets of the school are tracked.

Specialized accreditation. The B.A., B.S. in Journalism program does not participate in specialized accreditation at this time.

Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review. This is the first review of the B.A., B.S. in Journalism program on the eight-year program review cycle. In fall 2007 the program submitted a report to the Office of the Provost regarding implementation of the program since its inception in 2004. In response to that progress report, the Acting Associate Provost made five recommendations for program improvement. The program has addressed all five recommendations since then. The program has prioritized among the numerous and extensive school goals to focus on facilitating academic excellence; enhancing the systems and infrastructure supporting academic excellence; diversifying and enhancing financial support for academic excellence; and sharing, promoting and marketing academic excellence. The program has established enrollment goals and has pursued their achievement. The program has been more focused, strategic, and systematic in identifying and understanding comparator programs in the state and benchmark programs nationally. A highlight of these efforts was a road trip by journalism and mass media faculty in summer 2009 to other communication programs at public universities in the

state of Illinois. Journalism faculty has sought external funding and grants to support programs, services, and facilities of the school as well as to support faculty research. These efforts have included submitting applications for internal and external grants and initiating a joint sales effort across media assets of the school. A recommendation to pursue accreditation by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) was considered by program faculty but ultimately not pursued. Rapid changes in the journalism industry, which arguably have left accreditation boards and many journalism education programs lagging behind changing industry standards and practices, forestalled this issue. In addition, program faculty chose to instead focus its limited resources on revising the program to better align with those changing industry standards and practices. Had faculty decided to simultaneously pursue AEJMC accreditation, the result may have been a program redesign less effective than the redesign that has been achieved. Program faculty may also argue that the program may be a poor fit for specialized accreditation given its limited resources. However, once program redesign is fully implemented and deemed successful, faculty may revisit the question whether to pursue specialized accreditation.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand. Much is written throughout the program review self-study report about ways the news industry has been affected by rapid changes, with convergence being a key, and how journalism faculty has striven to reflect these changes through a revised program. While the program redesign was conceived, first and foremost, as a means to better educate students and prepare them for the professional world, it was also hoped that program changes would either forestall or successfully address the impact of the evolving job market on enrollment. Despite the benefits of convergence and digital technology, their effect on traditional news media, especially newspapers, in the short term has been tumultuous. This has prompted uncertainty, cutbacks, and job losses in the industry. These developments, together with the attendant gloomy publicity, have, in turn, negatively affected enrollment in journalism programs. However, in the longer term, the future of journalism and journalism education is bright. Convergence technology is already giving rise to strata of new types of journalism and demands for new skills and intellectual competencies. With its recent redesign, the B.A., B.S. in Journalism program is in an excellent position to capitalize on these new demands. Indeed, alumni of the program are being hired as multi-media reporters, editors and producers; i-copy news-workers; social media managers; and professional bloggers.

Major findings of this program review self-study. The B.A., B.S. in Journalism program is meeting the current needs of a rapidly changing news industry. The recent program redesign should result in higher enrollments as concerns about journalism as a career settle. The revised program is modern, flexible, streamlined, and balanced. Students in the program benefit from coursework and lab experiences that support both the theoretical framing of media and the practical skills of news production and dissemination, with extensive on-campus practice experience coupled with rich internship opportunities. Students also benefit from exposure to cutting-edge social media tracking and analysis technology, available through the Social Media Analytics Command Center sponsored by the school. Challenges for the program in coming years include addressing, in a considered manner, the ongoing flood of social media innovation, from Facebook, Instagram, Flipboard, Pinterest, and Reddit to Vine, Snapchat, Tumblr and Periscope; continuing to balance innovation, integration, and consolidation, including the tension between teaching foundational journalism skills and new techniques and technologies; and addressing the growing need for facilities improvements.

Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle. Within the context of the School of Communication strategic plan and assuming sufficient resource availability, the Journalism program intends to pursue the following initiatives during the next program review cycle: continue to build contacts in the news industry; explore further co-curricular opportunities; improve instruction in specialized areas of journalism; create a shared space for media outlets sponsored by the school; and hire at least one full-time, tenure track faculty member in journalism. The program will also fully implement the revised curriculum, continue to seek ways to increase revenue and improve grantsmanship, continue efforts to recruit students to the program, and improve tracking of alumni career trajectories and accomplishments.

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.A., B.S. in Journalism to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks the program for a well written program review self-study report that evidences broad participation of program faculty, staff, and other stakeholders in the program review process. The committee appreciates the bold selection of the University of Missouri and Arizona State University as aspirational institutions, as both are considered among the finest journalism schools in the country. A particularly unique and noteworthy input to the self-study process is a report resulting from a summer 2009 site visit by journalism and mass media faculty members to comparator programs at Illinois universities.

The committee congratulates faculty and staff for recognition of Journalism and the three other undergraduate majors in the School of Communication as, collectively, the top undergraduate program for 2014 by the Central States Communication Association.

The committee recognizes program faculty members for their multiple-year effort to restructure and revise the curriculum, which was new in 2004, to remain current with rapid changes in the discipline and profession during the last decade. Faculty has designed a curriculum that provides students greater flexibility in selecting courses suitable to their career goals and in developing specialized credentials through one or more Certificates of Excellence, which have replaced sequences. The committee further recognizes program faculty members for designing a new student learning outcomes assessment plan to evaluate student learning in the restructured and revised program. Particularly noteworthy is the use of pre- and post-tests and portfolios.

The committee commends the program and school for the numerous field experiences available to Journalism students, including work at university-sponsored media outlets (the *Vidette* newspaper, WZND radio, TV-10, and *J-News* online magazine) and completion of off-campus internships (458 internships were completed between spring 2010 and fall 2014). The committee recognizes program faculty for their contributions to developing the Social Media Analytics Command Center and for incorporating social media technologies available through the center into journalism courses and co-curricular activities.

Through attention to advisement and course capacity control and through consideration by faculty of time-to-degree when revamping the curriculum, the percentage of graduates earning a Journalism degree within four years is consistently higher than the percentage across all undergraduate programs at the University (e.g., 82.9 percent compared to 64.3 percent in fiscal 2014 for first-time-in-college students). The committee commends the program for those efforts and for increasing the percentage of students self-identifying with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented at the University (increasing from 19.9 percent in fall 2010 to 28.6 percent in fall 2014), particularly Hispanic students. The committee urges continuation of these efforts as well as attention to gender balance among students.

Recommendations

The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2023, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- In light of enrollment decline from fall 2013 to fall 2014, the committee recommends that the program implement recently-adopted recruitment strategies to try to reverse the decline. The committee also recommends continued vigilance regarding retention and graduation rates, in light of the decrease in six-year graduation rates below university-wide averages for the fall 2007 and fall 2008 cohorts.
- The self-study report for this program, as well as reports for other programs of the School of Communication, states that the student-to-faculty ratio in the School of Communication exceeds the ratio across all academic units at the University. The self-study report suggests that reducing the ratio is necessary for the program to provide instruction in specialized areas of journalism and to offer more co-curricular activities. The committee

recommends that faculty members of the Journalism program collaborate with faculty members of other programs in the school to explore options for reducing the student-to-faculty ratio in the school. Options to explore include, but are not be limited to, establishing priorities for new faculty hires and then requesting additional faculty lines for those programs from the College of Arts and Sciences.

- The committee concurs with the goal of improving instruction in specialized areas of journalism, using the certificates of excellence paradigm to organize courses and co-curricular activities in new areas of study. Introducing new specializations could benefit current students and could help with efforts to increase enrollment. However, because instructional capacity to teach additional specializations may be limited, the committee recommends exploring collaborations with other units to share resources (e.g., with Kinesiology and Recreation for sports journalism, with Geography-Geology for weather reporting, or with Agriculture for agribusiness reporting).
- Of full-time faculty in the school in fall 2014, 40 percent were female. Only 5 percent of tenure track faculty members self-identified with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented at Illinois State. The committee recommends that the program collaborate with other programs in the school to implement strategies for increasing these numbers, particularly among tenure track faculty.
- With facilities serving students in the school scattered across several campus locations and with the trend toward media convergence, the committee recommends that the program collaborate with other programs in the school and with the Office of Facilities Planning and Construction to study long-term space needs. Among options to consider is collocation of some or all school programs and services to promote synergies among students, faculty, and staff. Recognizing the unlikelihood of obtaining capital development funds from the state in the near- or mid-term, the committee recommends exploring external (i.e., non-state) funding for its facilities improvements.
- The program review self-study report indicates that deciding whether to seek specialized accreditation of the program was deferred by program faculty during the last program review cycle to instead focus, quite reasonably, on program redesign. The committee recommends that program faculty consider the question of specialized accreditation once the redesigned program is fully functional.
- The school will soon expand study abroad opportunities to include programs in four countries (France, South Korea, the Netherlands, and Brazil). However, none of the opportunities appear to focus on journalism. The committee recommends exploring a new study abroad option in journalism, either through existing partnerships (e.g., in South Korea with Dong Ah Institution of Media and Arts) or new ones. The committee also recommends that the school and program explore establishing a scholarship fund to lower the cost of study abroad for students with limited financial means.
- The school and program have numerous methods in place for interacting with program alumni. The committee supports the program in its efforts to incorporate these methods into a formalized plan for tracking and documenting employment and career progress of program graduates.
- The committee acknowledges work faculty has done to revamp its student learning outcomes assessment plan in conjunction with revamping the curriculum. The committee recommends that the program continue to revise the plan as needed, use assessment results to identify the need for any changes to the new curriculum, and document both its assessment activities and changes made to the program based on assessment outcomes.