

The Future of Journalism and How to Teach It

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In 2006 mysterious job titles began to show up in the journalism want ads. Community conversation editor, mobile online journalist, and other titles that made "blogger" seem almost traditional and boring. There were, and are, many such openings, at several large-circulation newspapers (Village Voice), high-traffic websites (CitySearch), and established non-profits (Center for Public Integrity). Aspiring journalists should be excited about such new opportunities - and they would be, if they could figure out exactly what the job qualifications are, and how to go about learning those skills.

In the fall of 2006 and again in the spring of 2007, the author taught a course meant to help the seniors in the UT-Austin journalism school better understand the changes occurring in the field as mainstream newsrooms cut their staffs, independent online start-ups emerge to cover uncovered communities, existing non-profits and corporations start launching their own content divisions, and amid all of these trends news producers try to encourage the news audience to create content.

This course is meant to serve the practical needs of students entering a brave new job market. But it also has the potential to address several ongoing debates concerning the role of journalism schools in the academy and the cities where they're based, interest among students in the democratic process, and critical approaches to journalism, journalism studies, and journalism pedagogy.

Recent research has emphasized the need for journalism schools to teach the multimedia skills that converged newsrooms demand. Such curriculums, which merge print, broadcast, and online sequences together to train students on a variety of platforms, are important. But they should also include courses that show students the skills, ethics, challenges, and opportunities involved at a time when their jobs will be more transparent, collaborative, and interactive than in the past.

As news organizations attempt to attract part of the online population actively discussing and documenting current events - independently of mainstream websites - reporters are running blogs and online divisions are soliciting reader contributions. These efforts range in sincerity from perfunctory reader forums to more active and prominent audience engagement and participation. Meanwhile innovative and effective experiments continue to occur on websites outside the domain of the news business. Mary Lou Fulton, who led the Bakersfield Californian's pioneering efforts to bring such experimentation into a mainstream newsroom, noted the complexities of this work in a 2005 presentation at the Citizen Media Summit. Fulton ended her remarks with a note of concern that half-hearted attempts to emulate Web 2.0 success stories would lead to a missed opportunity by mainstream newsrooms, for the resulting participation would be equally minimal and the experiment likely abandoned.

The same opportunity exists for journalism programs, which are currently in a situation where the more civic and critical interests of educators are aligned with the practical needs of professionals. Both seek greater journalistic engagement with the public. For the former this is a result of the desire to give students a sense of journalism's place in society and broaden their experience beyond the acquiring

of skills. For the latter it is a matter of economic survival.

This paper presents further exploration of these academic and professional needs and a framework for the type of course that could attempt to meet them.

Academic and Professional Common Ground

In recent years, specifically since 2000, in response to the civic journalism movement of the 1990s, broader social trends involving democratic activity (or the lack of it), and a more critical stance towards journalism practice both within and outside the academy, journalism educators have sought new approaches to curricula and pedagogy. This is also compounded by turbulence in the profession: cutbacks at print publications, the end of the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain, the loss of revenue and audience to non-traditional news sources online, and a general decline in popularity and respect for professional journalism and journalists. At the same time that journalism educators and professionals are experiencing such change and soul-searching, there are increasing numbers of students majoring in journalism and media (Reese and Cohen). Furthermore the central role of journalistic skills (writing, reporting, video and audio production, web design) amid the current rise in popularity of user-generated content and the role of user-generated content in such fields as politics, community activism, government, foreign relations, business, and more only seems to increase the influence of journalism education and the importance of debates over its future form.

One central theme to these debates is the promotion of civic engagement in the classroom. The teaching of public journalism was considered one potential remedy, because of its goal of making citizens and public life more central to journalism (Haas). The idea of involving citizens more directly in the news production process led to several successes but also conflict with professional journalists and their concerns about objectivity and control. Ironically public journalism's concept of the audience's role in journalism was conservative compared to some examples found in 2007, such as front-page (home-page, that is - print publications are relegating citizen content to their online divisions for now) contributions from readers, particularly on-scene photos or videos, and reader blogs that allow for the direct contribution of content from readers that is then published usually unfiltered by the media.

Public journalism, which called for the modification of existing journalistic practice within the confines of the existing media structure, has been criticized from some outside the newsroom as well. Critical media scholars in particular have pointed out the lack of a consideration by public journalism advocates of the pressures of corporate ownership on journalistic practice - particularly how it leads to a lack of marginalized voices (de Wall). This leads to the argument that it is not enough to have students become more aware and involved in civic life and work more closely with the public. Students must also make an effort to include publics that are typically not heard from, primarily along class-based lines (de Wall; Skinner, Gasher, and Compton).

Amid this push for journalism students to work in a more collaborative fashion with the public, and a broad spectrum of the public at that, the shift to online platforms for news and the increasing interactivity and collaboration that those platforms encourage are merging the interests of academics with professionals. In a broader socioeconomic sense, the audience for mass communication publications is splintering because of the Internet and globalization, leading to challenges that are forcing journalists to reexamine their professional ideology and their work routines - such as working in teams and making their beliefs more transparent (Deuze). This teamwork is not limited to professional journalists but also found between professional and amateur journalists in different examples of interactive storytelling (Pryor).

These interests of activist academics and innovative professionals are merging. How to discuss these new ways of doing journalism and then apply these discussions in a way that brings the outside world into the classroom and exposes students to broader social questions is the focus of this paper.

Research Questions

The paper attempts to determine how to design a course that would address the goals of journalism educators to increase their students' involvement with public affairs and broader sense of journalism's role within society while also providing newsrooms with students prepared to function in more collaborative and interactive professional/amateur ("pro/am journalism") work routines:

RQ1: Does the next generation of journalists require new forms of knowledge and if so what are they?

RQ2: If there are particular skills and knowledge required by pro/am journalism, what are some effective strategies for teaching them?

RQ3: Does the study of pro/am journalism expose students to broader civic issues?

Methodology

This is a participant observation based on experiences teaching a course for upper-division (junior and senior level) journalism students from August to December 2006, as well as the first months teaching the same course in the spring of 2007 (although the second class was not completed by the time of writing). The author also analyzed numerous articles from the mainstream press, trade publications, and websites that focused on citizen journalism issues while compiling the course syllabus and throughout the duration of the course. Course discussions and activities were also evaluated, including term papers, in-class exercises, and semester-length projects, to determine recurring themes, questions, and responses to both. There are some specific comments from students included here as well, but the paper consists more of the author's reflections on the experience, organized in an attempt to define topics worthy of addressing and effective pedagogical strategies for handling these issues.

Background/Course Design

In the fall of 2005 the UT-Austin School of Journalism introduced the course Writing for Online Publication, an elective for undergraduates, meant to cover the various aspects of citizen journalism - particularly how blogging was changing the relationship between the mainstream media, independent journalists, and members of the audiences for both. The course is part of a broader online journalism component of the curriculum, which includes required courses in multimedia production and web design. Although there are some technical skills introduced in the course, the emphasis is on the various intersecting trends behind the rapidly changing journalism industry, such as the spread of mobile technology which allows eyewitnesses to immediately record news as it occurs, the financial dilemmas traditional media faces due to a fragmenting audience, and the media's attempts to capture user-generated activity online through more cooperative and participatory forms of news coverage.

The author taught the course in the fall semester of 2006 and again in the spring semester 2007, and named it "The Future of Journalism". In the fall there were 12 students and in the spring there were eight, and each semester the course met three times per week for an hour per class. Although the department ultimately had to approve the course design, the author had a great deal of freedom to create each syllabus, including any readings, semester projects, in-class activities, and lectures. The courses had several differences from one semester to the next. The following covers each component of the class in greater detail:

Course Objectives

In each semester the objectives were the same:

1. Build awareness and understanding of new forms of journalism online, including citizen journalism (weblogs, podcasts, vlogs, etc.) and participatory journalism (reader forums, reporter blogs, etc.)
2. Develop ability to maintain weblogs through creation and posting of content (print, audio, photo, or video) while maintaining journalistic standards including fairness, accuracy, and research/interviewing

skills.

3. Enable understanding of best practices for generating audience-created content on weblogs.
4. Exercise critical thinking in planning and execution of citizen journalism projects, such as how to build interest in a citizen journalism/participatory journalism project, and what resources will be needed to create successful citizen journalism projects.

Topics/Lectures

There were several broad themes covered in the class that split into natural sections over the 15-week semester. The initial two weeks were devoted to laying out the two sides of the long-running debate that is somewhat artificial and obsolete - bloggers vs. journalists. The class considered the two most common arguments: the traditional media will not survive because of the audience shift to online media, and alternatively, blogs and other forms of online citizen media are a fad with little substance. Alongside various essays from both sides the class looked at evidence supporting both sides - such as announcements of newspaper cutbacks, the reliance of blogs on traditional media reporting, the use of cell phones to document natural disasters, and the increased use of audience content on newspaper websites. In addition to this were discussions of the increase of user-generated content outside of journalism, open source and peer-to-peer models, and the diffusion of cheaper and more powerful technologies. Gradually the course shifted to look at new combinations of professional and amateur journalism - particularly the trends towards hyperlocal and crowdsourced reporting, with the end goal being the realization that aspiring journalists, whether working for the traditional media or outside of it, were faced with an environment where the overlapping relationships between various media producers presented new opportunities that required a combination of old and new journalistic skills.

From that point on the class studied different examples of the most successful attempts at such new journalistic experiments. To "teach blogging" several have said the mindset is as important as the skill set (Curley), so the initial approach to exploring just what that mindset is comprised of included studying students' favorite websites - none of which, in either class, included a mainstream news website other than ESPN - as well as many of the most popular bloggers - which interestingly were mostly unfamiliar to the students. The class analyzed their writing style, production processes - such as how often bloggers posted, how they handled comments and other feedback, and the overall arrangement of their blogs, and their relationship to other bloggers and the mainstream media. For comparison, students then looked at attempts by newspaper websites to incorporate blogs into their product. During this phase of the class students also reviewed other forms of media and assorted tools used to produce blogs, podcasts, vlogs, and such things as Google Map mashups. With the introduction to the mindset and skill set, work began on class projects (see below).

The final section of the class covered different fields citizen media is impacting, to show students how citizen journalism and participatory culture overall reach beyond the news industry, creating demand for those with an understanding of "how to blog" while also changing the context in which the news industry operates. This includes politics at all levels, activism and free speech issues (with an emphasis on dissidents under oppressive governments), non-profits' use of online media for member mobilization and outreach, and changing relationships between businesses and consumers. These topics are presented alongside ethical debates, legal developments (particularly libel lawsuits against bloggers and posters to message boards), regulation of citizen media, battles among corporations and between corporations and the public over content control, surveillance, and a variety of other issues to flesh out the general debates and practices covered in the first two-thirds of the class. In addition a week is spent discussing developments in ubiquitous computing, such as mobile devices, geo-tagging, RFID, location-aware social networking, and other technologies. The goal here is to study the relationship between rising amounts of information, credibility and trust concerns, information filtering demands, and the roles of journalists and journalism in whichever form it takes, with current developments as one point on a potentially upward trajectory of rising information and rising needs for

someone to sort through it all.

Readings

The course did not include any required textbooks, but instead used articles gathered from a variety of newspaper articles, media trade publications, and assorted weblogs and websites, posted to a class blog. This was done for several reasons: to provide a wide spectrum of examples and viewpoints on the many issues the class covered; to show students numerous resources available online that would allow them to follow these developments after the semester ended; to encourage discussion and interest by showing students the relevance and topicality of these issues; and to include reader reactions to readings when available as a way to reinforce the interactive and participatory themes of the class. Providing readings that contained such audience feedback often enhanced the main readings and provided indirect examples of the debates the main authors were writing about in the first place. Among these main sources were Online Journalism Review, Editor & Publisher, The New York Times, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the Pew Center for Excellence in Journalism, the J-Lab and New Voices programs from the Institute for Interactive Journalism, Jeff Jarvis' BuzzMachine, Jay Rosen's PressThink, Cyberjournalist, a variety of industry organizations (i.e. Online News Association), and interviews, transcriptions of speeches, and the actual work of practitioners of the work discussed in these articles (including Rob Curley, Markos Zuniga, Josh Marshall, Adrian Holovaty, and more).

Semester Projects

The two semesters offered two very different project assignments. In the fall, the 12 students were split into four groups of three, with each developing their own blog. The technical requirements were minimal, since the groups were able to use free blogging services or an existing weblog, allowed to post unedited short videos, and introduced to such free and simplistic services as the Google Map mashup website communitywalk.com. The emphasis was on devising and testing strategies for coverage of a particular community or issue using whichever media the group felt worked best, promoting the site through online and offline marketing, experimenting with various styles of writing and presentation of information, encouraging public participation on their website, and interacting with any audience the group was able to attract. There were minimum requirements for the amount of posting per week, but the assignment was open-ended, to the point that two of the four groups proposed their own initial ideas for the project.

In the spring the entire class worked together on a pre-existing site, a weblog the author launched in 2004 that had grown to close to 300 members, which one of the four groups in the fall had worked on as well. Although there were only a handful of actively contributing members on the site by January 2007, the traffic and extent of posts over three years offered the potential for a wider audience and more interaction between the students and readers. As in the fall, there was less of an emphasis on technical skills and instead a focus on using the blog format - as well as vlogs, mash-ups, and mobile posting - to cover a particular story and attempt to approach it through hyperlocal and crowdsourced methods, as well as the more "mindset"-type requirements included in the fall semester assignment.

Course Requirements

In addition to the projects, students had to complete a midterm paper that reviewed the professional/amateur journalism debates and proposed how their semester project would address the questions being raised by the changes occurring in the industry. Their final papers presented the option to apply what they learned through readings, lectures, discussions, and their work to either creating an online media strategy for a newspaper, a non-profit, or propose their own independent media project for several years into the future. They were also required to post reactions to occasional homework readings posted on the class blog. Along with helping to provoke class discussions, the blog was useful as a way to expose students to each other's writing styles and ideas, and make them more comfortable

writing in shorter and more informal styles. In addition the links to course readings were archived and available for the students to consult for their papers.

Results:

This section will review observations and student comments in response to the main topics described above. At the time of writing the author was at the midpoint of the spring semester class, so the majority of the data comes from the fall semester. The student comments were taken from the class blogs after receiving approval from those students quoted, and the students are quoted anonymously, although students are numbered to show those students who are quoted more than once. Not every student is included in the quotes, but the ones selected reflect general sentiments among the class and are used as representative to avoid repetition.

Class Reactions:

Bloggers vs. The Mainstream Media

Although this argument has received so much attention in media coverage since the boom in blogging's popularity in roughly 2004, it was fairly new to the students. Many said they were aware of concerns about the news media's economic future and the impact of such websites as Wikipedia, MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube on people's media habits and the mainstream's influence. They noted that in prior journalism classes professors alluded to these trends, but there was little discussion of them because of the emphasis on learning fundamental skills. After reviewing some background materials on the issue (such as Lemann's 2006 New Yorker article on citizen journalism) and news reports of the successes of such websites as Digg juxtaposed with continuing struggles at newspapers (the LA Times was the dominant example in the fall, while the Santa Clara television station's decision to rely strictly on citizen contributions was the most striking example in the spring) class discussion on the blog and in the classroom revolved around a few main points: there are benefits to citizen journalism and benefits to professional journalism, and either/or dichotomies are misguided; professional journalism serves an important role but cannot resist change and must be more flexible in defining what "journalism" is; and hybrid forms that combine attributes of both professional and citizen journalism are the best strategy. Most opinions were moderate and far less dismissive of either professional or citizen journalism than the sources the students read.

Throughout the class conversations there was a notable appreciation for journalism's mission - particularly exposing corruption and explaining world events - but disappointment in the way that mission has been pursued. There were several comments made regarding a sense of failure by the media to be a watchdog, several said the mainstream had "sold out", and others were more resigned, noting how difficult it is for an independent voice to retain a critical stance as it tries to attract a wider audience. Despite these concerns, there was a general sense that journalism could find the proper formula for mixing professional and citizen reporting into a format that was interesting and effective, and that professional journalism remained critical because of some challenges citizen journalism faces and some weaknesses of the form.

Student Quotes:

"Journalism with journalists is only one type of journalism. Our profession is anything people want it to curtail, whether it be an album review on allmusic.com or an entry in a forum...(this is) changing the world for the better and is a result of a changing world." (1)

"Citizen journalism will force professional journalists to stay on their toes and take advantage of Internet resources, but I think its 'cheerleaders' exaggerate its integrity and future role in society. (But, really, I think the future of online expression in general will be more affected by government regulation

and corporate interest than anything!)” (2)

"It would be a waste to limit the use of technology to those who are trained journalists, and leaving out the citizens who have equally important viewpoints, as well as insights into communities that traditional journalists may not have. " (3)

“I think the title ‘citizen journalist’ is misleading. I think ‘activist journalist’ would be more appropriate. I doubt there are too many out there who are willing to be serious full-or even part-time journalists without receiving pay for the work that goes into reporting on anything that doesn’t inflame or deeply interest them.” (4)

"The pressures of capitalism will make a complete transition to citizen journalism impossible. Big media not only has the funds to allow their reporters to travel around the world, and to pay their living expenses while they report, but it also has access to many sources that the average citizen journalist does not have. " (5)

"Considering (a citizen journalism website) also has advertisements somewhat similar to newspapers, what is to stop this new type of journalism from evolving into the old corporate driven journalism we have today? I guess that's the problem with anything that gets too popular. " (6)

"Another issue that bothers me is that people are talking about the way things are changing so fast and the Internet is the new face of the news. That is not true for all 6 and a half billion of us. In many places the internet either does not exist effectively for the average citizen or amounts to a kiosk in the town square." (7)

"most of the discussion on the topic of political discussion on the Internet that I have heard was positive and optimistic. The Internet is supposed to provide a forum for discussion for those who previously had no voice. Anyone can start a blog and gain readership through quality writing. Or so I thought. I never really considered that there might be an elite group of bloggers that have a monopoly on user traffic. " (5)

Pro/Am Journalism: Current Mainstream Attempts and other Hybrids

One goal of the course was to move beyond these debates and begin exploring solutions. Students first considered how traditional news organizations were currently experimenting with this mixture of staff and audience content, and then looked at recent models such as OhMyNews. Although the students were critical of most initial attempts by current news organizations more straightforward blogging strategies (i.e. having reporters maintain blogs), the hyperlocal and crowdsourcing initiatives were overwhelmingly popular.

The one nearly unanimous opinion among all students was the lack of engaging blogs on the website of the local newspaper (the Austin-American Statesman). In their reviews, students noted the posting of press releases, the posting of announcements with no context, and the feeling that the blogs were used as another place to post information found in other sections of the paper, or simply added as a formality without appropriate resources or planning. For all of the students this was the first time they had read any of the local newspaper's blogs.

There was far more enthusiasm about newspaper experimentation with citizen journalism in formats other than the now-familiar blog/comment model. The students were most impressed with Rob Curley's success with hyperlocal journalism and the Fort Myers News-Press crowdsourcing investigation. In both cases, blogs are not approached as an end in themselves but as a tool that serves as an interface to databases (with many of the database details entered by the audience) and as a way to

manage and organize vast amounts of information, divided among the audience/reporters who can then contribute to the story or investigation. Upon exposure to these experiments students were far more excited about the potential for news organizations to partner with citizen reporters to produce a new form of journalism, rather than attempt to mimic "blogs" (although the crowdsourcing approach was originally undertaken by group blogs and networks of solo blogs that worked on stories collaboratively, outside of the news industry). Students were attracted to the crowdsourcing idea (one student proposing an investigation into alleged illegal car towing near campus with contributors sending cell phone video of where they witnessed tows), but students were also leery of how to launch such an investigation without a large audience. The hyperlocal/crowdsourcing trends not only seemed to provide a productive and interesting new tool for news websites, but also made it seem that news websites might be the ones best suited to the job because of their built-in audiences.

Student Quotes:

"Maybe what Statesman's writers should write about or perhaps be allowed to write about are the things they normally would only talk about once they got home or were out getting a drink with a friend. I would be much more interested in reading about where roadblocks got thrown up and by who while they were trying to write a story or what could not make it into the story because it could not be fact checked on time or at all but was curious and of note." (7)

"If journalists view what's going on as a battle raging between press and online (which many citizen and professional journalists have done), rather than as an exciting time for the industry, they're going to miss out on a big, important opportunity to take advantage of technology (which is not the enemy)." (2)

"I like how Curley instinctively knows that it's really the little things in our lives that drive us. As much as we may not realize it, our lives are pretty much about things like running errands...I love the idea of taking those daily tasks and things that people do and see every day, and making them easy to reach." (8)

"The internet now as it stands is so vast and gigantic that finding a resource like the web pages that Curley is creating goes beyond just informing; they have the potential to become tools...If I could create a hyperlocal I would focus on a map-based 3-d software that could provide me with basically all the information I would ever need to do whatever strikes my fancy in my locality. The info would resemble something like citysearch, but completely visual based...that would be fricking awesome." (9)

"I think that Journalism as a profession and a calling has a big opportunity right now being handed to it on a silver platter by citizen journalism...Journalists working for papers spend a lot of time, footwork and fingerwork on (briefs and shorter daily local coverage). If citizen journalists want these stories to cover for themselves then we should let them take control there. They are doing a good job. Journalists working for papers and stations can now use the funding and backing they receive to burrow like thorns further into the sides of city hall, the federal government, police, FBI, CIA, NSA, big corporations, influential lobbyists, major interest groups and anyone else of power or influence. Professional journalism and the 4th estate as a whole can be strengthened by this refocus of time and resources." (6)

Project Work

Although there were several distinct differences between the fall and spring semester projects, which are described, there was some common ground regardless of the general organization of the project. It is also important to consider that the spring semester class had only been working on the semester project for two weeks at the time of writing, and therefore conclusions about the effectiveness

of their project work are premature.

In the fall semester, the four projects covered: the apartment complexes the students lived in (eblokparty.blogspot.com/); the UT football tailgating community (longhorntailgate.com); affordable housing in Austin (houseinthecity.blogspot.com/); a pre-existing Austin-based community blog with recommendations on low-cost/high-quality places and events (unknowncity.com). In the spring the entire class worked on UnknownCity, but attempted to expand its coverage from reviews of places and tips on deals to the broader context of Austin's growth and whether the city's success was making it more difficult for the poor to survive.

There was some excellent work done by the students on their projects, but the details of what students produced on their blogs are not discussed here. Instead the author attempted to draw some general lessons from across the projects to provide some guidance for those trying to decide how to structure similar project assignments.

Challenges

In both cases, students' main concerns were twofold: what to write, and how to get an audience. The relatively open-ended and experimental nature of the projects, in comparison to more traditional assignments written for class, student publications, or internships, was generally difficult for students to deal with. For some the possibilities were so broadly defined that they didn't know where to begin. This in some ways was intended, to give students a sense of the reality that bloggers and independent journalists face when not assigned stories or institution-driven beats. Instead the groups began with a general area or issue and attempted to find interesting ways to approach it.

As many bloggers who attempt to turn their blog into an online community are quick to discover, building an audience is far more difficult than any technical task. The demands of creating content for the blog, promoting it to the public, and then trying to convince people to contribute with no financial incentive - and especially in the current media environment where many of the most "wired", who would be likely to contribute, already have their own blog, MySpace, Facebook, or participate on someone else's website. Students realized the need to have a niche to distinguish themselves, but this also created the need to find people who fit into that niche rather than just any member of the general public. The obstacles involved in finding and convincing people to contribute to sites - especially when the project duration is barely two months long - makes any audience contribution miraculous. These difficulties did raise interesting questions about just how possible it is for a weblog to develop into an online community in today's highly saturated citizen media environment, and the benefits of having an established brand and audience before embarking on a citizen journalism project.

It can also be difficult to balance the requirements of a journalism course with the experimental nature of the projects and the informal nature of blogging and citizen media in general. In trying to avoid being too stiff and traditional for a blog students could push the boundaries too far and appear to not be doing "journalism" at all, while if students tried to use the blog in a traditional journalistic way, they would be missing the point of the class by creating content similar to the newspaper blogs they admitted had bored them. Finding the balance between these two extremes is tricky, and in some ways is one of the main challenges that journalism faces. In a March 2007 speech at the SXSW Interactive conference, Henry Jenkins discussed the need for politics and journalism to pursue more of a "playful engagement" with the public, so that the critical issues discussed in both arenas can become more accessible. How to do so without straying into the sensational and the trivial and pandering to the lowest common denominator is something that takes much trial and error and patience on behalf of the students and the professor. Many students in the two classes said they weren't interested in "hard news," but it appeared that this was more due to the traditional ways that hard news is covered, because they were excited about and proposed ideas for covering "hard news" topics such as housing, crime, and government - just in unconventional ways.

Benefits/Drawbacks of the Two Project Styles

There is an unavoidable tradeoff presented by the two most likely ways to approach this sort of project. If students work on their own site, they become more comfortable running the site and the mystery of the technology dissipates. Their increased ownership of the site also seems to lead them to have more enthusiasm in regards to promoting and maintaining the site. If the entire class works on an existing site together, there is a higher potential for them to attract and interact with an audience - at a minimum, they can interact with each other by commenting on each others' posts, a practice that can be very effective at creating a sense of activity and showing students how reader feedback can affect a story. It would also be possible for students to comment on another group's blog, but when all the students are pursuing the same topic or covering the same area for the same blog, it seems more likely that students would have more fodder for comments. However, the fact that the site had a "boss" (in this case the author) who could be counted on to handle some technical issues, add members, and deal with other administrative tasks, likely reduced that sense of ownership and somewhat limited the students' exposure to running a site.

There are additional factors to consider. Several students already had experience running their own blog, and almost all students had their own MySpace or Facebook site, which have blogging capabilities and already expose students to the experience of running a site by themselves. Therefore the next level up would be a small group site, which in the case of the fall semester meant three students blogging together on the same site. This raises a few concerns. If students are assigned to create their own sites, does uneven access to financial resources or technical expertise create unfair advantages? The low cost of domain names and web hosting makes such overhead minimal, but students were more likely to opt for the less powerful but free (and simple to set up) versions of software like Blogger or Wordpress, which make it slightly more difficult for the public to add themselves as members. Also with the small groups, the likelihood that one member can affect the overall site output is greater. Lack of participation by some students is an unfortunate reality. When a group divides blogging responsibilities over the course of a week, the lack of effort by a group member can throw off the site's consistency and momentum, making it difficult to build an audience. If the entire class is working on the same blog, this problem is less likely, but a well-thought out posting schedule and precise responsibilities need to be laid out from the beginning. The author found himself rearranging the spring semester assignment several times to adjust to unforeseen issues, such as students waiting until the end of the week to post, leaving the site vacant of new material for the week.

Research Questions:

One clarification is needed before examining the research questions. Since the term "journalists" could encompass many variations - such as a reporter working for a news organization, an independent blogger, the main administrator and contributor to a community-driven website - these questions do not pertain strictly to any particular version of the occupation. It's entirely possible that journalism schools will produce large amounts of graduates who go on to work independently of the mainstream, be in charge of news divisions for various online organizations or companies, or even launch and run their own news operations. Realistically journalism schools should therefore expand their definition of journalists and journalism to include these variations from the norm, and these questions take that as a starting point.

RQ1: *Does the next generation of journalists require new forms of knowledge and if so what are they?*

It became clear over the two semesters that while professional and citizen journalists are presenting stories in new ways, many fundamental reporting skills remain essential to these new journalistic forms. Observers, including the students, often place an emphasis on the variations in the finished product - objectivity vs. subjectivity, formality vs. informality, depth vs. superficiality - and these distinctions in tone and style between traditional journalism and blogs are often valid. But key

skills and traits found among many of the best traditional reporters - developing a network of sources, generating story ideas, having a curiosity and awareness about the people and places where they live, having passion for and belief in the basic value of information, communication, and journalism, having a sense of imagination, humor, outrage, and responsibility - these fundamental characteristics are essential regardless of whether an individual works for a local newspaper or launches their own independent website. Most of the problems students had with the semester projects involved these issues, such as being unsure of what to write about, not completing assignments, and lacking sources and contacts to provide tips for stories.

The transparency created by the intertwined professional-amateur journalism network has arguably placed other traditional journalistic assets, such as accuracy and fairness, under greater scrutiny than in the past. This point arose in classroom and blog discussions, as students noted the ability of a broad audience to fact-check content through user comments and the conversations that can surround content that bloggers link to. One advantage of the semester projects which were based on existing blogs with more audience feedback was that students experienced this firsthand. In the fall as part of a homework assignment, the entire class posted to the same blog over the weekend and were required to comment on each other's posts. After one student claimed in a post that a local boat rental company had unfairly charged him for damages and was not to be trusted, another student raised questions about the incident in their comment, leading the first student to withdraw some of their initial allegations. Examples drawn from the local newspaper's online forums also showed how story subjects would comment on the stories to dispute points made in the article. The lessons were clear - reporting and writing has a greater chance of being publicly challenged than it did in the past.

Therefore take a good blogger and you'll likely have a good reporter. But the opposite is not necessarily true. There are additional demands placed on bloggers that are new to the profession. There are new ethical concerns raised when dealing with sources online, for mainstream or independent online journalists. If citizens collaborate on a crowdsourced investigation, are they also potentially liable for their efforts? What responsibility does a newsroom or a blogger have regarding the security of user data? When users are allowed to post anonymously, website administrators necessarily need to be aware of any ways that users' identity could be accessed - such as when a commenter's email address unknowingly makes their name visible to the public. Also it is necessary for journalists to know if an anonymous online source's data is known by a telecom or other third party. The ethical questions created by the digital divide were also raised in class discussions, particularly how such divides can limit participation by many members of the public, creating a need for a journalist to find ways to gather and include these voices when newsrooms seek the opinion of "the public."

There are two other concerns that are unique and without precedent in journalism. The blogger's typical work schedule, posting throughout the day and interacting with their audience and other bloggers, often leads to a more clear sense of the person behind the writing. For many professional journalists there is a great distance between who they are and what is revealed about them in their writing. Columnists usually are the ones who remove this wall between the personal and the professional, but even they don't face the constant sense of openness that bloggers do. Just as reporters often must reveal themselves to gain the trust of their sources, so must bloggers and reporters interacting with an audience - but in the latter case this occurs in public. Hence the personality of the journalist is moving more to the forefront. Conveniently this sort of public display has become far more common and comfortable with students due to the public profiles found on MySpace and Facebook. Secondly, as more journalists decide to launch their own websites, the "do it yourself" approach does not stop at reporting and writing or even the technical aspects of adding other media and features. Running websites also requires having a broad sense of other news organizations covering similar issues and areas, including other bloggers. Where reporters would in the past read other papers or watch television newscasts to make sure they weren't being beat on a story, today's journalists will have a much broader network of competitors and collaborators to monitor. The same need exists for staying

abreast of legal developments concerning online libel and the rights of independent journalists to press protections, and a general awareness of industry trends should be nurtured in students to help them navigate an increasingly volatile business. The course's structure and use of a variety of current sources attempts to serve this purpose as well, by showing students where they can find this information, and how to use such tools as RSS readers to monitor news sources.

RQ2: *If there are particular skills and knowledge required by pro/am journalism, what are some effective strategies for teaching them?*

Considering the response to RQ1, and the experiences described above, the two parallel efforts of describing and discussing the current media environment and allowing students to practice participating in that world seemed to provide some guidance and experience for students in dealing with these old and new demands journalists face. For all the students the readings and examples shown in class revealed new ideas and exposed them to a world of debate that dominates the news industry but is unknown to people who will, in some cases in less than a year, be involved in the shaping of the industry either from within it or from outside. Knowing the new terminology and tools, the main industry pioneers, and the most influential and astute observers of these changes is critical. Having some exposure to new technologies to begin imagining the potential of the Internet to tell stories in different ways is important as well.

Teaching "how to blog" - which amounts to the skills discussed for RQ1 plus presenting information in non-traditional ways, developing an active audience, and devising ways to apply that collaborative relationship to uncovering and covering news - takes a combination of explaining such skills in terms of traditional reporting, and introducing some new ideas. For the former, one class exercise was to break down the daily activities of a reporter - from story assignment to final edits on the finished article - and look for areas where the public could participate, such as suggesting stories, helping to review and analyze documents, and raising questions about raw reporting as if they were city desk editors. Another exercise is comparing the traditional inverted pyramid organization of an article to the standard blog post - which at its heart is simply the most interesting aspects of the story, the detail that would be the first thing the writer would tell their co-workers or friends, which the audience would be most likely to respond to and forward to their friends. Students were also told to try telling their story in parts, using a reporter's notebook approach, using the examples of the Times-Picayune's online coverage of Hurricane Katrina and the McClatchy newspapers Baghdad blog. Regarding the role of citizens in reporting, students were told to picture people as fact providers in addition to being storytellers. This was also expressed in terms of traditional sources, where some sources provide quotes and others provide bits of information to help move the reporting along. With this in mind, the provision of text, photos, video, or other contributions by citizens was considered in terms of the occasional compromise between participation and style - students compared raw footage of natural disasters and roadside bombs to edited multimedia packages as a way to show the value of a broad spectrum of contributions. From that point it becomes easier for the students to imagine and brainstorm such applications as an interactive Google Map to discuss, for example, the campus-area streets most prone to car break-ins, or reviews of apartment maintenance issues filtered down to the individual apartments in a complex - two ideas proposed by students.

RQ3: *Does the study of pro/am journalism expose students to broader civic issues?*

Not necessarily - but it does present the opportunity to explore the civic engagement and critical studies issues raised earlier in the paper. In the case of these two classes, the author made an effort in the fall to bring up issues of gender, racial, and class equity in citizen media (by assigning Harp & Tremayne 2006; spending time discussing network theory, power law inequalities and the long tail; and spending a class discussing the digital divide and lingering Internet and computer access issues in Austin), and in the spring this element of the course was even more overt. While in the fall one group

project dealt with affordable housing, in the spring the entire class project was an attempt to shift the existing blog from a travel and city entertainment guide with occasional news stories, to a more news-centric blog meant to focus on issues associated with growth in Austin, such as affordability and gentrification. Among the project's requirements was to document a low-income area of Austin relatively uncovered by citizen journalists.

These were direct attempts to deal with these issues, and as with any sort of journalism class they can be incorporated into a "future journalism" class. But there are some more subtle factors that are distinctive to the latter type of class. The need for students to attempt to encourage participation on the sites leads them to think about participation in public life in general. A week of class is devoted to the role of citizen media in the political process and the relationship between political culture and journalism, to discuss the similarities between political apathy, journalism's declining audience, and the similar responses by individuals using the Internet to try opening institutions such as news organizations and political parties to greater public participation. As students consider how to attract an audience, they are led to other local media sources to attempt online outreach, and have to consider the social context of their work to determine who would be likely to participate and the issues that would attract them to the blog project. In the spring more time was spent on the recent newsroom experiments' roots in the civic journalism movement of the 1990s, and the prominent presence in both eras of Jay Rosen, the Knight Foundation, and Jan Schaffer, among others, also presented opportunities for discussion of these issues.

Conclusions:

It appears that in 2007 the needs of the news industry for innovation and expanded skills from journalism graduates, and the desires of journalism educators for bringing greater theoretical depth and social relevance to journalism schools, seemed to be growing ever closer. Meeting both of these demands requires changes in journalism schools. Testing and refining the ideas experimented with in these two classes should be included in those efforts.

Ironically, by embracing change, confronting the industry's dilemmas, and pushing students to expand their notions of what journalism is, the fundamental skills of journalism and journalism's importance in society can become more apparent to students. The majority of students in these two classes had much to say about journalism's present and future, felt that many of the important questions journalism faces were not considered in other classes, and some left the fall class stating that it was the first journalism class that gave them hope for the future. The author designed both courses to stress that the students' prior journalistic training was not obsolete, that their skills were actually going to be in greater demand because of the growth of non-traditional news organizations, and that their mindset - including broad knowledge about social issues and the media and the need for such familiar journalistic job requirements as creating a network of sources - would be as important as the technical skill requirements that will undoubtedly change with each passing year.

The value of such courses should be clear. Therefore this paper ends with a suggestion for how journalism schools could get the most out of these courses - by establishing such courses as requirements, institutionalizing them within departments, and investing more resources in them. There are several reasons why this would increase the impact and effectiveness of these courses. It seems for one that treating the study of citizen journalism as an elective leads to low enrollments and the stigma of lesser relevance. If it is true that these trends are going to affect every journalism student's career prospects and the work they do after graduation, it appears to be the ethical responsibility of journalism schools to expose all their students to these issues, prepare them for the chaotic industry that awaits them, and give them the tools to find work if news organizations continue to shrink. In addition to integrating a course like this into the core curriculum, the department could establish an ongoing website that students would then contribute to for their semester project. Having a department-funded and administered group weblog could help to maintain the momentum of the site from one semester to

the next, so that new students would be able to step in and collaborate with an existing audience, and former students could continue to contribute to the site when they finish the course, in order to keep building experience.

There is no doubt that more research is needed on the design of journalism courses that respond to the realities of media today. These findings are based on limited experience. But journalism scholars and educators need to begin addressing these questions immediately, because a choice still exists between becoming active shapers of the news media of the 21st century, or fading into irrelevance.

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