

Applying the “Manifesto for Change” to Journalism Education

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Preface

In two previous projects, the author examined nine propositions likely to have an effect on the future of journalism. This project updates that work and also seeks to apply its lessons to journalism education.

In June 2006, this author published “On Behalf of Journalism: A Manifesto for Change.” That work was the culmination of a project begun three years previous, which resulted in the 2005 book, “The Press,” edited by Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. This was a scholarly volume examining the press as an institution of American democracy. Under the aegis of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, I was charged with bringing that work into a form more accessible to the field, and into a more action-oriented focus.

I formulated nine propositions, drawn from the book’s contributions, which seemed likely to affect the future of journalism. To discuss them, we assembled a group of journalists, scholars and others concerned about the topic. The Manifesto was built on these discussions, and on an additional year of individual research, and culminated in a number of recommendations. (A list of the propositions follows the conclusion). The recommendations focused on the role of corporations, the rise of not-for-profit media, the

responsibilities of journalists, the role of government and of the public, and what was called (rather lamely, it seems in retrospect) “new forms of media.”

Two years later, I was asked to update the Manifesto for the 2008 Breaux Symposium, “New Models for News,” sponsored by theanship School of Mass Communication’s Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs at Louisiana State University. This provided me an opportunity to return to the propositions and my earlier research and to see, in a period of enormously fast-paced change, which of the initial ideas about the future of journalism had been most apt, and which had been widest of the mark.

The update revealed how little we had understood just two years before about the powerful role of new technologies and new forms of journalism, as well as the changing role of the public in participating in the creation of journalism. Many other aspects of the work continued to be illuminating, though with some to-be-expected twists and turns. Fear of change has of course been a consistent thread (one that will no doubt continue) but the growth in new possibilities has been breathtaking (as has been the speed of the collapse of legacy media.)

A few months after completing the reexamination of the Manifesto, I began a new job in journalism education. The WJEC has offered an opportunity to revisit the document in a different light, updating it anew but also (and in particular) exploring its relevance to journalism education.

Introduction

In pondering this new application for the Manifesto, I am struck by how many of its themes resound through our work during my first two years at the USC Annenberg journalism school. For example, we are playing a far more powerful role than previously in helping to meet the information needs of the public, as the legacy media are hollowed out by the collapse of their economic model. In specific news outlets such as our Annenberg Digital News or the newly launched LA.spot.us, a community supported reporting site, as well as in our training – not just of mid-career journalists but of entrepreneurs, of nongovernmental organizations and others -- we are in fact a sizable nonprofit having a significant effect on journalism.

Another of the Manifesto's emphases is on the role of citizens. Here, the enormous growth and rapid change suggest that universities must ask themselves whether training journalists only – as opposed to also, for example, training citizens for their role in journalism – suffices. Should we be centers of news literacy for our universities, for the wider community and (through distance learning) for a whole new “student” population?

Meanwhile, the previous focus on corporate social responsibility has become virtually meaningless, as corporations struggle simply to survive. In its place has arisen the search for new economic models for journalism. Since the last Manifesto update, a myriad of

new economic possibilities has appeared, from micropayments to pay walls, search-related advertising to methods that enable news consumers to *opt* to pay. In this time of great flux, what is the journalism academy's best role in regard to the search for new economic models? Moreover, to the degree that the concept of social responsibility continues to be valid, it is now distributed among countless smaller decision-makers – among all those running new Web-based news outlets, for example. What role does the academy play in shaping the actions of these contributors to the new media ecology?

The media ethics discussion, too, has changed, with the shifting relationships among the former gatekeepers and those once known as “the audience,” now playing a much more active role. The ever-growing importance of transparency as a foundational journalistic ethic seems clear. What other conclusions might emerge from deep-digging journalism school ethics discussions? Similarly, what kind of research should we be contributing to the impoverished (in the United States, anyway) debate on the role of government?

These are some of the questions I have addressed in this reexamination of the Manifesto, placing the original propositions in the light of the journalism academy's roles. I hope the update will not only be useful to us in our work at Annenberg, but useful to the international journalism education community as well.

Principle Areas of Investigation

I. A Greater Role for Nonprofits: The Journalism School as Exemplar

Perhaps the most striking change for journalism schools is the degree to which we have shifted from being learning labs whose actual journalism (if any) was limited in its distribution and impact, to being significant -- even major -- media players in our communities. I don't mean to disparage work such as that done by students in, for example, Medill's Washington, D.C., bureau, in which small newspapers around the country were served -- often well indeed -- by students reporting on how their local issues were being addressed in Washington. Nor can we ignore such substantial local news outlets as the Missouri School of Journalism has long operated in Columbia, Mo., on television, radio, newspaper and magazine platforms.

Nonetheless, it is clear that in journalism schools across the United States major projects are increasingly making much more substantial contributions toward filling the holes left by the hollowing out of local "legacy" media. Noting the Internet's strength as a medium for exploration, Columbia Graduate School of Journalism Dean Nick Lemann wrote, "Journalism schools ought to explore, and are already exploring, the possibility of becoming significant producers of original news reporting to make

up for the loss of the reporting that economically devastated news organizations can no longer afford.” <http://chronicle.com/article/Journalism-Schools-Can-Push/49115>

This hope is clearly being realized. In their October 19, 2009, report, “The Reconstruction of American Journalism,” Len Downie (former executive editor of the *Washington Post*) and scholar Michael Schudson catalogued numerous ways in which colleges and universities are contributing to independent local news reporting, from the southern Florida alliance of newspapers using work from Florida International University to Northeastern University students’ investigative reporting’s appearances in the *Boston Globe*.

http://www.cjr.org/reconstruction/the_reconstruction_of_american.php

Similarly, the Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism will be contributing to the Bay Area News Project, a collaboration with the *New York Times* that plans also to have 15 of its own staffers. Content will appear in the Bay Area edition of the *Times*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/22/business/media/22bay.html> New York

University’s upcoming collaboration -- also with the *New York Times* -- “The Local: East Village,” will appear on the newspaper’s Website and include coverage of the University’s immediate neighborhood.

http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2010/02/23/the_local.html

Scholar Michael Schudson, noting at a speech at USC Annenberg that “more journalism schools are going into the business of actually producing journalism,”

mentioned this School's role in that regard.

<http://annenberg.usc.edu/News%20and%20Events/News/100210Schudson/SchudsonRemarks.aspx>

Our work at USC Annenberg indeed mirrors several of the above-mentioned models. Neon Tommy, the voice of Annenberg Digital News,

www.neontommy.com is our own Web-based report, including reporting from classes

(on science, for example, or religion) original work from the NeonTommy staff

(revealing swine flu deaths covered up by county officials)

<http://blogs.laweekly.com/ladaily/city-news/swine-flu-deaths-covered-up-in/> and

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/11/30/neon-tommy-becomes-first_n_374797.html

and collaborations with KPCC and with the *Los Angeles Times* in its Homicide Report, documenting the lives of murder victims.

<http://annenberg.usc.edu/News%20and%20Events/News/100127LATimesPartnership.aspx>

In a reporting class, another professor, Sandy Tolan, directed numerous substantial multi-media projects on "Hunger in the Golden State" in collaboration with the Center for Investigative Reporting and California Watch, a network of media throughout the state. The stories appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, KQED and newspapers across California. <http://hungerincal.uscannenberg.org/>

So, a great deal of work is being done by journalism schools in meeting the public's need for high quality information. But what are the particular contributions of the academy?

We are seeking to answer that question, too, at USC Annenberg. For example, a project based in the independent municipality of Alhambra seeks to identify how a community incorporating different language groups can come together to solve civic challenges. One

of the primary answers is what Professor Sandra Ball-Rokeach calls a “local media source grounded in community-based research.” <http://www.metamorph.org/> Ball-Rokeach notes that the project goals of Alhambra Source include: “a participatory platform, a common space for local storytelling, linguistic tools facilitating conversation across ethnic groups, research on the effects of a new media source on civic engagement and a model for local media outlets in ethnically diverse communities.” <http://alhambrafeed.org/2010/04/16/alhambras-contaminated-groundwater/>

Ball-Rokeach has another project, Metamorphosis, which she describes as having “a mission to understand the transformation of urban community under the forces of globalization, new communication technologies, and population diversity so that its research can inform practitioner and policy maker decisions.”

<http://annenbergl.usc.edu/AboutUs/PublicAffairs/Pubs/CommLine/100303CommLine.aspx>

As Donica Mensing, Associate Professor at the Reynolds School of Journalism University of Nevada, Reno, points out, “Reproducing some of the journalism of the past is not necessarily a high value activity for j-schools. For this work to have value, the standards, organization, editing and networking of new models must be incorporated into the creation and distribution of the journalism. We owe it to students and to the health of the discipline to push for new skills and mindsets for

the future, and avoid absorbing all energy into reproducing work we already know how to do.” <http://studentdev.jour.unr.edu/jeducation/?p=190>

Interestingly, this increased role for journalism schools – providing more journalism to a public ever more in need of information in the public interest, while having a greater impact, more notice and more influence – raises its own questions for the university. How do you report “without fear or favor” from within an institution that emphasizes collegiality and must balance such contending interests as protecting student privacy, raising money and burnishing community relations? Independence is one of the central values of ethical reporting. Carving out that independence within the university will not come easily for all. This too, then, is an arena worthy research and reporting going forward.

The Citizens’ Responsibility to Be Informed: Broadening the J Schools’ Audience

The original proposition asserted that “citizens of a democracy have a responsibility to be informed,” and focused on media literacy courses, stronger civics education and others tools to create the environment of vigorous debate in which the press can thrive. In fact, the media environment has shifted dramatically since that construction. The people “formerly known as the audience,” have become co-creators of content. The old adage

that freedom of the press belongs only to those who own one has become virtually universalized: We all own the ability to publish now, and multitudes of us do.

So what does this mean for the journalism academy? The Manifesto's emphasis on news literacy remains valid, indeed has become perhaps even more essential. And much is being done on this topic. A center of activity is the State University of New York at Stony Brook, whose Center for News Literacy

http://www.stonybrook.edu/journalism/newsliteracy/big_idea.html has done much to spread the gospel that journalism schools (and universities in general) should do much more to help citizens understand and help shape media. A conference at Stony Brook in 2009 <http://www.newsliteracyconference.com/content/included> among its topics, "How can journalism schools take on a new university-wide role in News Literacy?"

Among its recommendations:

- "Provide seed grants to journalism programs at schools and colleges. Specifically those schools that are ready to move forward with news literacy programs that reach beyond journalism majors. Give \$25K per institutions, and spread the money around.
- "Set up a clearinghouse so that schools can collectively use, participate with, and share some of the ideas already coming into play at Stony Brook.
- "Develop external partners with professional and academic organizations."

The conference included international participants and focused as well on "global common denominators" as noted in this post at globaljournalist.org:

<http://www.globaljournalist.org/stories/2009/09/30/news-literacy-worldwide/>

An interesting look at this issue is chronicled in this blog post, “Does media literacy belong in J-schools?” by a journalism professor who attended the symposium, <http://studentdev.jour.unr.edu/jeducation/?p=68> “I think journalism schools have something else to offer. I struggle to avoid creating more ‘literacies’ but it seems to me we don’t need to address students so much as consumers of media, but as creators and citizens. Despite the unfashionability of teaching civics and public engagement in universities, this is exactly what journalism is about.”

Another initiative. “The News Literacy Project,” directed by Alan Miller, focuses on middle and high school students, bringing journalists (retired and active) into various classrooms to help them focus on identifying credible information.

One of the key roles in this arena for the journalism academy is to serve as a news literacy resource university-wide. Here at USC, Journalism Professor Judy Muller is slated to teach a news literacy course next year that we hope will draw students from across the campus. Similar outreach to the community more broadly is a logical next step.

But don’t today’s new media conditions call for more than creating educated “consumers?” Members of the public also need support in their new roles as creators, whether in collaborating with legacy media who tap the wisdom of the crowd, or in

establishing and running their own news sites. (I was on a panel recently with a Web news provider who said he refers to himself as “a journalist in private practice.”)

Recognition of this role is growing in the academy. USC Annenberg’s Knight Digital Media Center, which has long trained traditional journalists in the use of today’s new digital and social-network tools, is now considering extending its training to others who, though not called journalists, provide information in the public interest – such individuals as the 80 people employed by Human Rights Watch around the globe, and those working for other such NGOs and foundations. Similarly, our California Health Journalism Fellowships, which has traditionally focused on health journalists in newspaper and broadcast newsrooms, recently extended its reach to include medical professionals who blog.

Alan Rusbridger, editor of the *Guardian* in the United Kingdom, has perhaps best summed up the idea of a collaborative, participatory future in his notion of a “mutualised newspaper,” described in his Hugh Cudlipp lecture earlier this year. Acknowledging the strengths of the professional, Rusbridger urges that we remember as well the strengths of the people we used to refer to as “readers,” noting: “they bring us a rich diversity, specialist expertise and on the ground reporting that we couldn't possibly hope to achieve without including them in what we do.”

We can also enable them to make known their own stories – stories that never were told in the supposed “Golden Age of Newspapers.” For example, here at USC Annenberg, a

program called Mobile Voices, in partnership between Annenberg and the surrounding community, has designed an open-source platform enabling low-wage immigrants to tell their own stories using cell phones.

<http://mediaresearchhub.ssrc.org/news/a-multimedia-tour-of-mobile-voices>

Meanwhile, a program called Intersections: the South Los Angeles Reporting Project draws on Annenberg's resources (including Mobile Voices, along with local high schools and citizens' groups to create a community news Web site focusing on issues of mutual interest in this community of African-Americans, Latinos, Asians and immigrants.

<http://www.intersectionssouthla.org/>

An expanded reach for news literacy initiatives, incorporating citizens' more active roles in the new media environment, will be a key consideration for the journalism academy.

3. Economic Support for Journalism: The Academy as Laboratory

The primary focus of this proposition in the original Manifesto was squarely on corporations. "More responsible corporate governance among media companies is essential if the costly work of original journalism is to be sustained." The concern about how journalism will be sustained remains relevant indeed – the fears concerning this challenge have only grown in the intervening years. But two things have changed

significantly: The news corporations (particularly those that own newspapers) have undergone such substantial economic shock -- with several newspaper companies in bankruptcy, several newspapers having folded, and the remaining ones undergoing round after round of severe cuts – that any hope of an increasing focus on responsible corporate governance has only dimmed.

The other change is more hopeful: the need for those who provide the news to keep an eye primarily on the public interest has not gone away; it has been distributed broadly. There are now *multitudes* of news providers. How they do their work, and what principles they hold dear, continues to matter greatly.

This opens two interesting arenas for journalism schools. One is the need for research on new economic models to supplement (some would say replace) the models that have been collapsing as the barrier to publication has fallen and new ways of advertising have arisen. This is a center of significant activity in the journalism academy. The City University of New York's Graduate School of Journalism has a "New Business Models for News Project under the leadership of Jeff Jarvis that conducts experiments and research about revenue possibilities for news. <http://newsinnovation.com/models/> Similarly, Arizona State University's Knight Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship, directed by Dan Gillmor, seeks to teach ASU students entrepreneurial thinking and skills for the new media environment which they'll be entering.

<http://cronkite.asu.edu/faculty/gillmorbio.php> The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, meanwhile, has recently appointed Penny Abernathy in a newly created

position, the Knight Chair in Journalism and Digital Media Economics. And Duke University's DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy has commissioned valuable background papers for a symposium on "Economic Models of Journalism." http://dewitt.sanford.duke.edu/index.php/about/area-of-research/economic_models_of_journalism

At USC, our research and experimentation has led us in several directions. We joined with the Knight Foundation to bring to Los Angeles the spot.us model born in the Bay Area, which seeks to test the notion of community-supported journalism.

<http://www.la.spot.us/> Another important part of the equation is foundation support.

Annenberg's Center on Health Reporting is funded entirely by the California Health Care Foundation. Being part of a foundation-funded startup provides invaluable experience in the challenges of protecting journalistic independence in this very different funding environment.

Moving from experimentation with new funding models to creating an environment of entrepreneurship for our students, we are running this summer a two-week, fellowship-supported experiment in collaboration with USC's business and engineering schools, bring together our own journalism students with students from those two disciplines to develop news applications for mobile phones. Meanwhile, Annenberg is also planning an Innovation Lab, to be supported by corporate contributions, enabling the research and development of new ways of providing information and new ways of supporting it.

As this new world of widely varying funding models emerging, new ethical challenges arise. The journalism academy will be essential to solving these effectively. For example: It is widely agreed that an essential ethic of the new media environment is transparency. If news consumers can identify the sources of funding, for instance, of a given information outlet, they have a key piece of information in judging its credibility.

Yet J-lab's Jan Schaffer said at a recent USC Annenberg event that she is finding many foundation funders reluctant to be cited publicly as supporters of these new media outlets.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Los-Angeles-CA/Economic-Literacy-and-Entrepreneurship-at-ASCJ/326102285104> Clearly new media forms require new ethical formulations, and the academy has a role here. The University of Wisconsin Madison recently sponsored a symposium on ethics

<http://blogs.journalism.co.uk/editors/2010/04/30/reportr-net-does-new-media-require-new-journalism-ethics/> that included a look at "Donors, non-profit journalism and new investigative models" <http://www.reportr.net/2010/04/30/donors-non-profit-journalism-and-new-investigative-models/> and issued a report on ethics for the new investigative newsroom (see the PDF link within the preceding URL).

Research from the many new experimental organizations, particularly those embedded in journalism schools, will provide important lessons and substantial support for stronger ethics in this new media ecology.

Other Propositions

There are important role for the academy in several other areas examined by the Manifesto. For example, like corporate responsibility, media accountability has become more and more a widely distributed responsibility. Where before we emphasized the media need to do a better job of holding themselves accountable and making their work transparent, citizens now play a key role in these activities. Compare the pre-Internet opportunity to get a correction into the newspaper with the ability now to post one, and the strengthened role of the news consumer is clear.

For a while, an organization called Grade the News, “a media research project focusing on the quality of the news media in the San Francisco Bay Area,” which was based at [San Jose State University's School of Journalism and Mass Communications](#) and affiliated with [Stanford University's Graduate Program in Journalism](#), played a role in this arena. That effort seems to have faltered, though other non-academy-related efforts have arisen (see for example MediaBugs, <http://mediabugs.org/> “a service for correcting errors and problems in media coverage in the San Francisco Bay Area.”)

The notion that journalists needed to do a better job of making their voices heard is interesting to ponder in the light of new realities just a few years down the road from the Manifesto. Today, everyone with an ounce of interest in journalism can make himself heard on the topic, and it sometimes seems everyone does –often biliously, rarely judiciously. Surely there is a vital role here for those of us in the academy to inject facts, context (both historical and international) and balance into this debate. As for the essential role of the free press needing to be made a concern of the public, that seems to be one blessed offshoot of the collapse of legacy media. Crisis does indeed have a way of focusing the mind: Public concern about how we can ensure continued access to high-quality information seems to be growing.

“New forms of media” has ceased to be one of nine propositions and become instead the terrain on which virtually all the others are playing out. One piece of evidence comes from Pew research this spring on “The New News Landscape: The Rise of the Internet:” “The Internet has surpassed newspapers and radio in popularity as a news platform on a typical day and now ranks just behind TV.” www.pewresearch.org

Lastly, there is the (often thorny) question of the role (or roles) of government. Given the curious state of American politics surrounding this issue, it an arena in which it is only beginning to be possible even to introduce simple facts and current realities into the

public dialogues. Real debate about the various complexities and possibilities is probably still some distance down the road.

But here again, it is all the more important to have thoughtfully reasoned infusions of context and fact brought into the public discussion. The Schudson-Downie paper mentioned above makes this kind of contribution. So does a USC Annenberg report by David Westphal and Geoff Cowan earlier this year, called “Public Policy and Funding the News.” <http://www.niemanlab.org/2010/01/separation-of-news-and-state-how-government-subsidies-buoyed-media/> is a description of the report and contains the pdf link. An op-ed by Westphal “Should government support journalism? It always has” can be found here.

http://communicationleadership.usc.edu/blog/government_action/should_government_support_journalism_it_always_has_1.html

This will doubtless be an arena in which discussion will grow more and more vigorous and substantial— especially if nourished by academic contributions.

Conclusion

It is fair to say that this report raises more questions than it answers. (I hope these are questions having some academic value.) I have taken the topics from my original

Manifesto and set them into today's new media realities – and into my new academic world. I arrive at some happy conclusions. One is that a very great deal is happening. More personally, I am made newly and forcefully aware of how much power to shape our work can be found in the thinking that precedes it. As I researched and wrote this paper, I was struck again and again and at how closely the innovations I have helped lead at USC Annenberg conform to these arenas of challenge and possibility that I identified -- years ago, in such a different news environment.

And while I have drawn few significant conclusions, this one is clear: In the old media world, with its top-down monopolistic configuration, the problems were there to be solved by a relatively few people, in a rigid environment. Most of those challenges are pretty much the same: It's a constant struggle to keep the public's information needs at the center of our thinking. It's unclear, for example, how we will pay for high-quality journalism. Those doing journalism (or in any way serving the public's information needs) must be held accountable.

But if the problems remain identical, they now rest in the hands of multitudes. For good and for ill, the old challenges are newly distributed throughout the population, and the solutions – if and when they come -- will come from the many rather than the few. It's a more unsettling prospect than the familiar world of controlling monopolies and rigidly fixed patterns. It is also, in my view, a more promising one.

ADDENDUM

PROPOSITIONS

In June 2005, a group of journalists, scholars and others concerned about the challenges confronting American journalism gathered at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

The nine propositions below served as starting points for their discussion.

- A greater role for nonprofits – organizations such as the Center for Public Integrity, the *St. Petersburg Times* and National Public Radio, along with foundation support – could help lift all media.
- Citizens of a democracy have a responsibility to be informed. Media literacy courses, stronger civics education and other tools can create the environment of vigorous debate in which the press can thrive.
- Our society would be better served if journalists could make their voices heard more effectively – in response to freedom of information challenges, reporters threatened with jailing, concerted efforts at misrepresentation of the press, and so forth.

- The media can significantly strengthen their own position by doing a better job of holding themselves accountable and making their work transparent.
- The essential role of a free and responsible press must be made a primary concern of the public. Only they can protect and sustain it. The discussion must be brought to public attention.
- More responsible corporate governance among media companies is essential if the costly work of original journalism is to be sustained.
- In this period of challenge and change, journalists would profit by seeking a clearer common understanding of ethics and good practices, and a deliberate recommitment to journalism's public-service role.
- New forms of media, the engagement of a richer array of people in producing media, and new ways of using media are transforming the landscape. An understanding of these changes, their potential and the challenges they pose, is essential to addressing the problems and opportunities confronting journalism.
- The government role in protecting, regulating, and supporting a free and responsible press demands thoughtful consideration and public discussion.