

# 14 Journalism Schools

**FAR FROM BECOMING OBSOLETE**, many journalism schools have been flooded with applicants—in part because would-be journalists realize that new skills are needed with each passing day. It is no longer sufficient to report and write; today’s journalists also need video shooting and editing skills. It is no longer sufficient to be a great news photographer; photojournalists now have to know how to conduct interviews, and set up a website. Modern journalism schools not only teach the five W’s (who, what, where, when, and why) but also crowdsourcing, computer-assisted reporting, and a wide variety of digital-era skills.

As the good journalism schools retool themselves, a big question has arisen: can they play a significant role not only by teaching journalism, but by actually doing it? Increasingly, the eyes of journalism school deans have turned to a model they can see across campus: teaching hospitals. In an April 2010 letter to the FCC, 13 deans of journalism schools explained that some schools are becoming “more like the communications equivalent of university teaching hospitals, by partnering with local news outlets to undertake journalistic work that also emphasizes pedagogical and professional best practices.”<sup>1</sup> Columbia School of Journalism professor Michael Schudson elaborated: “This system has been very successful in simultaneously providing real-life training for medical students, medical care for patients and staffing for hospitals at the center of medical research.”<sup>2</sup>

Commercial entities are far more open to student labor than they once were, says Chris Callahan, dean of the Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University.<sup>3</sup> In 2007, his school created the Cronkite News Service (CNS), which enlists students to work on stories about state issues and lawmakers. In December 2009, the students examined the financial filings of Arizona members of Congress and discovered that seven members had paid a total of \$300,000 in bonuses to their staff at the height of the recession in 2008.<sup>4</sup> The story ran in newspapers throughout the state and appeared on websites.

The school also produces a half-hour newscast that airs three nights a week on the local PBS station. According to Callahan, his students’ 30-minute program is a “wonderful alternative” to the “cops and robbers” broadcasts aired by the commercial stations in Phoenix.<sup>5</sup> Students work two days a week in the CNS newsroom. Their editor, Steve Elliott, says he teaches his students to “[identify] what newspapers aren’t covering” so they can offer material that’s non-duplicative, and to do stories that “the AP doesn’t have time to do.”<sup>6</sup>

Some journalism schools have been using this approach for years. The University of Missouri’s journalism school helps runs KOMU-TV8, the NBC TV affiliate in Columbia, Missouri. Students have been reporters, producers, and writers for the station since 1970.<sup>7</sup>

One of the more ambitious new partnerships began earlier this year in San Francisco. Warren Hellman provided five million dollars in seed money to the Bay Citizen, which is partnering with the Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism and the *New York Times*, to produce two pages of content twice a week for the *Times*’s San Francisco edition. Students serve as paid interns at the Bay Citizen, and some even go on to full-time jobs there. The goal, says Berkeley dean, Neil Henry, is “to be front and center in figuring out a way to give news to local communities at a time when the industry is losing its ability to do that kind of work.”<sup>8</sup>

Some journalism schools have focused on providing hyperlocal information and reporting. New York University, City University of New York (CUNY), and the University of California–Berkeley all run websites featuring writing by students and neighborhood residents on hyperlocal issues. CUNY’s journalism school, for example, took over full-time management of The Local, a *New York Times* blog that covers a section of Brooklyn.<sup>9</sup> On a typical day, the

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site published articles about a rally for community gardens and changes in local bus routes that had been confusing area residents.<sup>10</sup> The site features an events calendar and links to relevant blogs, and also uses digital-era information-gathering processes such as crowdsourcing to collect data on, among other things, broken car windows in a particular neighborhood.<sup>11</sup>

If these models succeed, it could be of considerable help in some communities. There are approximately 483 colleges and universities in the U.S. and Puerto Rico that have journalism and/or mass communications programs. In the fall of 2008, U.S. journalism and mass communication programs enrolled 216,369 students (201,477 undergraduate, 14,892 graduate).<sup>12</sup> An estimated 50,850 students earned bachelors degrees, and 4,480 students earned master's degrees in journalism in the 2008/09 academic year.<sup>13</sup>

The most frequent criticism of the teaching hospital model is that student journalists are a source of cheap labor and actually end up displacing their professional counterparts. The students are willing to work for “free,” earning course credit at a time when professional newsrooms are eliminating staff to cut costs. One former editor, Peter Scheer, wrote, “Does it make sense for [J-schools] to be subsidizing the accelerated dislocation of one generation of their graduates to make room for a younger generation of their graduates? In the investment world this is called a Ponzi scheme.”<sup>14</sup> But Nicholas Lemann, dean of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, responded that students are doing journalism that newspapers no longer can. “With the typical metro news editor looking at a half-empty newsroom, the question isn’t whether to cover local issues with journalism students or veteran reporters, it’s whether to cover local issues with journalism students or not at all,” Lemann says.<sup>15</sup> CUNY’s dean, Steve Shepard, admits that his students are “very cost effective,” but adds that without them the hyperlocal journalism in Brooklyn’s Fort Greene and Cobble Hill neighborhoods “wouldn’t get done.”<sup>16</sup>

These programs work only if they can maintain high quality. The managing editor of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, George Stanley, says he will not use University of Wisconsin students anymore, because he had to run a correction on the one student-produced article he published. These collaborations “are much more of a service to

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students than they are to the professional media,” he says.<sup>17</sup> Quality control is “a legitimate concern,” Shepard confirms. “They all need editing and oversight,” he says of his students.<sup>18</sup> The Cronkite School’s Chris Callahan says that without a high-level editor who treats the students’ work as his or her own, these partnerships won’t work.<sup>19</sup> The Cronkite News Service’s editor, Steve Elliott, acknowledges that he spends a lot of time rewriting student copy to bring it up to professional standards.<sup>20</sup>

These programs’ ability to fill journalistic gaps is also constrained by the academic calendar; most cannot provide news content during the summer break, and because students graduate and new ones arrive each year, they lack institutional knowledge about the subjects they are covering. It is only the full-time faculty like Elliott who can bring institutional knowledge to these journalistic efforts. With a class of approximately 50 students, Berkeley’s journalism school is the biggest news operation in the region according to its dean, Neil Henry. “The problem,” according to Henry, is that the students “don’t hit the ground running and there is tremendous changeover.”<sup>21</sup> The University of California at Berkeley pays students to work during holidays to update digital news sites in Oakland,

the Mission District, and Richmond. Henry believes that if he could finance one full-time journalist as an anchor, he could make the schedule work. The Cronkite School’s Chris Callahan is exploring how to go from a three-night-per-week, 30-week-per-year operation, to a year-round one. (He estimates that it would cost two million dollars over three years—approximately \$600,000 per year—to expand their public TV show to five nights a week and make it year-round).<sup>22</sup>

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Teaching hospitals also offer venues for medical research, and journalism schools expect the new breed of J-schools to offer high quality research. CUNY established a Center for Entrepreneurial Journalism initially capitalized at \$10 million (largely funded by foundation gifts) to train students how to create new journalism enterprises. At NYU's journalism school, Professor Jay Rosen created a hyperlocal site about the East Village with the *New York Times*. "Deciding how to launch the site, how it should operate, and how to make it effective in the East Village community are ideal tasks for students," Rosen says. The students are "immersed in the innovation puzzle in journalism."<sup>23</sup> Clients actually pay the Cronkite School to develop media products for them. For instance, the *Arizona Guardian*, a web publication devoted to state politics and government, commissioned the school to develop an iPhone application that provides background material on lawmakers and allows users to immediately contact their representatives using the phone's GPS.<sup>24</sup> Several schools have created joint efforts with other divisions within their universities. A recent article in the *Columbia Journalism Review* suggested that J-schools and law schools team up to provide legal help for journalists who want to press for access to government information.<sup>25</sup>

Most, if not all, of the journalism (and the expense) is being shouldered by the schools, not their collaborators, often with the help of foundations. CUNY's production of *The Local* is financed by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, with additional funding from the McCormick Tribune Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.<sup>26</sup> The Cronkite School raised \$18 million in three years from national foundations to help finance its new facility in downtown Phoenix.<sup>27</sup> The Berkeley journalism school's digital news sites have been funded by grants from the Ford Foundation. The two-year, \$500,000 grant (which was recently renewed for another two years) has been used to hire two multimedia professionals to teach the students.<sup>28</sup>

