

**Assessment Report
Journalism Department
San Francisco State University
September 2012**

Background

The Journalism Department is a program accredited through the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. It is one of nine schools in California accredited through this body, one of six CSU programs that are accredited. We continue to enjoy a reputation for training young journalists who are prepared to work in news organizations with little to no help from seasoned professionals. We have seen some improvement in students' digital media skills since we changed our curriculum to better reflect changes in the industry, however, we still have a lot of work to do to prepare our students for the varied media landscape, particularly in how it relates to online journalism. Our hire of two faculty members with expertise in multimedia and online journalism will bolster our digital media program and help our students out tremendously. We are very excited about the coming year and will engage in a robust discussion about reconfiguring our curriculum. Students are also excited and have expressed eagerness in wanting to learn the nuts and bolts of producing high quality journalism in several formats. They are bubbling with ideas.

Our program goals consist of 12 competencies that reflect the qualities and characteristics that we would like all graduates of the program to have. They are:

Learning Outcomes

- News Judgment:** That graduates have news judgment that allows them to identify and develop story ideas through observation, reading and paying attention to their environment
- Critical and Independent Thinking:** That graduates know how to synthesize information and think independently as they work through problems using inference and logic.
- Cultural Competence:** That graduates understand a variety of cultures and how those cultures influence perspectives, attitudes and personal interaction with the world.
- Writing:** That graduates write concisely, clearly and accurately, while still engaging the audience with compelling storytelling.
- Analytical Competence:** That graduates can discern and weigh the quality of information they gather, as well as know how to analyze and interpret it.
- Research and Reporting:** That graduates know how to methodically find information through the Internet, public documents and personal interviews.
- Media Literacy:** That graduates know how to competently navigate through a rapidly changing media world, understanding media's influence on society, community and the democratic process, and that students also understand the power of image in shaping society's understanding of the world.
- Ethics, Integrity and the Law:** That graduates know the ethical standards and constitutional laws that guide journalism excellence.
- Critical Evaluation:** That graduates know how to critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Data and Numbers:** That graduates know how to apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
- Technology:** That graduates know how to apply technology in their professional work.
- Visual Competence:** Work demonstrates an ability to research, find and capture in a technically competent, concise, well composed and visually compelling manner the gamut of human experience in a variety of formats.

Direct measures of assessment are Entrance and Exit exams for two of our core writing classes: Jour 221, Newswriting, and Jour 300GW, Reporting. In both of these classes, students take an entrance exam, which is uniform across the sections and is used solely as an assessment of where each student is with five of the 12 competencies. The competencies addressed in these two courses are, News Judgment, Critical Thinking, Analytical Competence, Research and Reporting, and Writing. In Jour 300GW, we also address the competency of Critical Evaluation. The results from this initial assessment are instructive for both the teacher and the student. The student immediately understands what is expected and what areas they may need to focus on, while the teacher gets the birds-eye view of skills that need the most attention in the course.

The exit exams, which are administered at the end of the course and are uniform for each section of the course, test student achievement for the aforementioned competencies. The results from exit exams account for 15 percent of the final grade for the course. In addition, the department uses the results from the entrance and exams to examine overall academic growth in the cohort.

Every two years we use a second direct measure, which is a review of electronic portfolios. A designated cohort of students is asked to submit work from several courses at various levels of the curriculum. This process was designed to give us more information about the development of students as they work through the curriculum. We did not review portfolios this year. But we will have a review of portfolios in 2013 if not sooner.

The third measure we used in our assessment was an annual survey of graduating seniors. This is an indirect measure of student achievement in the competencies and it provides us with quantitative and qualitative data that helps round out the results from the direct measures.

Entrance and Exit Exams (Direct Measure)

Entrance exams are administered during the first week of instruction. Students are allotted 50 minutes to complete the test. In Jour 221, Newswriting, the exam consists of three sections: grammar, punctuation, civics and current events, and news judgment. In Jour 300GW, Reporting, which is a GWAR course, the test consists of six sections: AP Style, grammar, civics and current events, journalism terms, news judgment, and writing a brief. Faculty members created both exams.

Exit exams are administered during the last week of instruction or in some cases during finals week. Students in Jour 221, Newswriting, are allotted 105 minutes to complete the exit exam. The exit exam has much more material on it than the entrance exam, which is why we allot more time than for the entrance exam. The Newswriting exit exam consists of six sections: Grammar and AP Style usage, punctuation, civics and people in the news, accuracy and media law, court terms, and writing a full news story.

Students in Jour 300GW, Reporting, are allotted 100 minutes to complete the exit exam, which has much more material on it than the entrance exam and consists of six parts: AP

Style, grammar, civics and current events, journalism terms, news judgment, and writing a story from a video press conference.

The exams are graded by the instructors of their respective courses and each instructor uses a rubric to grade the written portions of the exam.

This is the fourth year we have tracked these scores and the overall results have remained the same for students in Jour 221, Newswriting. Students in the fall 11 – spring 12 semesters showed significant improvement, moving from an average of 63 percent to an average of 80 percent.

In Jour 300GW, Reporting, students in the fall 11 – spring 12 semesters also showed improvement starting with an average of 68 percent to finishing the course with an average score of 83 percent. One section, however, showed practically no change in the entrance and exit scores. In this case the entrance score was significantly higher (80 percent so students started the course strong) when compared with the entrance scores of other Reporting sections.

ATTRITION

Faculty has long viewed Jour. 300GW, Reporting, as a course that weeds out the serious from the not so serious journalists. We have dubbed it the journalism bootcamp of the department and have set standards and goals as high as those required in the profession. Students must learn where to go to gather credible information, how to cultivate sources, how to synthesize and analyze information, and how to develop news stories from the information they gather. They must also learn how to write compelling articles, with accuracy and on deadline. Students in this course learn if they can meet the challenge, and many learn they don't like interviewing strangers, or that they don't like all the leg work that goes into reporting and writing a story. While the number of students who drop varies year-to-year, this year the numbers are pretty good. In Jour. 221, Newswriting 10.9 percent of students dropped the class with a W. Three out of 73 students did not receive a passing grade. In Jour 300GW, Reporting, 5.6 percent of students dropped the class, while 4 of 71 did not receive credit.

ePortfolio Review (Direct Measure)

We did not do a portfolio review this year. We will do the next one in the 2012-13 academic year.

Graduating Senior Survey (Indirect Measure)

Although this is an indirect measure of program success, I really appreciate the feedback of students about the program. I find it insightful, not just about the program, but also about where students feel they are in their career goals and in the development of journalism skills.

The graduating class (N=44) continues to be diverse: 49 percent identified as white, 19 percent Latino, 5 percent African American, 9 percent Asian American, 12 percent mixed

race, and 7 percent as other. Sixty-six percent of our seniors were female, 34 percent male.

The breakdown of concentrations among seniors reflected the transition the department is still undergoing. We phased in a new curriculum in 2009 and we are seeing the tail end of the old curriculum. More than half (52 percent) followed the Print/Online concentration (the new curriculum), while 25 percent completed the Photojournalism concentration. Twenty-three percent completed the older pre-2008 curriculum. Students in the new curriculum are required, rather than recommended, to take courses in digital journalism.

Half of respondents transferred from a community college, while the other half started their academic career at San Francisco State. Time to graduation also continues to improve from previous years. Twenty-one percent of students (up from 10 percent last year) graduated within four years, 41 percent graduated within five (up from 32 percent last year), and 14 percent graduated within six. Twenty-five percent graduated in more than six years. The reasons for delayed graduations varied, but the common responses were that work, the expense of going to school, family matters, and indecisiveness at the start of college got in the way of ideal plans. Eight people said difficulty in getting classes contributed to their delay in graduation.

Finding work after graduation is a difficult task in an economy with 8 percent unemployment. We have worked hard to encourage our students to begin working on their career goals when they are students. We make this point during academic advising and in our mandatory orientation for new students. We tell students about networking opportunities and encourage them to join some of the professional organization to begin developing these networks. We also tell students that they need to have at least one internship before they graduate, preferably two. Internships are a sure path to employment. We've seen some improvement in this area, but we'd like to see more. Sixty-nine percent of respondents completed at least one internship before graduating, up from 50 percent last year. It was encouraging to see that 31 percent of respondents said that one of their internships was paid.

We allow students two opportunities to earn course credit for journalism internships, however, 79-88 percent of respondents said they did not receive either available course credit for their internship(s). We'll have to probe more into the reasons behind this finding.

As of February when this survey was closed, 84 percent of graduating seniors said they had no job lined up, yet 81 percent said they had not applied for a full-time job either. Perhaps we can work more closely with the career center to prepare our students for the task of finding a job upon graduation. Forty-eight percent of respondents suggested that we add a Career Preparation course. We had a 1-unit career course a while ago, but it stopped filling up. We might consider, however, offering workshops and working more closely with the campus career center to provide students with the help they need.

Students seemed to be clear on their career goals and it was encouraging that a majority of students wanted to stick with journalism. Sixty-two percent of students stated they had not changed their goal of working as a journalist.

In terms of student's confidence in the program, 79 percent of respondents (down slightly from 80 percent last year) said they believed the department successfully prepared them for a career in journalism. When looking at specific learning outcomes, students gave the department excellent marks for helping them develop critical thinking skills, writing skills, cultural competence, critical evaluation, and understanding the role of media in society. The lowest mark went to applying basic numerical and statistical concepts. Most students marked us as average in that area. We are aware of this weakness as students and our ePortofolio have identified this as an area of needed attention, but we have yet to develop a curriculum that addresses it. Sixty-seven percent of students gave us a good or excellent rating in the area of navigating technology and technological changes, up 3 percentage points from last year with 64 percent rating us good to excellent. Most students marked each outcome with a good or higher rating, but the majority of ranks fell into the good category. We have room for improvement.

Students cited faculty and the emphasis on real-world experience as the main strengths of the department. On the other hand, they said a lack of class offerings was our greatest weakness. We have two new faculty members among our ranks this year, one is a tenure-track professor with expertise in videography. The other is a full-time lecturer whose expertise ranges from digital media to computer coding. With additional permanent faculty, we can increase our class offerings.