

WHAT SCHOOLS OF JOURNALISM ARE TRYING TO DO

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Six years ago our Council on Education for Journalism formulated some principles and standards for academic preparation for journalism, which were at that time adopted by both the American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism and the American Association of Teachers of Journalism. The first of these general principles reads:

Because of the importance of newspapers and periodicals to society and government, adequate preparation is as necessary for all persons who desire to engage in journalism as it is for those who intend to practice law or medicine. No other profession has a more vital relation to the welfare of society or to the success of democratic government than has journalism. No other profession requires any wider range of knowledge or greater ability to apply such knowledge to current events and problems than does journalism. Adequate preparation for journalism, therefore, should be sufficiently broad in scope to familiarize the future journalist with the important fields of knowledge and sufficiently practical to show the application of the knowledge to the practice of journalism.

As this statement was unanimously accepted by representatives of the leading American schools and departments of journalism at their annual meetings six years ago, it is fair to say that it expresses our belief as to the justification for university education in preparation for journalism, as well as to the character and scope of that education.

Will this statement of our beliefs stand the test of critical analysis?

In the first place, are newspapers and periodicals of sufficient importance to the success of democratic government and to the welfare of society to warrant state and privately endowed universities in providing adequate preparation for young men and young women who desire to take up some form of journalism as a career?

Ever since the earliest prototypes of the modern newspaper appeared in Europe three hundred years ago, governments of all nations have held that the press influences the ideas, opinions, beliefs, and morals of persons who read them. All governmental restrictions on the unlimited liberty of the newspaper to publish whatever it pleases bear witness to this belief. Government censorship, the laws of libel, statutes against obscenity, and official propaganda in times of peace and war are all concrete expressions of the general consensus as to the influence of the press. The use of newspaper advertising, publicity, and propaganda by all kinds of public and private interests, affords further evidence of the wide-spread belief that the contents of newspapers and periodicals affect both public opinion and private action. Critics of the press in all periods of its history have deplored the publication of vivid descriptions of crime, scandal, and vice, because they have held that such news tends to exert an unwholesome influence on human conduct. Newspapers may be excluded from the mails if in the opinion of the postal authorities any portion of their contents tends to exert an immoral effect on readers. Defenders of the press, on the other hand, maintain that fear of newspaper publicity acts as a deterrent to persons who may be considering the commission of criminal and vicious acts. Finally, guarantees of freedom of the press in the federal constitution and in all state constitutions give the highest official recognition to the importance of newspapers in a democracy.

Because of this generally accepted belief that the press influences the opinions, morals, and actions of readers, would not both state and privately endowed universities be neglecting an important duty to the state and to society if they failed to provide adequate preparation for young men and young women who desire to become writers and editors? No newspaper or periodical can be any better than those who make it. If, lacking adequate preparation for their work, writers and editors are half-educated, superficial, inaccurate, and unscrupulous, the newspapers and periodicals that they produce will not exert the wholesome influence that it is generally assumed the press

should exert on readers as citizens of the state and as members of society. Universities have spent millions of dollars on establishing and maintaining medical and law schools to educate physicians, surgeons, and lawyers. Are journalists less important to the welfare of society and to the success of democratic government than are members of the medical and legal professions? As it has been found necessary to protect society against ignorant, unscrupulous quacks and shysters, is it not equally necessary to protect society and government against immature, half-educated, unscrupulous journalists?

In the second place, is it true that no other profession requires a wider range of knowledge or greater ability to apply that knowledge to current events and problems than does journalism? Even a superficial reading of a single issue of any daily newspaper furnishes the answer to that question. Every significant human activity is reported in the day's news, and every important problem of the day is discussed in editorial columns. On the average daily paper, a reporter is called upon to cover a great variety of events, to report almost any one of which requires some special knowledge on his part if he is to write an intelligent, accurate story. To cover the courts adequately, a reporter needs some knowledge of the law and of legal procedure; to do satisfactory work on the city hall run, he must know something about municipal administration; to report intelligently a meeting of a scientific society, he must know something about the basic sciences; to interview a banker on some phase of the Federal Reserve system, he requires some knowledge of money and banking; to obtain the views of some noted economist on the present business depression and unemployment, he should understand the theories of production, distribution, and consumption. In these days of specialization, on the other hand, a lawyer, with two or three years of college work and a three-year law course in which he acquires a general knowledge of law and its application, undertakes to master and practice only in a single field, such as criminal or corporation law. A physician or surgeon, likewise, prepares himself from his medical school days to be a specialist in some branch

of medicine or surgery, rather than a general practitioner. Almost from the day that a student enters a college of engineering as a freshman, he begins a specialized course of training for some particular field, such as automotive engineering, hydraulic engineering, mining engineering, or railway engineering. Specialization early in a university course, rather than a broad, liberal education, has come to be the recognized type of preparation for the various professions other than journalism.

Granted that a journalist needs a much broader general education than does a member of any other profession, a four-year university course of study that includes government and politics, economics, sociology, psychology, history, science, and literature, would seem to be the minimum requirement as preparation for intelligent newspaper and magazine work.

In the third place, the question may well be asked, is any form of specialized education essential to train the student how to apply this knowledge that he acquires in a four-year college course to the practice of journalism? Some practical newspaper men and some authorities on higher education apparently believe that what they call the "tricks of the trade" of journalism, or the rules of the "newspaper game," can best be learned by actual practice in a newspaper office, rather than in the university class-room. If the preparation of the day's news, "the food of opinion" in a palatable form, is merely a trick, like the preparation of a soup, a salad, or a dessert by an experienced chef, then it can undoubtedly be learned by an apprenticeship system not unlike that by which an expert cook learns his trade. By their very phrases, these critics of schools of journalism brand journalism as a trade, business, or game, rather than as a profession. This point of view was recently expressed in an editorial in the *New Republic*, which said, "the fact remains that newspaper work as practiced by the rank and file in the United States does not meet any of the tests which would justify describing it as a profession." If time permitted, I should like to discuss the question as to whether or not journalism is a profession, but since the *New Republic* in the editorial just referred to declares that "no statement makes a

professor in a school of journalism angrier" than to say that journalism is not a profession, I will refrain from doing so.

Let us therefore return to the question of the need of courses in journalism to show the student how to apply what he has learned in other subjects. I am willing to concede that if our high school and college courses of study developed mature, thoughtful young men and young women, capable of thinking straight about what they have learned and able to apply their learning to current events and issues, only a few courses in journalism would be necessary to prepare them for journalistic careers. Probably only courses in the history of journalism, in the newspaper as a sociological phenomenon, in the influence of newspapers and periodicals, and in the law of the press would be needed. But after thirty years as a university instructor, I am convinced that our college courses in subjects other than journalism do not result in developing in the average student the ability to think logically and to apply intelligently what he has learned to his work as a reporter, copy reader, or editor. Therefore, it seems to me that the function of most of the courses in journalism is to teach students how to think straight about what is going on in the world at large and how to apply what they have learned to understanding and interpreting the day's news.

A well-organized course in newspaper reporting, for example, is not primarily concerned with the technique of news gathering and news writing. Much of that technique can be and now is being taught in high school courses in journalistic writing. Even a clever office-boy with no more than a common school education may learn how to get news and how to write a passable news story. The course in reporting in a school of journalism is devoted largely to an intensive study of local news and its significance. It includes an analysis of the organization and practical workings of municipal, county, state, and federal governmental agencies, and a consideration of the important types of news that develop in connection with these branches of government in the local field. It is concerned with the functioning of courts — local, state, and federal — as news sources

and the significance of the news to be obtained in connection with them. It deals with the various social service and welfare agencies and the character and importance of news that they afford. It considers local industry, local retail and wholesale business, local banking, local labor conditions, local real estate and building, and all other phases of the business and industrial life of the community as sources of such news as is of interest and significance to readers as citizens of the community. It includes a consideration of local schools and problems of education, churches and their work, men's service clubs, women's clubs, and all other organizations not purely social, in relation to the life of the community. In short, a well organized course in reporting involves a survey of the whole community and all its important activities, as a means of showing students how to discover and evaluate the news that they may furnish. Thus it serves to correlate the work of news gathering and news writing with what students have learned in psychology, economics, and similar subjects.

The course in copyreading, likewise, is not merely designed to give students practice in writing headlines and in correcting errors in copy. Its most important function is to teach students how to evaluate the news that comes from all parts of this country and from everywhere abroad, in the light of its significance to readers of a particular newspaper as citizens of the local community, of the state, and of the nation. It should show students how to apply what they have studied in other courses about social, political, and economic conditions in their own country and in foreign countries to the evaluation of news concerning those conditions. It is concerned both with the day's news itself and with what is behind the day's news.

The course in editorial writing is not intended to teach students how to write fluent, superficial comments on current events and issues. It is devoted to the careful, impartial, logical analysis of the latest phases of the social, political, and economic problems that they have studied in other courses, in order to enable them to interpret the new aspects of these problems for newspaper readers in an interesting and intelli-

gent manner. It is designed to teach them how to think straight about what is going on in the world day by day, and to write interestingly and effectively concerning these things.

In pointing out what he considers the absurdity of including in a university curriculum some of the courses now offered at the University of Wisconsin, Dr. Abraham Flexner in his recent volume, *Universities: American, English, German*, mentions the study of the principles of journalism as an example of a course that has no place in a university. Perhaps if he had taken the trouble to find out what the course deals with, he might have been much less critical of it. The course in the principles of journalism as I have given it at Wisconsin for a number of years undertakes to lead students to consider what influence the newspaper may exert on the opinions, morals, tastes, and standards of living of readers. It concerns the manner in which attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and habits of thought and action develop in the individual, and what part various agencies, including newspapers and periodicals, play in this development. It considers the nature of public opinion and its relation to individual private opinion. Thus it seeks to apply what the students have learned in individual psychology and social psychology to newspapers and periodicals as influences in the formation of individual and public opinion. In a similar manner it takes up the problems of morality and the recent changes in moral standards, in an attempt to determine to what extent, if at all, newspapers influence the moral ideas and ideals, as well as the conduct, of readers. The causes of crime are discussed, together with the possible effects of the publication of news of crime, scandal, and vice, in order to discover under what conditions such news may exert socially beneficial effects and under what conditions it may produce anti-social results. In this way the material in courses in psychology, sociology, ethics, and the history of morality is brought to bear upon the problems of the journalistic handling of news of crime, scandal, and vice. Another question considered in this course concerns the possible effects of musical, art, and dramatic criticism and the reviewing of books in newspapers on the tastes of

readers. This involves a consideration of the function of criticism in general and of journalistic criticism in particular. It requires the use by the student of what he has learned in courses in the appreciation of music, art, and literature.

In the course in the principles of journalism are also discussed the changes in the standards of living in this country and the part that newspapers and periodicals have played both by their reading matter and their advertisements in changing and raising our standards of living. What influence, for example, is exerted on readers by departments in newspapers and periodicals devoted to home building, home furnishing, and home decoration; household management, including the selection and preparation of food; fashions in dress, jewelry, and similar accessories; health and beauty; radio and automobiles? What influence on our standards of living does advertising exert? What is the difference between desirable and undesirable advertising from the point of view of its effects on standards of living? In an attempt to find the answers to these questions, students are encouraged to use what they have learned in economics and in individual and social psychology. Even though Dr. Flexner condemns this particular course in the principles of journalism in one part of his book, he admits elsewhere that journalism as "a sociological phenomenon of immense interest and importance . . . deserves to be studied as such within a modern university."

If time permitted, I might review all of the other courses in journalism in order to demonstrate the same points that I have made concerning those in reporting, copy reading, editorial writing, and the principles of journalism. The course in the community newspaper, for example, another study that Dr. Flexner condemns, is based largely on rural sociology and economics. The course in the writing of special articles is concerned chiefly with the most effective means of popularizing scientific and technical material. If the results of research in science and various technological fields are to be of any service to humanity, they must be presented to the average reader in such a way that he can understand and apply them in his own

life and work. Even though physicians and surgeons, by their code of ethics, are supposed to shun publicity, they have had to resort to popular articles in the press in their fight against tuberculosis, cancer, diphtheria, and other diseases. As to the history of journalism, since even Dr. Flexner admits that it is "a topic legitimate enough" for inclusion in a university curriculum, I will not pause to consider it.

One question remains to be discussed; namely, do such courses in journalism as I have outlined belong in a four-year university course designed to give students a broad, liberal education? The managing editor of a daily paper is reported in a recent issue of the *Editor & Publisher* to have told high school editors at the annual meeting of the National Scholastic Press Association in Cleveland that schools of journalism "take away four precious years which should be devoted to securing a liberal arts education." I trust that he was misquoted, for if he did make this statement, plainly he does not know what he is talking about. From two-thirds to three-fourths of the curriculum of the four-year university course required of students preparing for journalism consist of liberal arts studies, and not more than one-third or one-fourth of courses in journalism. Moreover, even the courses in journalism in so far as they undertake to train students to think straight, to write clearly and effectively, and to apply what they have learned in other fields to the practice of journalism, are broadly cultural rather than narrowly technical. Instead of taking away "four precious years that should be devoted to securing a liberal arts education," as this editor contends, they aim to give greater significance to liberal arts studies, because they show students how to apply these studies to the events and problems of today.

Unfortunately for too many of the students enrolled in our liberal arts colleges, lack of purpose and direction in their work results, under the elective system now generally in vogue, in a more or less haphazard choice of studies, with little effort on their part to think seriously about what they are studying in application to present-day problems. A well organized four-year year course of study in preparation for journalism

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in which required and elective courses in history, economics, government and politics, sociology, psychology, science, and literature are being pursued at the same time that students are taking courses in journalism, gives purpose and direction to the students' work and shows them what these other studies mean in relation to the life and the work of the world. Personally I should be willing to pit the average journalism graduate against the average liberal arts graduate, not on the basis of his fitness to enter upon a journalistic career, but on the basis of his ability to think straight and to apply what he has learned to present-day social, political, and economic problems. That, after all, is the final test of the value of a college education, and that is a test that I believe the average school of journalism graduate is ready to meet.