

# ASJMC INSIGHTS

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# From the Editor ....

This issue attempts to bring you up to date on what is being done with convergence in journalism education around the nation today. As you will see, and probably already know, convergence is not fully embraced in some places, for a variety of reasons. Still, it is causing changes in many journalism and mass communication school curricula as these programs try to prepare students to be more versatile and perhaps more employable as a result. I hope you will enjoy and profit from this roundup. I realize that this issue may tell you more than you really care to know about convergence, but it also may be of some help, especially for those programs that have yet to enter the fray or have just begun to dabble in it. Judging by what has been written, getting into convergence can be exciting and frustrating at the same time, and it does cost some money. Yet, it can be done more inexpensively than many think, although our authors did not get into that issue much.

I would be remiss if I did not point you toward a group of research articles about convergence and convergence curricula appearing in the spring 2005 *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*.

Coming up in the spring issue will be three articles on adjuncts, one of which reports the results of our fall 2004 adjunct survey that went to ASJMC members. My original plan had been for that content to appear in this issue, but convergence took over and left no space. If the trend continues, adjuncts will outnumber regular faculty on many campuses within the next few years. That is a bad trend, in my opinion, for any number of reasons—accreditation, both regional and professional; possible sub-standard teaching; lower pay; and damage to the academy in other ways. Still, the trend likely will continue because state legislatures and boards of trustees seem to have other priorities.

Also in the next issue, there will be some articles on the continuing writing problems of our students. Among them, I hope there will be some good ideas on how to attack the problems effectively.

*Robert M. Ruggles*  
Editor



# Convergence: Where Are We?

DEBORA H. WENGER AND JUDY VANSLYKE TURK  
Virginia Commonwealth University

Convergence. Coming soon to a classroom or newsroom near you?

Maybe. A spring 2005 survey of journalism education administrators and newspaper, television, and online editors reveals that journalism curricula may be less converged and newsrooms – with the exception of online media – less likely to be practicing convergence than they were in 2004.

The survey, conducted online by the School of Mass Communications at Virginia Commonwealth University, divided respondents into “converger” or “traditionalist” segments (see tables below) based on cluster analysis of attitudes regarding convergence. Newspaper editors were more likely to be “traditionalists” than the television, online, or journalism educator respondents: 6 in 10 newspaper editors clustered in the “traditionalists” segment compared to 7 in 10 television news directors and online editors who were “convergers.” Almost 8 in 10 journalism education administrators placed in the “convergers” segment.

In that context, it should not have been surprising, perhaps, that the majority of survey respondents – across all groups – consider their news operations or curricula only somewhat converged or not converged at all. Television news directors were most likely to describe their

news operations as converged: 50 percent of them said they were highly or moderately converged, but that was down from 56 percent in 2004. Almost 5 in 10 of the online editors – 46 percent – considered their news operations highly or moderately converged, and they were the only group to view themselves as more converged than in 2004. Only 25 percent of newspaper editors said their news operations were highly or moderately converged, a drop from 33 percent in 2004. Journalism program curricula also appeared to be less converged in 2005 than in 2004: 42 percent of the administrators said their curricula were highly or moderately converged compared to 57 percent in 2004.

**Virginia Commonwealth Survey Results**

Sample	Eligible	2004		2005		
		Returned	Response Rate	Eligible	Returned	Response Rate
Educator	336	92	27	335	71	21
Newspaper	955	84	9	972	146	15
TV	635	65	10	640	66	10
Online	512	78	15	516	60	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,438</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2463</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>14</b>

**Table 2**

**Journalism Sectors of Convergers / Traditionalists**

Organization	2004		2005	
	Convergers	Traditionalists	Convergers	Traditionalists
University	74% (64)	26% (22)	76% (50)	24% (16)
Newspaper	41% (34)	59% (49)	43% (60)	57% (79)
TV	67% (41)	33% (20)	69% (44)	31% (20)
Online	70% (42)	30% (18)	73% (38)	27% (14)
Total	62% (181)	38% (109)	60% (192)	40% (129)
	Sig. = .000; % (N)		Sig. = .000; % (N)	

## Basic skills first

Given these findings, it should come as no surprise that convergence-oriented skills – writing across media platforms, multimedia story planning, gathering and editing video and audio, and creating and designing graphics for the Web – are viewed by all respondents as less important than basic skills of journalistic writing, reporting, interviewing, research, copy editing, and ethics. Newspaper editors placed less importance on preparing students to work in highly converged newsrooms than other respondents, while educators were most likely to view cross-platform skills as important.

However, surveys tap into respondents' opinions and what they say they do. What does the convergence landscape look like “out there” in the real world? More robust than the VCU survey might indicate.

According to the Convergence Tracker of the American Press Institute's Media Center, convergence is alive and well at print, broadcast, and online media in 33 states – and in markets both large and small, from market #1 (based on Nielsen ratings) New York to market #181 Bowling Green, KY.

Most convergence relationships involve sharing news content and promoting that shared content – or each other's headlines. Of 107 convergence relationships tracked by API's Media Center, 93 involve news partnerships and 44 involve promotional relationships. Fewer – 41 of 107 – involve advertising partnerships.

Among the more common convergence practices noted in these 107 relationships are:

- Placing a television camera in a newspaper newsroom for on-air reports from print journalists;
- Promoting the morning newspaper's headlines in the local television news the night before;
- Shared project coverage among newspaper, television, and online partners;

- Use of talkbacks – generally live, televised interviews with print or online reporters who have knowledge or expertise on a particular topic or story; and
- Sharing of news budgets among newspaper, television, and online partners to facilitate multiplatform story planning

While many of the convergence partnerships appear more sporadic than ingrained or habitual and focus on simple sharing of content, some are impressively comprehensive.

In addition, confirming the findings of the VCU study that “converger” respondents are more likely to work in larger news operations and markets, most of these comprehensive partnerships are in top-20 markets.

### *Consensus: Basic skills remain paramount*

comprehensive partnerships are in top-20 markets.

- In Chicago (market #3), the partnerships involves the *Chicago Tribune*, WGN-TV (Warner Brothers), WGN Radio, cable news channel CLTV, and Tribune Interactive. The *Tribune* has TV news stages in the center of its newsroom with multiple cameras, and promotion and ad sales efforts are shared across media platforms as well as content.
- Partners in Sarasota (market #13) are the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, Six News Now (SNN), and HeraldTribune.com. Here, there is one news manager overseeing all convergence efforts and a common newsroom. All are New York Times Company properties.
- In Tampa (market #13), the *Tampa Tribune* partners with WFLA-TV (NBC) and Tampa Bay Online. Media General owns all three media properties, and they share a common news facility. Cross-selling of advertising seems to have been more successful in Tampa (at least according to self-reports to API) than for other convergence partners elsewhere.
- Orlando's partnership (market #20) involves the *Orlando Sentinel*, Clear Channel Radio, WESH-TV (NBC), WTMO-TV (Telemundo) and

Orlandosentinel.com. Orlando claims the first central multimedia news desk and a “progressive new media culture,” according to API’s Convergence Tracker. The Internet is integrated with the newsroom, and there are extensive cross-promotion and cross-media sales.

Nevertheless, comprehensive convergence is not limited to the major markets. In market #66, for instance, the Lynchburg *News & Advance* and the *Danville Register & Bee* and WSLS-TV (NBC)—all Media General properties in Virginia-- regularly work together on breaking news as well as projects. The television news staff produces daily news updates for local radio, and there is some sharing of advertising across platforms. These partners also shared convergence training for their reporters.

Some of the convergence partnerships cross state lines: a Lawrence, KS and Kansas City, MO partnership that involves the *Journal-World*, Channel 6, World Online and KUSports.com, for instance, or a partnership that involves the *Moline Dispatch* and *Rock Island Argus* (along with QuadCitiesOnline) in Illinois with WQAD-TV (ABC) in Quad Cities, Iowa, or another that pairs the *Opelika-Auburn News* in Opelika, AL with WRBL (CBS) in Columbus, GA.

Some convergence efforts are bilingual, such as the relationship between KNTV-TV (NBC) (English) with KSTS (Telemundo, Spanish), KTSF-TV (independent, newscasts in both Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese), and the *San Jose Mercury News* (English with a weekly *Nuevo Mundo* edition in Spanish).

Perhaps of particular interest to administrators who head college and university journalism programs are the partnerships that involve universities and their journalism programs. In Muncie, IN, for instance, NewsLink Indiana is a training ground for Ball State University journalism students; it produces a Website and broadcast news briefs for WIPB-TV and WBST radio (PBS). All the partners are located in the same building on the Ball State campus.

In Tuscaloosa, AL, there is both sharing of news content

and cross-promotion between the *Tuscaloosa News* (a New York Times Regional Newspaper Group paper) and WVUA-TV (an independent station owned by the University of Alabama and under the director of the journalism program there).

In addition, at the University of Missouri, the *Columbia Missourian* is an active partner with KOMU-TV (NBC), KBIA-FM (NPR) and Website Kbia.org, all owned/operated by the School of Journalism and the University of Missouri.

Several factors appear to contribute to successful convergence partnerships. James Gentry, a professor and former dean at the University of Kansas, noted several in case studies he has authored for API’s Convergence Tracker Website:

- Deliberate, ongoing, open communication among partners;
- Putting the readers and viewers ahead of the egos of the editors and reporters;
- Finding the right partners and making the partnership a strategic priority for all; and
- Learning and understanding the cultures in each partner’s newsroom.

Moreover, from convergence partners’ own self-reports, it seems that having a single news manager over all partners, a shared newsroom, shared convergence training, and committed leadership at both local and corporate levels also are key ingredients to convergence success.

### **What curriculum changes to make?**

The VCU survey does offer some insight into where journalism schools may want to focus their curricular efforts when it comes to convergence. Of the seven convergence skills included in the survey, collaboration skills, the ability to write across platforms, and multi-platform story planning are considered the three most important.

For the second year in a row, the ability to collaborate is considered highly important by practitioners. The overall mean, based on a Likert scale, is a 4.34 for 2005 versus 4.35 last year. Practitioners (mean = 4.38) place

slightly more emphasis on this skill than educators (mean = 4.19).

The belief that students need the ability to write for multiple media platforms also continues to grow. The educators' mean increased from 4.35 last year to 4.48 in this year's survey. For practitioners, the increase was slightly smaller – moving from 4.14 to 4.21. In a change from last year, every practitioner group, including newspaper managing editors, has a mean over the 4.0 mark in this year's study. The data confirm that writing across platforms is clearly an important part of a beginning journalist's skill set.

This year, newspaper practitioners are more in line with their online and broadcast colleagues when it comes to multimedia story planning. Last year the mean for newspapers was 3.92; this year it is 4.15. Educators as a whole (mean = 4.37) see this skill as more critical than practitioners (mean = 4.19).

When it comes to preparing students to capture still photos, video clips, or audio clips, the gap between educators and practitioners has almost disappeared. Practitioners believe capturing stills is the most important skill (mean = 3.80), which is consistent with last year's findings. Educators put equal importance on capturing stills and video clips (mean = 3.75).

In evaluating the practitioner numbers, one may be inclined to think that the larger number of newspaper practitioners represented in the sample drives the results; however, for the second year in a row, television practitioners actually give the ability to capture stills a slightly higher mean score than the newspaper journalists. It will come as no surprise, however, that television practitioners continue to place the most importance of any group on the ability to capture video clips (mean = 4.04).

The gap between educator and practitioner responses on the importance of training students in technical skills for the Web has narrowed significantly this year as well. The educator mean dropped from 3.92 in 2004 to 3.68 this year. The practitioner mean increased slightly from 3.59 to 3.66.

## How best to teach convergence skills?

A major problem for both educators and practitioners seems to be determining the best way to teach the core convergence skills: writing across platforms, the ability to collaborate, and multiplatform story planning.

Several schools have had some success in focusing on the issue of writing for multiple platforms. At the University of Southern California-Annenberg School, students entering the major take a Convergence Core Curriculum. Each class in the Core is team-taught by three instructors. Students, for instance, take newspaper writing on Monday, television and radio writing on Wednesday, and online writing on Friday. The schedule is repeated for Reporting and Production in subsequent semesters.

At the University of Kansas, the school takes a Web-centric approach in its multimedia reporting course. Students learn how to gather and present information in text and video, but they deliver the content via the Web.

At VCU, journalism students take both an introductory broadcast writing course, which includes an online component, a video lab, and an audio lab, and an introductory print reporting class – regardless of whether they will specialize in print or broadcast.

Teaching collaboration skills seems to be inherent in many broadcast courses as students are generally assigned to teams to produce the content required for their courses. To ensure that print reporters get the same kind of collaborative learning, some schools, such as Kent State University and VCU, require participation in multimedia reporting teams as part of a capstone course. These classes also provide an opportunity for students to explore what it takes to produce strong multiplatform stories.

One approach to teaching multiplatform story telling involves introducing students to the concept that convergence projects should capitalize on what each medium does best. For example, key strengths of broadcast journalism include the ability to convey emotion and the ability to let the viewer or listener hear or see something. Print is more easily able to provide depth, detail,

and permanence. And online has the ability to be interactive and more immediate even than television.

The best convergence journalism takes story ideas and filters them through this paradigm. For example, let's say you were going to do a story on day care center violations as a converged news project. On television, you might follow an inspector through a day care center, showing people the things he looks for. If you discover that there is a day care center with a number of serious violations, you would want to talk to parents and the center operators about the findings to get their reaction. In the newspaper story, you could provide more specifics on the laws that regulate day care centers in the area and how effectively they are enforced. You might also do a sidebar on how tough it is to find quality day care. Online you have a perfect opportunity to let the audience interact with the data. Perhaps you could create a searchable database of all the day care inspection records for your area. You could provide links to information on finding a good day care center, list the signs that indicate there may be problems with a center, and provide information on how to report a potential problem. A project produced in this way takes advantage of the visual and emotional aspects of television, the depth and detail of print, and the interactivity of online.

Students generally find it quite easy to brainstorm a convergence approach to a story, even if they are not proficient in all three platforms. Fortunately, having an understanding of how media can work together to complement each other seems to be what those in the industry who embrace convergence are looking for.

### **What employers want**

At TBO.com in Tampa, content manager Jim Riley said to give him a journalist and he can create a Web producer. TBO is the Web partner for WFLA-TV and the *Tampa Tribune*, Media General's flagships for the company's convergence efforts.

Riley said he does hire candidates right out of school if they have the right skills. "My ideal candidate has a strong journalism background and also knows HTML and Photoshop. Those are the two core Web skills you

need because they help you work with designers."

In a converged news environment, Riley believes understanding how each platform works – its culture, advantages and challenges – is the key to success. "You gotta relate to the partner; if you can't, you're not going to do very well."

Dan Shorter, general manager for PalmBeachPost.com, said his best employees historically have been those with journalistic backgrounds who understand quality and integrity of information and deadlines, and because of this background are capable multi-taskers. "Although they're certainly not perfect," Shorter said, "what they create has a lot fewer errors in it. The online world has fewer infrastructures for catching errors."

Journalism graduates or those with journalism experience "have been on computers a lot already. Learning some new code or a new software program doesn't confuse or bother them. They're perfectly positioned to develop just a few extra skills" such as HTML and editing audio and video, Shorter added.

Among Shorter's innovations are the 60 kiosks the *Palm Beach Post* has placed in shopping centers and other community locations to bring the newspaper's online content to where people work, shop and gather." We can't be satisfied with reaching 50 or 50 percent of our community – the ones who read newspapers," he said. "We need to reach everyone in our community with jobs, with ads, with weather and sports, and the kiosks put the *Post* in front of millions who don't read our paper. Consumers are agnostic as to media platform."

Media General is trying to grow its own converged journalists. The company created a post-graduate convergence internship two years ago. In four of Media General's most converged markets, the media partners hire recent college graduates to train across platforms. Susan Defraties oversees convergence efforts at WFLA-TV. She said the *Tampa Tribune* just hired the partners' first convergence intern partly because of the intern's understanding of what it takes to work across platforms.

"I think the key for anyone coming into a converged



news environment is to understand how to take one story and make it work in print, on TV, and for the Web,” said Defraties. In fact, that’s a big part of what Defraties and others share with students from the University of South Florida who take a converged media course that takes advantage of the school’s proximity to Media General’s News Center. USF students spend time with the working professionals on all three platforms represented in the News Center, and the students produce some converged content of their own with the help of their professional mentors.

Joe Gannon works for News12 (KPNX), the television partner for azcentral.com, a site News 12 shares with the *Arizona Republic* in Phoenix, AZ. The Gannett Corporation owns all three media properties. Gannon said it makes a big difference whether schools are trying to turn out journalists whose primary job will be in print or broadcast or whether they’re training online journalists.

For online journalists, he believes a fundamental understanding of HTML, database management, and other Web technical skills is essential. For print and broadcast journalists, he believes basic journalism skills are still paramount. In the News 12 newsroom, most of the Web posting is done through templates, so it takes only limited computer skills for a broadcast journalist to master the job.

When we spoke to him, Lou Ferrara was leaving his job as the television content manager for the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* and its television partner Sarasota News Network to become online editor for the Associated Press in New York.

Ferrara is another converger who said the emphasis in journalism schools has to be on solid reporting skills, but he believes today’s journalists should be able to speak all languages – understanding how each medium works and what the expectations for those media are. Ferrara sees cross-platform work growing within the industry.

“This is becoming a norm. Reporters for newspapers are moving more toward the Web. Video is a compo-

nent for the Web tied into text reporting from the reporters. Everyone needs to know how TV/video work, however,” Ferrara wrote in an e-mail.

Ferrara believes the news industry is at a critical and changing point in its history. “The next 100 years are going to be far different from the past 100, when you had hometown stations and a local newspaper. A grasp of that is good for people to know. Not everybody gets it,” he said.

Like Ferrara, Gina Katzmark was about to change jobs when she interviewed, leaving WBTW-TV in Myrtle Beach-Florence, SC, where she’s been news director in a converged environment, and moving to WFMY-TV in Greensboro, NC to take a similar position but in a market that is just beginning to think about convergence. Katzmark said one of the most valuable attributes for successful cross-platform work is being able to think about convergence in the process of planning story coverage. “And it works best when there’s one person thinking across all the platforms and what each one can do best rather than individual editors thinking only of TV, or online, or the newspaper,” she said.

She also noted that being able to write in multiple styles is an essential convergence skill. WBTW-TV’s convergence partners are the *Morning News* in Florence, the weekly *Horry Independent* in neighboring Horry County, WBTW.com, and morningnews online.com. “Our journalists need to know that attributions are handled differently across the various media, that when you’re doing a story for print you need to be more descriptive than when you’re writing for broadcast because you can’t see the people or the setting in a print story,” she said.

At Cox Newspapers, the emphasis is also on the Web. Michael Schwartz is the manager of editorial training for COXnet and Cox Newspapers. He is even more passionate about the need for new journalists to have multimedia tools. He focused his message for print journalism instructors.

“They should be pushing print journalists to embrace the Web as a remarkable medium that offers them the

chance for the first time in many years to be competitive with TV and radio. It is a means for print journalists to provide breaking news in a way that was previously impossible in a newspaper.”

He wrote in an e-mail, “A good understanding of Web design, navigation, and capabilities is essential for the journalism student to have a broad understanding of how to tell stories effectively across platforms. It is essential that college administrators and teachers expose students to the freshest examples of how news organizations are exploiting the advantages of the Web in offering the user a rich, deep, interactive, and entertaining experience.”

Schwarz said knowing how to capture and edit video and audio are invaluable skills. He said that journalism students need to understand that their futures lie in being able to cross platforms with ease.

“There is a dramatic growth in users and advertising revenue occurring on the Web, versus declining readership and advertising revenue in print. The smart, aspir-

ing journalist will acquire multimedia skills so he/she can move fluidly between platforms,” wrote Schwartz.

In conclusion, there is plenty of support in both the industry and the academy for emphasizing the basics – reporting, writing and ethical-decision making. That has certainly not changed. The challenge for journalism educators is in figuring out what will give their graduates the edge in a highly competitive job market. For the convergers in the industry with whom we spoke, that edge can be found on the Web.

As many others have noted, the Web has the ability to bring all media together into one – text, audio, video, and visuals – and to take it one step more, to interactivity. It is the super medium that a growing number of forward-thinking journalists believe will be the primary information delivery platform of the future.

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# Convergence: Who's Doing What

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*Journalism is the art of collecting varying kinds of information (commonly called “news”) which a few people possess and of transmitting it to a much larger number of people who are supposed to desire to share it.*

Henry R. Luce (recalled on his death in 1967)

There is little likelihood that Henry Luce was talking about convergence as we know it way back in the 1960s, but many who support the concept of preparing students for work in a multimedia world appear to come from the Luce perspective. For them, the goal of journalism education is simply to teach students how to collect and disseminate information – the platform matters only to the extent that students must master different tools to achieve the goal.

Sounds simple, right? Of course, within the very real constraints of credit-hour limits, faculty expertise, and funding for technology and equipment, training students for work across platforms is much more of a challenge. This article explores the scope of convergence curricula within the academy, provides examples of the most highly-converged curricula, takes a look at schools that have modified existing programs to address convergence, and reveals why one school that tried convergence is now leaving the multimedia approach behind.

## Programs overview

For the second year in a row, researchers at Virginia Commonwealth University have surveyed journalism education administrators about convergence and the approaches individual programs are taking toward teaching multi-platform skills. In 2005, 71 administrators responded.

For the purposes of the survey, VCU defined a converged curriculum as one that teaches all journalism students how to generate news content for print, broadcast, and online. Based on that definition, 12.7 percent of the respondents defined their programs as highly converged, and 22.2 percent say their programs are not converged at all. That leaves a vast majority (65.1 percent) who fall within the category of somewhat to moderately converged. It is clear from this survey that many schools are trying to expose students to some sort of multimedia training.

The VCU survey tried to quantify what approaches schools that are at least somewhat converged are taking for teaching convergence. The most common approach (chosen by 46.9 percent of the respondents) involved a curriculum that provides opportunities for students to develop competencies across media platforms and allows students to specialize in print, broadcast, or online at the upper level of the curriculum.

The second most common approach (34.7 percent of respondents) involved one or two required classes that offer instruction across media platforms, for example, an introductory journalism course that includes writing for print, broadcast, and online.

The third model involved individual instructors incorporating multimedia instruction into courses as they see fit. In this model, there is no institutional requirement that courses offer instruction across media platforms. Just 12.2% of the respondents said this model most closely resembles their schools' approach.

At the same time, 82.6 percent of responding educators felt strongly that it is important or very important that journalism schools prepare students to work in highly converged newsrooms. Just 4.8 percent said this effort was unimportant.

The educators also were asked how effective journalism schools are at preparing students for work in highly converged newsrooms. The results were mixed here. Most respondents were neutral (43.3 percent), and 35 percent said journalism schools are ineffective or very ineffective at preparing students for highly converged newsrooms. In contrast, just 21.7 percent rated schools as effective or very effective.

So what might be preventing schools from giving themselves higher grades? Three factors emerged as major challenges for journalism schools. First, 44 percent of respondents said that a lack of funding for needed technology and equipment is a very significant challenge.

Thirty-three percent of those surveyed said that a very significant challenge is that faculty lack the skills needed to teach across platforms (81 percent of those surveyed ranked this as very significant or significant), and along that same line, 35 percent said that a lack of funding for training faculty is a very significant challenge.

Schools with the most highly converged curricula either do not face the above challenges to the same degree as other schools, or they have found ways to overcome those challenges.

## Big-time convergence

When the topic is big schools going into convergence in a big way, the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication is one of the programs most frequently mentioned. What may be interesting to those familiar with the program is a discussion of how the convergence curriculum at USC is evolving.

When USC implemented the convergence curriculum in the fall of 2002, the school began requiring students

to take a series of classes designed to teach them how to write for print, broadcast, and online at the same time. Instructors were told to use a synchronized syllabus and assignments. The idea was to have students gathering information for and writing

the same story on all three platforms. Assistant Professor Laura Castaneda said both instructors and students hated the approach, "I think there are stories that work well in one medium and not in another. So we no longer synchronize," she said.

Castaneda was part of a faculty group that has since created a new Convergence Core Curriculum, which was launched in the fall of 2004. The Core is spread across three semesters, beginning with news writing, then reporting, and, finally, production. Here's a look at the newswriting portion of the Core:

- 202 Newswriting: Print (2, Fa) Introduction to basic skills of print newswriting, news judgment, construction of print news stories. Social responsibility and ethical framework for print journalists. Typing ability required. Concurrent enrollment: JOUR 203, JOUR 204.
- 203 Newswriting: Broadcast (2, Fa) Introduction to broadcast newswriting with emphasis on the ear and eye. News judgment. Social responsibility and ethical framework for broadcast journalists. Typing

## *Convergence Hindrances:*

### *Lack of*

*1. money*

*2. faculty skills*

*3. training*

ability required. Concurrent enrollment: JOUR 202, JOUR 204.

- 204 Newswriting: Online (2, Fa) Introduction to online newswriting with emphasis on context and relationship of topics to the story. Social responsibility and ethical framework for online journalists. Typing ability required. Concurrent enrollment: JOUR 202, JOUR 203.

Each class in the Core is team-taught by three instructors. Students, for instance, take newspaper writing on Monday, television and radio writing on Wednesday, and online writing on Friday. The schedule is repeated for reporting and production in subsequent semesters. “We don’t expect students to become experts in print, broadcast, and online journalism, but we believe it’s important for students to understand how all three work and how they are increasingly working together,” said Castaneda.

USC draws on a large pool of adjunct instructors to pull off this major commitment to team-teaching. But even with USC’s resources, Castaneda says the school struggles with issues such as whether there is a need for print students to learn non-linear video editing. The school is considering a plan to offer one-day seminars to teach students some technical skills rather than devoting regular class time to this type of instruction.

Right now, Castaneda said USC is struggling with the online portion of the curriculum. “We’re trying to figure out how to really boost the online journalism content and make it a true visual journalism curriculum that incorporates the best of print, TV, and radio. We’re not there, yet.”

In the long run, Castaneda believes the convergence curriculum makes USC students more marketable by giving them the ability to move from one platform to another.

### The Web-centric approach

At the University of Kansas William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications, the word “convergence” is out and the words “multimedia” and “cross-platform” are in. It’s been more than four

years since the school’s major curriculum overhaul, and Associate Professor Rick Musser said some things have changed dramatically. “Where we’re moving in terms of multimedia is on the Web. We’re migrating from having students turn in a hard copy story to using blogger software to create a multimedia portfolio.”

Today at KU, all journalism undergraduate students must take the following core courses:

- **JOUR 101 Media and Society (3)**  
Introductory course open to all KU students. The course emphasizes the use of critical and creative thinking as tools to better consider the reliability of information received through newspapers, magazines, radio and television, online media, trade publications, advertising and business communications. The class also surveys media ethics, economics, technology and the function and impact of media on a free society.
- **JOUR 301 Research and Writing (3)**  
Instruction focuses on gathering and presenting news and persuasive information for all media. Students learn to write for a variety of media, purposes and audiences. Students gain basic skills ranging from interviewing to video editing as well as concepts needed to write for a variety of media platforms. Prerequisite: JOUR 101 completed with a grade of 2.0 or better and completion of English requirements.
- **JOUR 415 Multimedia Reporting (3)**  
Hands-on instruction in the gathering, writing and presentation of news and information for newspapers, magazines, television, radio and online media. Student work may appear in campus media. Prerequisite: JOUR 101 and 301, each with a grade of 2.0 or above.
- **JOUR 419 Multimedia Editing (3)**  
This course emphasizes principles of editing for written and verbal expression, logic, visual presentation, organization, and news judgment for all forms of media: newspaper, magazine, broadcast and online. Prerequisite: JOUR 301 with a grade of 2.0 or above.

Musser said the multimedia reporting course serves to prepare students for TV news, newspapers, magazines,

and online journalism. No matter what medium they specialize in, students will take this course. “In the world I’m training these people for, the question will not be: ‘Is it TV or is it print?’ It will be: ‘How can we best tell this story?’” he added.

Is the program working? Musser said, “More things are making it on the air and in the paper because the quality is better. The kids are getting published.”

There are also tradeoffs. For example, his colleague who runs the TV newsroom believes students are not as technically proficient as they were under the old curriculum, but that colleague also believes the students know what a story is and that they are better reporters. “This is not easy. It takes commitment from people at the top and from people within the curriculum to make this happen,” said Musser.

### **Converging within existing curricula**

Many other schools are embracing convergence with more of a one-armed hug than the full body clutch! They are trying to lead their students to an understanding of what each medium does best by exposing them to some basic skills for working across media platforms.

Virginia Commonwealth University is one of those schools. In the fall of 2002, the VCU faculty began discussing the need to introduce students to cross-platform training and do it within the existing curricular framework. The first thing the team did was to recommend that the electronic media sequence and the news editorial sequence be combined into one educational track called journalism. Though students still specialize in either print or broadcast within the major, the new title more accurately reflects the school’s journalism emphasis.

The school also was cognizant of the need to work within the 40 credit hours allowed by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. After reviewing the current curriculum thoroughly, VCU came up with the following requirements for all journalism majors:

- MASC 303 General Assignment Reporting – Detailed study in gathering and reporting facts, with emphasis on clarity and maturity of writing.

The intent is to build skills in interviewing, to provide practice in writing general news and features. (3 credits)

- MASC 363 Electronic Media Writing I – Students will concentrate on developing writing and reporting skills for radio and television (includes a Web writing module) (3 credits)
- MASC 365 Radio Production – Students will learn the purpose, function and execution of basic techniques of radio and audio field and studio production. (1 credit/5 week course taken concurrently with MASC 363)
- MASC 366 TV Production - Students will learn the purpose, function and execution of basic techniques of television and video field and studio production. (1 credit/5 week course taken concurrently with MASC 363).

Students then go on to specialize in print or broadcast journalism by taking a series of advanced skills or theory classes. In the spring semester 2005, for the first time, the school offered a five-week online journalism lab that taught students the fundamentals of reporting and writing for the Web. It is not yet a required course, and like USC, the journalism faculty at VCU is still not satisfied with the amount of online journalism to which the students are exposed.

As a capstone course, VCU brings print and broadcast students together again for a one-credit seminar class. Students are required to work in teams to produce a multimedia project at the end of the semester. The course is designed to get print and broadcast students communicating about current issues affecting the field of journalism and working together to disseminate complementary content on at least two media platforms.

To accommodate the need for the additional credit hours required by this new convergence curriculum, VCU eliminated four credits of electives for broadcast specialists and six credits of electives for print specialists. The tradeoff means fewer choices for students, but at least one broadcast faculty member says the payoff comes because the broadcast majors are getting additional, much-needed writing and reporting instruction, and the print majors are starting to think more about

opportunities to enhance their stories with pictures and sound.

### Student-selected convergence

At the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana College of Communications, an education in convergence is primarily a student's choice. Within the journalism sequence, all students are required to take the same four classes:

- Journalism 200 – Introduction to Journalism - Discussion of the history, freedom, technologies, ethics, and functions of the news media. Training in clear, descriptive writing techniques, using journalistic models.
- Journalism 400 – Reporting 1 - Fundamentals of journalistic writing; reporting news of public affairs.
- Journalism 405 – History of American Journalism - Surveys the history of the field of journalism since pre-colonial times. Includes the evolution of the media in the United States and the evolution of cultural concepts concerning the media, including rights granted under the First Amendment.
- Journalism 411 – Law and Communications - Historical background of the nature and meaning of the law as it relates to journalism and contemporary problems of freedom of expression.

Once those courses are completed, print majors are then required to take a second level of print reporting, as well as a news editing class and a graphics and design class. Broadcast majors must take radio journalism and two more classes in television journalism specifically.

After that, students are free to use their electives to explore another medium. For example, print students can take any of the broadcast journalism courses offered, and it's vice versa for broadcast students. Another elective, the school's investigative reporting class, is specifically designed for both print and broadcast students.

Professor Walt Harrington, chair of the Journalism Department, said the faculty has stayed committed to the idea that they're there not only to teach students the necessary entry-level skills, but also to prepare students

to do in-depth, analytic journalism. "The challenge is how to get all students through a shared experience," said Harrington.

Now, the school's Reporting 1 class is a very print-centric public affairs reporting course. As that course and the curriculum stand now, it would be possible for a print student to avoid any exposure to broadcast journalism altogether. But Harrington said students who are serious about their careers and self-directed generally take a wider array of the school's electives, including courses with a broadcast emphasis. In addition, the school has hired a new instructor for the Reporting 1 class, so there is a possibility that the class will evolve to incorporate broadcast and online components.

Harrington said the school's commitment to public affairs journalism goes back decades, and there are no plans to alter it. "We really aren't sure where journalism is going. But the point isn't for us to predict the future; it's for us to enable students to prosper in whatever comes," said Harrington.

### Back to basics

Amazingly, convergence in the curriculum is now old enough for at least one school to be saying, "Been there. Done that. Over it." Ten years ago, the faculty at Brigham Young University's Department of Communications began discussing the need for students to work across media platforms. The discussion was prompted, in part, by the school's advisory board, which included such industry leaders as Dean Singleton.

Department chair Ed Adams said the school's first efforts involved locating both the broadcast and print operations in the same newsroom. The two groups held story meetings together and conducted enterprise reporting projects together to provide content for a daily newspaper and a nightly newscast.

But the curriculum itself was lagging behind. In 1999, most of the journalism classes outside the lab were still separate. The school was trying to create "super reporters" – those who could move easily between platforms – by simply exposing print students to broadcast

and vice versa. The exception was a class called, "Writing for Mass Audiences," in which students were taught a little bit about writing for a lot of different media and audiences. "We spent some time on fundamentals, but never achieved mastery in one area. Students were moving on to their major classes without knowing very much in-depth," said Adams.

However, the school did achieve a great deal of success online. In March of 1999, *Editor and Publisher* profiled NewsNet, an online service created by teams of BYU print and broadcast students. According to E&P, once a story appeared on NewsNet, it was repositioned to appear on the college TV or radio stations or in the student-run newspaper. E&P was so impressed by the service that NewsNet received the first-ever award for Best College Newspaper Online Service at that year's Eppy Awards competition for interactive newspapers. Adams said the site went on to win best online campus news site for three years in a row.

But in terms of basic pedagogy, Adams said things were not working, "We were making right and lefthand turns before the students were ready for them." In 2001, BYU decided to create specific classes in online journalism and in multimedia reporting. The school also turned "Writing for Mass Audiences" back into a basic news writing course. Adams says the faculty decided students needed a solid foundation in the fundamentals before taking online and multimedia classes at the capstone level.

But 2004 brought more dissatisfaction with the curriculum. Adams said the faculty saw some evidence that

students still were not getting the depth they needed within the individual disciplines of print and broadcast journalism. "Convergence took away necessary depth in core writing skills," said Adams. Another problem was the amount of faculty resources that had to be dedicated to teaching convergence courses. "Not many faculty are able to do print, broadcast, and online, so it required team teaching efforts," said Adams.

Today, Adams points to a lack of impact from those early convergence efforts. Adams said students who graduated during the height of BYU's multimedia curriculum were primarily still getting jobs in traditional venues. So, in the 2006-2007 course catalog, there are no more convergence-in-the-classroom elements to be found. The only things remaining of the discussion that began in 1995 are the print and broadcast operations still housed side-by-side, and NewsNet content is still produced by students in print and broadcast classes. Adams says the communication between print and broadcast students and the sharing of some resources remains a positive.

### **Convergence future**

Converge at the beginning, converge at the end, converge throughout, or don't converge at all! If you can say one thing about convergence in the college curriculum, it is that one size does not fit all. Yet, personnel in all of these programs believe they have found an answer that's generally right for them, at least for now.

*Debra Halpern Wenger is associate professor of media convergence and new media in the School of Mass Communications, Virginia Commonwealth University*



# When Journalism Curricula Converge, Expect CHALLENGES

DAVE BOEYINK  
Indiana University

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In the early 90s the Indiana University School of Journalism took its first steps toward a converged curriculum. What we accomplished works for us. Pieces of it may even work for others.

However, we learned more from the obstacles we stumbled over than from any rare insights we may have had. So what follows is a look at what we did—especially where we stubbed our toes. If we learned from our missteps, perhaps others will, too.

## **Vision and objectives: better in hindsight**

When the task of revising the core curriculum of the journalism major was assigned to a curriculum committee, the first job was to create a set of objectives. In its 1993 report, that list included:

- Flexibility for students;
- Increased focus on information gathering;
- Adaptability to changing media forms;
- Visual and verbal literacy;
- Integration of math skills into the major; and
- Writing/reporting for multiple audiences

In retrospect, these objectives kept our work on track for more than a decade. We came back to this list each time we planned some new change.

However, the list also proved to be shortsighted. The original objectives drafted in 1993 failed to include "critical thinking" as a goal, despite the relevance of that intellectual skill for journalism majors who need to adapt to changing media environments in the future. What were we thinking?

Another limitation of the original objectives was their focus on changes in curriculum. This left out important objectives related to traditional skills. Not including these objectives risks making convergence seem like the end of journalism education, rather than the means to better reporting, writing, and editing.

## **Planning: reallocating resources and sustaining momentum**

Curricular change demands a painful reallocation of resources. For example, the adoption of a multimedia

approach in two beginning skills courses required a commitment from full-time faculty to teach more of these sections, rather than advanced skills and theory courses. The commitment of full-time faculty to these beginning courses has not been sustained. Graduate students now staff a majority of these sections.

More critically, projects like this, particularly when they add to the workload of faculty and staff, can run out of steam. Here, ongoing support of the unit's director (in IU's case, then-Dean Trevor Brown) is essential.

However, because of the demands on a dean's time, one or two faculty (depending on the year) served as directors to keep the project moving. Sustaining reform in any unit may require that kind of delegated leadership over the long haul.

And it is a long haul. After more than 10 years, Indiana isn't close to having a completely converged curriculum. One conclusion: Faculty committed to keeping their major responsive to the changes in communication, commerce, and culture may need to consider curricular reform as a perpetual, rather than a periodic, process.

### **Convergence challenges**

In the mid-90s, IU was trying to balance getting out too far ahead of developments in traditional media, while still creating graduates flexible enough to succeed in a converged media market 10 or 20 years in the future.

Ultimately, three approaches were adopted:

- Students would continue to be encouraged to develop one area of expertise;
- At the same time, all students would be exposed to multiple ways of communicating visually (photo, video, graphic design) and verbally (newspapers, magazines, broadcast, online); and
- Finally, in challenging students to think about how

shifting audiences can be reached, the focus would be on problem solving (critical thinking) as a way to prepare students for unpredictable changes in the future.

So far, so good. However, the technology convergence demanded created a different practical problem. Students often see mastery of software, rather than good reporting and writing, as the goal of a Web magazine. When a new technology is introduced, that camera or software can hijack the course. At IU, we slowly

realized that making the technology transparent (i.e., simple) allows students to focus on the best strategies for communicating new, useful information to audiences.

But here's the irony:

Despite the ubiquitous presence of the Web, many journalism students think traditionally, identifying themselves as magazine writers or broadcast journalists. They are also frustrated with a multimedia approach that stresses flexibility over competence in a single medium.

This problem has proven difficult to solve because it requires changing pre-existing biases. A strategy for overcoming these biases centers on audiences. Getting students to see how audiences using different media process information in different ways helps them understand how varied story-telling styles are needed to reach each audience.

### **Convergence courses: The academic equivalent of childbirth**

Our focus on convergence in the curriculum has been centered on three introductory skills classes. Each has presented its own set of problems.

*J200: Reporting, Writing and Editing I* was transformed from a newspaper class to a multimedia course in writing for newspaper, magazine, and television audi-

*One problem: Journalism students continue to think of themselves too narrowly, preventing the flexibility convergence requires*

ences. But who was going to teach this course? Professional adjuncts usually have expertise in one specific area of journalism. As a result, full-time faculty needed to teach more introductory skills courses, leaving more advanced skills courses to adjuncts.

A series of one-week summer workshops over a five-year period prepared faculty and graduate students. In addition, a course coordinator held weekly meetings for all instructors, laying out specific goals for each class session. An online collection of lecture notes, exercises, videos, and assignments gives instructors the resources they need to teach outside their areas of expertise.

Shifting the course from a basic newspaper class to a multimedia class spawned other problems. The new curriculum model dropped the requirement for an editing course, which frustrated some faculty. The new course titles include the term “editing,” but often the content does not. Editing is part of the production of the Web magazine, and grammar is taught in both introductory courses. But editing has been marginalized with the shift to a multimedia focus. Too much to teach, too little time.

And that leads to student anxiety. The new multimedia course only allows three or four weeks on each kind of writing. That frustrates students looking for an early dose of competence.

In the second convergence skills course, *J201: Reporting, Writing, and Editing II*, students spend 10 weeks working on a major reporting project that requires multiple sources (library, online, and experts) and a human focus. The final story is then edited for a Web magazine, adding online experience to each student’s multimedia training.

Some students struggle with Web technology, while others are dazzled by its graphic potential. Both groups can lose sight of the ultimate goal: communicating with an audience. This problem has not been eliminated.

However, several strategies have helped:

- Focusing students on the goal of communication, often by reviewing news sites they find useful;

- Simplifying the technology using software tools, such as Contribute, and developing templates that restrict design options; and
- Banning distracting graphics (and color combinations) that undermine the message of the Web story.

The third convergence class is *Visual Communication*. IU’s introduction to visual literacy (formerly a photography course) now includes photography, video, and graphic design. To prepare faculty, the course was team-taught the first year. A faculty member from each visual area prepared the lecture, visual materials, and exercises for that module. These materials are now shared by the instructor who takes charge of the course each semester.

Unlike J200 and J201, Visual Communication is a large lecture course with weekly lab sessions run by graduate students. Faculty find this course demanding because of its size and the combination of theoretical and practical training it demands.

Presently, the course is headed in two directions. One faculty member has pushed the convergence model further, including a module that “converges” all the material the students prepare for the course. Other faculty focus more on the theoretical principles of visual journalism, reducing the number of practical assignments. Where the course will land is anyone’s guess.

In short, we have created three great convergence courses that are a challenge to teach. The search for ways to help instructors thrive in this multimedia environment is far from over.

### **Training faculty: Money, expertise, and stress**

To make the transition to multimedia courses, workshops were offered in online reporting, online writing, graphic design, broadcast reporting, and broadcast writing. One of the most successful workshops structured each workshop day around one week’s instruction in the broadcast module. Normally, outside experts served as workshop instructors. More than half the faculty participated in each workshop. Many came to all of them.

A Knight Foundation grant provided the resources IU

needed to underwrite workshops with outside experts as instructors. However, similar workshops could be organized for less money using colleagues from within the department as instructors. But keep one thing in mind: Nothing increases the satisfaction of faculty like a little cash spent for food. If you want a successful workshop, don't forget the bagels and cream cheese.

One mistake we made in the workshops was our failure to spend time on evaluating student work. Faculty can learn the basics of reporting and writing in other media. But it isn't clear how competent they are to evaluate student work outside their area of expertise. Can a person trained in graphic design grade a video assignment? Can a faculty member with professional experience in newspapers judge a student's broadcast writing? None of IU's summer workshops provided training on this critical task.

In retrospect, one solution is to have faculty skilled in that area provide detailed grading rubrics for others. For example, a broadcast instructor can describe what competence looks like for each exercise. That road map can help a print instructor fairly evaluate that assignment. Maybe.

### **Training graduate students**

One of the major ideas behind IU's convergence initiative was to reshape the way journalism was taught in the coming century. Altering our curriculum is one way to accomplish that; revising the training of doctoral students is another.

All doctoral students are now required to take a course in pedagogy that includes discussions of teaching in a converged curriculum. We have also experimented with having these doctoral students assist in courses outside their expertise. For example, one graphic designer assisted in a broadcast news class. More critically, doctoral students were trained to teach in the multimedia environment provided by the converged classes in the journalism major.

However, this model for training graduate students mirrors the same problems seen among faculty: stress over teaching outside one's area of competence, need for

appropriate curricular materials, and uncertainty about evaluation of student work. Our strategy is not without significant costs.

### **Technology**

As a part of its convergence project, Indiana created a digital lab for all forms of visual communication: photography, broadcast, and graphic design. A great idea! But as a sage copy editor once said, "Just when things seem to be getting dark, everything goes completely black."

The first year of the Digital Media Lab offered more than its share of black moments. Broadcast editing was particularly difficult to integrate into the multipurpose digital lab because of its extensive technological requirements.

The key lesson: Simpler is better. Broadcast classes now use Final Cut Express software for editing, a stripped-down version of FinalCut Pro. Similarly, a Web magazine project has switched from Dreamweaver software to the less complex Contribute. That project also uses more templates, limiting design options to simplify the project and allow students to learn what is more important: communicating with an online audience.

However, working toward transparency in the use of technology does not mean you need less of it. Technology in teaching has accelerated in an era of convergence. And that spells money.

At IU, the School of Journalism could have reduced its budget for operating the digital media lab if it gave control of the lab to the university. But doing so would mean we couldn't determine who uses the lab and what courses had access to it. An ongoing issue was making sure the Mac-based School of Journalism was in sync with the Windows-based campus on technology issues, such as fonts. Without the ability to work on projects in campus computer clusters, students demand more access to labs (and more computers) within the school or department. Can you spell "sinkhole"?

Finally, the daily details of lab management eat up staff time and energy. Ten years ago, the IU School of

Journalism had one full-time person on technical staff. Today, we have three—not counting a Webmaster and a Website manager. Surprise, surprise.

## Last thoughts

The faculty at the IU School of Journalism has worked hard developing a coherent curriculum for our students as they enter an age of convergence. We're happy to share that model with anyone. Details on what we have done can be found at IU's Convergence Forum: <http://convergence.journalism.indiana.edu>.

But we don't think we've got all the answers. Our major is far from completely converged. And even in what we have done, we have run across our share of problems.

In the end, the problems each of us faces in the acade-

mic challenge brought by convergence may be the most important things we can discuss. If we believe critical thinking and problem solving are at the core of journalism education, we are practicing that in the creation of a converged curriculum.

In other words, you don't need all the answers to get started. Half the fun will be solving the problems that inevitably arise. The good news? Once you start, you won't have to wait long.

A free CD-ROM on IU's experience is available by e-mailing the author at: [boeyink@indiana.edu](mailto:boeyink@indiana.edu).

*David Boeyink is an associate professor at the IU School of Journalism. He was a director of the curriculum reform project.*

# Media Technology: Opportunity or Conundrum?

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TV, radio, wire, Web, newspaper, magazine, cell phone, PDAs, podcasts, blogs, and even good old-fashioned billboards carry our messages. Skywriters have fallen out of favor, except at the beach. It's the range of communications media that creates both opportunity and conundrum for journalism educators. Do we teach 'em all? Some? Together? Separately? Is convergence a curriculum in and of itself or just part of the mix?

"The best articles, whether written for print, online, or broadcast media—or as advertising or public relations materials—tell stories," Assistant Professor Cecile Holmes explains to students in the syllabus for her Narrative Journalism course in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of South Carolina. The final project for her students is a narrative piece "using digital storytelling techniques including images, words, and sound or video."

In general, I tend to use the term "journalism" ecumenically. Like Professor Holmes, I'd apply much of what we learn about multimedia reporting in journalism courses to the other side of the equation—the public relations or advertising courses that seek to persuade across a spectrum of media.

Note her focus on "storytelling" rather than technology. The course is taught, in part, at the Ifra Newsplex, the multimedia laboratory newsroom the college opened in 2002. Newsplex was designed and built by the German-based Ifra press consortium for our College of Mass Communications and Information Studies and its journalism school. We use Newsplex for teaching, professional training, and research.

## **It's not the toys!**

But even Kerry Northrup, Ifra's technology guru who inspired Newsplex and was its first director, constantly reminded visitors, "It's not about technology." Technology is the facilitator for new ways of looking at newsgathering, story building, and dissemination.

Instructor Doug Fisher also uses the Newsplex venue for his course on Legislative Reporting Across Media. In spite of the course title, Fisher notes in his objectives that "the 'toys' part of all that comes at the end. The journalism still comes first."

Fisher's point is most important. "I am less worried about your production skills and more about your journalistic

ones of fairness, truth-seeking, completeness, accuracy and ethics,” he tells his students.

We have not created a separate convergence curriculum or major in our journalism program. That does not mean we didn’t consider it. But we’ve concluded that there should be a multimedia current running through our program. Rather than make a distinction between plain vanilla single medium instruction and the multimedia banana split, we’ll take the swirl.

As a result, our multimedia emphasis is not uniform. So be it. It’s not uniform in the professions either. We consider ourselves a strongly professional school, highly successful in placing our students because they are graduated with marketable skills.

News directors, managing editors, and agency heads almost uniformly tell us multimedia skills are added value for a job candidate. But what they are clamoring for is the graduate with solid, reliable basic skills. They remind us with a wink towards their own interests that we’ve built a reputation on strong reporting and copy-editing skills for our print majors, reporting and producing for broadcast majors.

Two of our faculty, Dr. Andrea Tanner and Dr. Sonya Duhe`, in a current study surveyed television news directors across the country, asking what skills reporters must possess to be hired in their newsrooms. “The most common response,” the two professors reported, “was broadcast writing skills (98% of respondents).” An ability to adapt news copy for use by multiple media was cited by 44% of news directors. Only 36% of news directors said they have their own programs in place to provide employees with these skills, Tanner and Duhe` reported.

The backpack journalist who reports, shoots, edits, and transmits her reports out of a digital backpack of tricks is largely a television compression of four jobs into one. One of our recent graduates, Heidi McGuire, does just that in Greensboro, N.C., and loves the autonomy of handling all those roles. News directors tell us they would like to have a Heidi or two on staff, but don’t expect that to become the norm. Tanner and Duhe`

cautioned, “There may be far fewer job openings than many educators anticipate for a truly ‘converged journalist’ in a traditional television newsroom setting.”

Our job as educators is to hit the primary target, yet keep our eye on new media developments.

“While maintaining our commitment to journalism excellence in focusing on traditional critical thinking, writing, editing, and design skill sets, the faculty in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications are also cognizant of the impact of new media technologies,” said school director, Dr. Shirley Staples Carter.

### Capstone courses a key

Convergence for most news media starts with adding a Web page to either a newscast or newspaper. The school’s capstone courses in print and broadcast journalism each includes a web component. The “broadcast senior semester” is designed as a television newsroom producing a daily half-hour newscast for broadcast on campus cable and through a Columbia cable outlet. The “print senior semester” has greater deadline latitude and produces an alternating weekly lab newspaper and Web product. Print students also appear on the daily broadcast, much as in local print/broadcast collaborations, to describe their upcoming edition.

Our newest major—visual communications—takes photojournalism into the digital dimension and expands it into the area of web design. Web is, by its nature, the most convergent medium, enveloping words, pictures, streaming video, audio, animation, and graphic effects.

Convergence for many news organizations often ends with adding a Web page. That overlooks possibilities that continue to emerge with new technology and new applications for established technology.

Where we’ve hit our fuller stride is in creating student-oriented projects that take advantage of Newsplex’s versatility. Because of a lack of on-campus space, the \$2.5 million, 5,700-square-foot laboratory was constructed in the production building of South Carolina Educational Television, physically separate from the rest

of the college. That does not facilitate scheduling regular semester-long courses there. Academic use also has dovetail with the steady and increasing flow of professional training developed by the Ifra/USC collaboration.

Here's what's worked well:

- Professor Holmes' narrative course unveiled a Newsplex Media Theater of the future to showcase student projects in multimedia form. It's at: <http://newsplex.sc.edu/showcase/index.html>.
- A total of 86 student journalists from the University of South Carolina and seven other journalism schools covered the 2004 Republican and Democratic national conventions and Election Day as part of the Cingular Wireless Election Connection. In a project overseen by Newsplex director Randy Covington, the students on assignment at the conventions and at the polls used Cingular's photo phones to post more than 2000 items to a unique Website. It is at: <http://www.wec.textamerica.com>.
- "As I sat in my Boston hotel room and walked around the convention itself, I was struck by how little journalism I was seeing," Covington noted. "Meanwhile, our student reporters were all over the place, covering the race for the Presidency from the points of view of the homeless, the gay community, and the environment."
- The effect was a pointillist painting of the campaign and election scene, "one of the "surprise hits of the Weblog coverage," according to CNN. The 2005 Batten Awards for Innovations in Journalism called it a "notable" site for political coverage.
- Students teamed with reporters from Media General's Florence/Myrtle Beach television station WBTW and its *Morning News* in Florence, S.C., to cover the annual Biker Week convergence of some 300,000 motorcyclists at the beach resort. In addition to reports for both the paper and television station, the students added the Web dimension to the Media General coverage. That site is at: <http://www.sc.edu/cmci/news/archive/bikewk.html>.
- Newsplex has become the home field for Associate Professor Bonnie Drewniany's annual Super Bowl of Ads class where advertising students evaluate the highly touted and highly priced advertising that

debuts during the NFL's Super Bowl. While not technically a multimedia event, Newsplex technology facilitates conducting the ad analysis without missing a play of the football game.

- Later in the semester, the creators and sponsors of the best ad are invited to campus to explain their work and pick up the school's "Cocky" award. ("Cocky" is USC's gamecock mascot.) Ifra also conducts an "Adplex" training program in multimedia advertising. That Website: <http://www.jour.sc.edu/news/isite/05supbowl.html>.

Integrated marketing and communications on the ad/pr side are hardly new to us. Yet we believe advertising and public relations are still fertile ground for expansion of multimedia approaches through new media.

It's hard not to conclude that convergence is a hodgepodge in the marketplace. Nor does a focus on newsrooms that purport to practice convergence provide a clear path for either educators or future journalists.

"Even in those newsrooms in which convergence is taking shape, management is searching for the ideal—reporters and editors facile with the skills and knowledge of traditional journalism yet comfortable with the newest technology and concepts of multiple-media newsgathering," two South Carolina professors, Dr. Erik Collins and Dr. Lynn Zoch (now at the University of Miami), concluded in a 2003 study.

Collins and Zoch conducted a global survey of news organizations practicing some degree of convergence, asking what type of education they currently look for when hiring reporters and what type of education they would ideally look for.

"While more than a third currently look for those trained in traditional print journalism, in the future only one-tenth will be hiring those trained in that tradition," they reported. Collins and Zoch suggested that "may be indicative of the need to hire people who are trainable in new ways of thinking and not set in the ways of traditional print journalism."

That assumes news organizations will invest the time



and money in on-the-job or external training. The Tanner/Duhe` research is less optimistic. Our experience on the professional side of Newsplex suggests clear benefits for news organizations that make that investment.

National and international clients have sent teams of reporters, editors, and executives to Newsplex for up to week-long, scenario-based training. We're bringing broadcasters and law enforcement together for training in effective use of the multimedia AMBER Alert program designed to locate and free abducted children under a Department of Justice grant. We're working with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty to reconfigure its broadcast base in Prague so it can reach audiences in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East via radio, Web, and television.

There's more:

- Since 2002 and the opening of Newsplex, the college has hosted an annual academic conference on convergence. (We're co-hosting it this year at Brigham Young University, <http://convergence.byu.edu>).
- We publish the online Convergence Newsletter as an "editorially neutral forum for discussion of the theoretical and professional meaning of media con-

vergence." See: <http://www.jour.sc.edu/news/convergence/index.html>.

- Newsplex inspired the Cavplex at Richland Northeast High School. The Columbia school believes the program and facility, funded by a federal grant, is the "first high school-based Convergence Media program in the country." See: <http://www.richland2.org/rnh/convergence/cavplex/index>.

The arrival at our doors of a generation of high school graduates already versed in multimedia journalism will set new challenges and create new opportunities for educators. These students will arrive with certain expectations and technological skills. Our mission will be to fuse their nascent talents to the basics of writing, reporting, and critical and ethical thinking in an environment in which they are already comfortable. As educators, we ought to be able to multitask, too.

*Charles Bierbauer has been dean of the College of Mass Communications and Information Studies at the University of South Carolina since 2002. As a correspondent for CNN for more than 20 years, he reported for television, radio, wire, and Web—often all in the same day.*

# Divergence in Convergence: Changing Attitudes

KIRSTEN JOHNSON  
Elizabethtown College

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“Most people say, ‘yes, we want to converge,’ but when it comes to doing it, it can be a painful, difficult change,” Randy Covington, director of Newsplex and assistant professor at the University of South Carolina, believes.

While they may be in favor of convergence, getting students, faculty, and staff to think and act convergently can be a challenge for a number of reasons. First, to some, convergence has not been clearly defined, leading to confusion. Second, convergence requires students, faculty, and staff from different media backgrounds to cooperate, not compete. Third, convergence is often viewed as a disruption, requiring a change in the way things have traditionally been done. Fourth, funding for the needed equipment to “do” convergence properly is not easy to come by in these days of increasingly tight budgets.

## Divergent definitions

Few interviewees for this article could agree on a common definition for convergence. For some, it means teaching students to work across different media platforms, creating stories not just for newspaper, television, radio, or the Web, but for all the different media. To others it means teaching students when and how to use certain media for a particular story. Many, such as Vincent Filak, assistant professor at Ball State University, admitted faculty are “still trying to define convergence in terms of what it means.” Others, like Rick Musser, a professor at the University of Kansas, thinks convergence is old news. “Convergence-- that discussion is over and gone.”

With these competing notions of convergence, it is no wonder faculty, students, and staff may hesitate to embrace it. What is needed is a clear, understandable definition of what convergence, in all its complexities, is.

The Media Center at the American Press Institute indicates that 85 TV stations in the United States have a news convergence partnership. These partnerships range from a station sharing information with a newspaper in a market to a true coming together of the different media in one building with a multimedia assignment desk. Right now, with just a handful of stations truly embracing convergence, it can be difficult to get students and faculty to buy into the notion. Perhaps it is time for educators to start trying to bridge this gap. “It is important for colleges and universities to be involved in this,” said Melanie Stone, associate professor of journalism at the University of Mississippi. “If we leave this to the communications industry, the potential of what could be will never be.”

Stone and Traci Mitchell, assistant director of student media at Mississippi, were part of a team that launched a converged media center at Ole Miss in August of 2004. Mitchell said even though they spent several years plan-

ning for the change, they found a lot of hesitation from students who wanted to cling to the way things used to be. “I wish we could have found a better way to bring the students along. We anticipated some of the resistance from students, but not as much as there was. There was not enough communication from the managers to those below them.”

Stone said there was also hesitation from faculty. “But more faculty have started attending conferences and are gaining a clearer understanding of media convergence and are feeling less threatened by it.” Mitchell said a fatal fraternity fire at the school early in the 2004 school year helped bring everyone together and made students realize that convergence really does work. “It was a sad day for the community, but a proud day for student media,” Mitchell said, as students worked from early in the morning until late at night gathering and reporting stories across media platforms. She said their Website logged more than two million hits following the fire.

### **Competition vs. cooperation**

“Journalism is essentially about competition, not cooperation,” Ball State’s Filak said. Getting students and faculty to buy into media convergence can be difficult because journalism history and tradition tell us the media are supposed to compete, not cooperate. KU’s Musser has witnessed the conflict between competition and cooperation firsthand. “On good days there’s cooperation; on the other days there’s competition,” he said.

Many interviewees said much of the resistance to converge came from students who worked on the newspapers. Musser said, “The newspaper end tended to retreat.” Mitchell says she encountered the same resistance from newspaper students at the University of Mississippi, but she pointed out colleges have a unique opportunity to take advantage of the revolving door. “New students are always coming in who have no idea about the way we used to do things,” she said. That revolving door can help move the convergence process forward.

### **Inadequate Training**

Many professors lack adequate training to teach across platforms. This lack of training and understanding can

lead to faculty hesitation (South, Nicholson, 2002).

When the University of Kansas changed to a more converged curriculum, James Gentry, former dean and now professor, said, “No one emerged unscathed.” He said professors were forced to throw out old lecture notes and revise courses they may have been teaching for years.

“Continuing news cultures of the various media and the continuing news cultures of the people who teach those courses are major obstacles,” Musser added.

How to teach media convergence courses can also be a source of contention. One way KU approached this obstacle is through team teaching of multimedia courses. “It’s important to get people from different media teamed up and teaching in the same classrooms,” said Musser.

Filak recently presented a study at the 2005 BEA conference in April on teaching convergence in the classroom. He found that in an introductory team-taught convergence course, students taught by one instructor across media lines had a more favorable view of print and broadcast media than those who were taught through “mini-courses” by those who are specialists in print and broadcast (Filak, 2005).

At Brigham Young University they’ve been trying different ways of teaching convergence for about 10 years. Quint Randel, assistant professor there, said there is a danger in trying to teach students too much about the different media. He cautioned that the result could be students who are “jacks of all trades and masters of none.” Instead, he continued, it might be better to teach students to “be jacks of all trades and masters of one-and-a-half or maybe two. It’s really hard to teach someone to be a killer writer. It’s even harder to say now you will also be a killer writer in print AND broadcast. Make them really good at one and then they can go to other applications.”

BYU’s Randel admitted there was also some hesitation on the part of broadcast faculty, who felt a newspaper model of convergence was in place. “Broadcast faculty felt like they (students) were getting too much print and not enough broadcast.” In order to address this

issue, changes were made to the way convergence was taught. Now, BYU students are taught to work in teams. "In a truly converged environment students need to be able to understand the advantages and disadvantages of the different media," he said.

Many faculty members interviewed believed the Web is the common ground in all of this. Larry Pryor, assistant professor of journalism at USC's Annenberg School for Communication, suggested creating one good course in on-line journalism and making it a requirement. He says this should be a course that gives students the basics of Web publishing, design, and writing.

### **But We've Always Done It This Way!**

Pryor says the elimination of "University Inertia" is key. "Universities and colleges are traditional, and they operate within certain academic boundaries and traditions. When new technology, like the Internet, suddenly appears on the scene, it's a major disruption to a journalism school." He also noted that the curriculum can take several years to change which can leave journalism schools "caught in the neverland between university traditions and the pressure from outside the academy."

Pryor added, "Three or four years ago you may have been asking faculty to make a leap of faith. Now it's to the point of being undeniable."

### **Funding—always a problem**

What can be said about funding? Resources differ from campus to campus. It is probably enough to say that at least some extra dollars will be needed to get instruction involving convergence started on any campus, the more elaborate the design, the more dollars needed.

### **Changing attitudes**

So what can be done to get students, faculty, and staff to embrace convergence? Here are some suggestions:

Provide a clear definition of what convergence (or insert

### **References:**

Filak, V. (2005, April). The impact of instructional methods on media bias and convergence approval. Paper presented at the Broadcast Education Association conference, Las Vegas, NV.

South, J., Nicholson, J. (2002). Cross-training: In an age of news convergence, schools move toward multi-media journalism. *The Quill*, 90 (6), 10-15.

the term you choose here) is to everyone in the department and all of those involved with student media.

Focus on faculty training and re-training. Faculty need to be flexible in terms of course content. A course in broadcast news shouldn't be taught in 2005 the same way it was taught in 1960.

Covington suggested, first, consolidating newsrooms and putting everyone physically in the same place. Next, he said, it is important to integrate convergence into everything that is done. He emphasized that convergence cannot be viewed as something that is "off to the side." Finally he suggested teaching students to think about how stories can be told across different platforms.

Make sure students have adequate time and resources to work convergently. As Filak said, "There's hesitation because of the amount of time that's available. We're not to the point where everybody's got so much free time that they can put together a story for all the media."

Emphasize teamwork among students in courses and in student media. Make sure students are still learning the basics of journalism, and give them an appreciation for all of the different types of media, but don't expect them to be experts in each area.

Mitchell said planning and setting clear goals have been the keys to success at Mississippi. The goals include: serving the students' best interests, producing better journalists, finding the best ways to serve the community with information, and emerging as a leader for convergence in higher education.

*Kirsten Johnson is a lecturer in the Department of Communications at Elizabethtown College.*

# HBCUs Converging, Too

BARBARA BEALOR HINES AND TIFFANY BOLDENAR  
Howard University

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Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) share many of the same challenges as their counterpart journalism programs at both public and private universities: Educating students across platforms, combining print, broadcast journalism, and strategic media to prepare students for the increasing demand for skills in convergence; obtaining the funding to provide space and equipment to teach the emerging technology; and faculty training.

According to “The Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Journalism Education,” a supplement to the Annual Survey of Journalism and Mass Communication Graduates (1999) conducted at the Grady College of Journalism at the University of Georgia, more than 33 percent of black students graduating in journalism attend historically black colleges and universities. Journalism programs at these schools, generally much younger in years and leaner in resources, are embracing and, in one instance, stretching the notion of convergence.

## Florida A&M University

At Florida A&M, a new journalism building opened in fall 2005 but not yet completed, features work stations for the student media (*The FAMUan* campus newspaper, WANM-FM radio station; *Journey* magazine, and FAMU TV-20, cable educational access station) configured to allow media to share stories. According to James Hawkins, dean of the School of Journalism and Graphic Communication, each of the student media will be able to send stories electronically to their counterparts. Students working at a multimedia desk will produce a Website featuring news and information from the other media platforms.

During the 2004-05 school year, students could take camera/edit training classes in three-hour, non-credit Saturday morning workshops for six weeks during each semester. More than 100 students took advantage of the opportunity to work in a converged news environment, said Kim Godwin, until October 6 interim director of the FAMU Division of Journalism.

While there are no new courses in the curriculum, Joseph Ritchie, Knight professor of journalism at FAMU and instructor for the required Colloquium course, introduces students to the cross-platform world and provides them with an understanding of the workflow issues inherent in convergence.

## Grambling State University

Grambling State University’s Department of Mass Communication offers four concentrations--broadcast journalism, news-editorial, public relations, and visual communication. Two core curriculum classes teach students about convergence--Online Writing and Design and Mass Media Writing and Editing.

The department is looking for more space to expand its program of convergence. "We have a proposal for a new newsroom that will include a digital editor and converged media lab, to complement the core courses," said Rama M. Tunuguntla, former department chair.

### **Hampton University**

Hampton University's Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communications has five academic programs--advertising, broadcast journalism, media management, print journalism, and public relations. Currently, there are two courses in the curriculum that deal with convergence--Online Journalism and Multicultural Reporting.

Online Journalism teaches students basic Web design and how to use text, graphics, video, and audio. Students examine the pressures, pitfalls, and advantages of online reporting; they also study the journalistic values and judgment necessary for being successful journalists. Clarence Cotton, assistant professor of journalism, said Online Journalism is required for print and broadcast journalism majors and teaches students to understand how to stream videos.

In fall 2005, Hampton students were to be required to take a new course, Introduction to Media Writing, designed to compare and contrast writing styles so students can gain a better appreciation of them. The course will be a prerequisite to Online Journalism and Multicultural Reporting.

### **Howard University**

Since 2001, Howard University's journalism students have worked in a Converged Media Laboratory that serves its four sequences--advertising, broadcast news, print, and public relations. At that time, the faculty made a decision to focus the curriculum on convergence and created BlackCollegeView.com, a student-run news and information Website.

The Converged Media Lab is a student-faculty-industry collaborative that integrates the creation, distribution, and promotion of news and media products for local and international audiences. Because Howard was the first HBCU to offer an integrated advertising curricu-

lum, faculty wanted to innovate by including the advertising and public relations sequences in the convergence mix.

"BlackCollegeView.com is the Journalism Department's vehicle for experimenting with media convergence and deepening students' practical understanding of disciplines outside their own specialties," said Phillip Dixon, chair.

Print journalism majors in the News Lab course generate text and graphics for the Web site. A companion section for broadcast majors, NewsVision Lab, generates audio and video news packages for BlackCollegeView.com. CapComm Lab, designed for public relations and advertising majors, gives advertising majors the opportunity to gain experience on the sales team soliciting and designing ads for BlackCollegeView.com. Public relations students generate commercial and persuasive messages for clients and provide services such as strategic planning, special events, publication design, and public service campaigns.

All of the sections gain experience writing for the National Newspaper Publishers Association's news service, [www.BlackPressUSA.com](http://www.BlackPressUSA.com), reaching more than 200 black newspapers and 15 million readers. That site is housed in the Converged Media Lab.

In 2004, NNPA was a co-founder of a convergence partnership among the Department of Journalism, the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), and the Knight Foundation. The partnership provides streaming audio and video to BlackCollegeWire.org and nationwide to HBCU radio stations. It also includes sound bites for individual stories and weekly news summaries with voice-overs done by students. BlackCollegeWire.org is a project of the Black College Communication Association.

Robin Thornhill, former *Washington Post* advertising executive-in-residence, serves as the coordinator of the activities of Howard's Converged Media Lab. She received support from the University's Fund for Academic Excellence to research how other universities

were dealing with convergence and to make recommendations for the future.

For scheduling purposes, all sections of the Converged Lab meet simultaneously. Dixon said this enables the instructors to show the students the advantages of collaborating across platforms and across disciplines while respecting the ethics of all media professions. He believes that “every student news product is a vehicle toward convergence. We have begun talks to have all our news organizations unite to recruit advertising and sponsorships. BlackCollegeView.com is the obvious hub for convergence since the Web allows for presenting audio, video, still photography, text, and graphics. Our progress in recent years shows that BlackCollegeView.com has attained that capacity.”

### **Jackson State University**

At Jackson State University’s Department of Mass Communication, there are five concentrations--advertising, broadcast journalism, broadcast production, news editorial, and public relations. The department offers two classes--Radio TV News Writing and Electronic Newsgathering--to train students to write across platforms.

The transition to convergence has been demanding. “We’re trying to get students to see what additional information will make the story successful in other media besides the platform for which they were originally writing. With a limited number of computers and equipment, students often didn’t get their stories completed on time,” said Sunny Smith, broadcast journalism professor and internship coordinator.

All HBCU campuses share equipment woes. At Jackson State, the department has an editing lab that includes four Macintosh computers, two Sony cameras, six Panasonic cameras and six audio recorders. Seventeen Dell computers are used in the writing lab while six computers are used in the advertising lab.

Convergence was introduced to JSU students beginning in spring 2004, and students are being encouraged to learn to use all of the equipment. “All students who are broadcast production and news editorial majors are

allowed access to broadcast equipment. Students are now required to take a camera or editing workshop before they are allowed to use the equipment,” Smith said.

After attending a Poynter Institute Convergence Seminar for Educators in February, Smith said she returned to face challenges in bringing the idea of convergence to students. This summer, she got more specialized training through her Educator in the Newsroom fellowship at WRAL-TV in Raleigh, NC.

“I learned a lot and came back very excited from both opportunities. However, it is hard getting my colleagues to jump on the convergence bandwagon, mainly because of equipment,” she said.

Jackson State is exploring team teaching with the Art Department to incorporate Web design, as well as a possible convergence lab internship class. “The goal would be to do cross-platform reporting as a team project. It might mean a print or broadcast reporter would work both for the *Blue and White Flash* (campus) newspaper or for online purposes,” said Smith.

Jackson State University’s commercial TV station is resuming its production of local programming that gives students a greater opportunity to report. There will be a Website for the TV station and beginning this fall students will do CNN newscasts via closed circuit, she said.

Two universities--Norfolk State (Virginia) and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State--have not yet incorporated convergence into their curricula.

### **Norfolk State University**

“We just went through re-accreditation, and we didn’t want to make changes just yet. But during our next curriculum review, we will incorporate it,” said Emmanuel Onyedike, former chair of the department.

### **North Carolina A&T State University**

At NCA&T, technology and innovation go hand in hand. The New Media Consortium (NMC) recently recognized the university as a leader in innovative

approaches in the use of technology for its demonstrated commitment to push the boundaries of teaching, learning, research, or creative expression, and adept in the application of technology.

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication--which offers broadcast production, electronic media and production, media management, print journalism and public relations majors--will implement convergence courses beginning in fall 2005, said Tamrat Mereba, professor of mass communications and director of new media.

"We just finished building a TV studio where we plan to integrate print and broadcast. The goal is to transmit audio bits, video clips, and written data to make them converged," he said. Convergence labs are also being constructed. The school received \$149,000 from the state of North Carolina to upgrade software, boost overall technology, and assist with establishing a master's strategic communication and journalism program.

The new Media Center includes several pieces of equipment essential for convergence.

"We have a high definition television set, digital technology editing and production, complete sound mixing and recording studio, and an advertising digital graphics layout and design lab. We have put together interactive technology, research labs using convergence technology, and a complete lab for print and public relations students in addition to our student newspaper, *The Register*," Mereba said.

Mereba said convergence at North Carolina A&T has grown in a number of ways since its emergence three years ago. "We have succeeded in managing media expenditure centrally yet giving various schools autonomy. We have a central system to coordinate everything in our department so we can

function together rather than separately," he said.

### Other training help

On all the campuses, faculty training has been crucial in helping programs develop a converged environment. Industry-sponsored programs offered by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the Radio-Television News Directors Foundation, and the Advertising Education Foundation have afforded many HBCU faculty with the opportunity to sharpen their skills and experiment with emerging technology.

Howard's Clint Wilson spent the summer of 2004 as an American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) fellow at USA Today.com. "As the real world advances with technology," Wilson said, "it's hard to keep up with the equipment demand. Students [currently] use streaming video and streaming audio [in the Howard lab]. We are trying to use this technology because the jobs are going to be segmented into these different components. And we encourage all students in the department to use the equipment so they can be versatile."

During summer of 2005, five HBCU faculty members participated in the Educator-in-the Newsroom broadcast fellowship program of the Radio-Television News Directors Foundation. They spent four weeks in radio and television newsrooms refreshing their skills and mastering new technologies. A similar program, the Institute for Journalism Excellence, hosted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, gave additional faculty members the opportunity to work in traditional and converged newsrooms. The Poynter Institute for Media Studies also provides a variety of workshops for faculty of all universities. Enrollment is limited, however.

*Hines is professor of journalism at Howard University; Bolden is a senior print journalism major in the Annenberg Honors program there.*



# A Small College and Convergence

EDNA NEGRÓN  
Ramapo College of New Jersey

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When Ramapo College senior Alison Miller went to ESPN Radio in New York City last spring to do her internship, it was her online journalism training that gave her an edge, she said. Miller, a co-editor of the campus newspaper, *The Ramapo News*, learned to integrate audio and photos and to experiment with video production in storytelling using a Web-based tool designed by a journalist to make it easier for students to develop online content.

Miller took basic journalism skills to her internship, but her online experience added value to her work at ESPN.

“It is a big part of why I got the internship in the first place,” Miller said. “Once I started working on the Web site for ESPN Radio, my boss had me train the other interns on how to use content management software because I already had a head start. This made me stand out.”

More than ever, today’s 24/7 information environment requires a new generation of media practitioners to be proficient in story development and writing in at least one medium. But they also need to understand how media converge in the real world. Students need to become critical thinkers while understanding the components of good storytelling in various media, Ramapo College communication arts faculty agree.

A liberal arts state institution of about 6,000 students, Ramapo College is located in North Jersey about 35 miles from New York City. Convergence at Ramapo means teaching students how to get their messages across well in one medium, while exploring storytelling in other media. Communication arts students can study a specific “track,” such as journalism, fiction writing, television production, interactive media, or cinema studies, but they are also able to explore storytelling across platforms in print, television, the big screen, or on the Web.

“Our goal as a major is to prepare students with the critical understanding and skills needed to produce media for an increasingly converged media environment,” said Pat Keeton, communication arts convener at Ramapo. “The curriculum is structured to provide students with as broad an introduction as possible to all tracks and disciplines and then – as interest dictates -- to channel students into several ever-focusing threads of pursuit, while still allowing for, and even encouraging, a fluid migration across tracks.”

Since the late 1990s, Ramapo’s communication arts program, which resides in the School of Contemporary Arts, has grappled with how best to prepare students to work in an on-demand information economy.

The communication arts major at Ramapo College is at a crossroads. These days, students already live in a converged world with instant messaging, blogging, iPods, and Blackberries, among other PDAs. Their world is literally at their fingertips.

For the 14 full-time faculty members, the challenge in spring 2005 became identifying what Ramapo's 523 majors needed to know to be able to compete in an increasingly converged media environment. The faculty also wanted students to be able to think critically and to develop a greater awareness of contemporary multicultural social and political issues.

But the CA faculty was up against many obstacles: lack of resources, dwindling state funds, a growing enrollment, lack of full-time faculty, and pressure to lower our adjunct rate. The faculty also needed to redefine what convergence meant within the context of a communication arts program.

"The faculty understood that wherever students start their academic careers, whether in journalism or graphic design or fiction filmmaking, in the real world they will find that the messages that they produce in a given medium will be repurposed for many media," explained Keeton.

Getting the curriculum to that point took years of revisions. And it's still a fluid process. Initially, Ramapo's CA faculty in 2002 designed a "converged" major stressing an interdisciplinary approach, dropping concentrations.

The faculty realized that students still identified with a particular field-- either print journalism, TV, or advertising, to name a few-- and last spring revised the curriculum to prepare students with a deeper foundation in the liberal arts using a sequence of courses that emphasizes the integral relationship of content, aesthetics, and technique in media production.

"Through long and ongoing discussions, we sought to find ways to create a core foundation in media/visual literacy and idea development at the beginning and to strike a balance between defining courses that would prepare students for proficiency in a particular medium or genre while allowing fluidity for students," said Keeton.

The goal became the design of a communication arts curriculum that prepared students with a transferable skill set in a particular track, i.e., journalism, interactive

media, that would be flexible enough to be applied in a variety of media environments. So, for example, a print journalist would be trained first in the basic tenets of good reporting and writing, but could also learn how to apply those skills to write and produce a story for the Web. In the Reporting and Writing for Online Media course, students use their journalism skills to take a story deeper on the Web and learn a little about Photoshop and reporting and editing digital audio and video. From there, students interested in pursuing digital imaging, for example, could later take an entire course on Photoshop effects or learn more about Web design.

The faculty designed the curriculum working first in clusters: journalism, creative writing, interactive media, television/promotions, and digital cinema to outline the sequence of courses in their particular fields. But as a convening group, the faculty connected the dots to related courses that could expose students to storytelling in different media.

The curriculum changes took effect officially with the start of the 2005 fall semester.

Under the revised curriculum, Ramapo CA students would take a 17-course major that allows them to pursue "tracks," but provides flexibility for experimentation. The major is in addition to the General Education courses required campus-wide. Ramapo students need a total of the equivalent of 128 semester hours to earn a communication arts degree.

In the journalism track, about half of the courses are specific to reporting, writing, copyediting, and ethics; the rest allow students to integrate their print skills with television, documentary, or new media or take electives in local government, the courts and politics, among other courses that would add depth to their liberal arts education.

So journalism students would take foundation, media and research, and idea development courses at the 100 level. They would move into basic newswriting and reporting at the 200-level. At the 300-level, journalism students could pursue beat reporting and take courses such as Community Journalism or Reporting and

Writing for Online Media, and Race, Ethnicity and Cross-Cultural Journalism at the upper 300-level.

Then they could opt to take television courses or video documentary or interactive multimedia publication, exploring storytelling with new media technologies.

With the goal of giving students the opportunity to work in a converged environment in their 400-level Advanced Projects, the faculty paid special attention to prerequisites that could apply to other courses. So, for example, students studying field video documentary would need to take Newswriting as a prerequisite. Cinema studies students could take Newswriting or Scriptwriting as a foundation course.

To make this “converged” approach work, effective advising is critical. The process of advising students about what courses they should take and when became key.

The faculty needed to strengthen advisement to keep students on their desired tracks. Last academic year, the faculty-conducted mandatory advisement for students with 80-plus credits piloted in fall 2004 proved successful. This helped students identify which media appealed to them and what other courses could be beneficial.

The faculty found that we needed to revamp the 100-level Writing for the Media to reflect idea development, research, and the changing media environment. The faculty is considering a team-teaching approach to these survey courses to be able to give students the “big picture” of what’s going on in the media.

To bring the converged student experience full-circle, the CA faculty in 2000 launched an annual showcase, “Media Collision,” of the best student major work. Here, select students exhibited their work across media.

The faculty also worked together to maximize use of resources. With the help of a central equipment office which handles faculty requests for digital cameras, tape recorders, and video cameras, the faculty programs use of equipment. Sometimes, the teachers work together on projects. For example, the television professor might demonstrate effective use of a video camera for the

online journalism class. Or a student lab aide in interactive media might serve as the technical producer for the online journalism class.

Last academic year, the program dedicated a multimedia lab for interactive media and online journalism classes. The CA faculty is now looking forward to the upgrade of the television studio space and equipment to support the needs of a curriculum in print, interactive design, journalism, and digital cinema.

A converged production studio would provide student producers with an environment that integrates computer stations for writing/research/development, raw production space (sound stage), a chroma key station for interactive design purposes with computers dedicated for motion graphics/ title design, FinalCut Pro editing stations, and audio stations for integrating sound design, and news broadcasting area. The idea is to allow students at the 400-level to work together in a converged environment.

It could also serve a similar function for classes in motion/graphics, broadcast and/or online journalism, and especially for interdisciplinary classes at the Advanced Project level that involve all of the areas of teaching and learning in the major.

Students, such as Scott Stanchak, a spring 2005 Ramapo communication arts graduate, are increasingly interested in diversifying their skills. He is a new generation journalist. Stanchak’s Web site ([scottstanchak.com](http://scottstanchak.com)) shows his converged background: he writes a weekly column about a baseball team for a local Jersey newspaper, produced his own campus TV show, hosts a local radio show in central New Jersey, and hopes to host his own television show in the future.

“I was able to use the radio and television stations as much as I wanted,” said Stanchak. “It also gave me the opportunity to make the demo tapes that I’m sending out now and also taught me leadership skills.”

*Edna Negrón is an assistant professor of journalism at Ramapo College of New Jersey.*

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