

Journalism Education:

Missing the Democratic Connections

A Research Report for the Kettering Foundation

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*The purpose of education, like that of technology,
is to make us more leisured, but hardly more
equitable or more community centered, hardly more
democratic or public spirited.*

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Introduction

It is the first day of class in a senior-level television news skills course. In most ways, it's similar to other courses of its kind at schools across the country — with one exception. After the roll is called and the syllabus described, the instructor presents the class with a basic question. “Does television journalism, as practiced today, deserve First Amendment protections?”

The answers start flowing. “This is an easy one,” you can hear them thinking. The discussion begins, a conversation based on assumptions that limit students from even considering the connection of their chosen craft to the democratic principles that afford it special protections. Most common among these assumptions is that the marketplace rules the media. Each semester, at least one student argues that stories lacking an interested audience are not worthy of coverage.

As the discussion continues, their eyes tell the story. Some students are thinking about learning the cameras and editing bays. Others are worried about doing stand-ups, the on-camera piece for television reporters. Another group is wondering if they can cover the football team for their first stories. None expect to begin by talking about democracy and their responsibility to citizens in the democracy.

The above scenario describes a typical first day in my television reporting courses at Louisiana State University (LSU). Students are introduced to journalism's links to democracy beginning with the first class. However, as this report will show, journalism educators who strongly connect the idea of democracy and civic responsibility to the reporting endeavor are in the minority.

Yet, James Carey's statement should give journalism professors pause for reflection. What role do journalism professors play in helping students make the connections between journalism and democratic practices? Educator and scholar John Dewey approached education as a democratic process. He considered people to be capable of coming together to address issues that concerned them — both directly and indirectly. The focus is on making decisions for the public good. The formation of a public, which could be a group of strangers, was to address issues that were not simply for private gain, but rather to provide solutions to common problems facing a group of citizens. His writings about democracy center on the value of deliberation. Inquiry and communication among citizens who are attempting to come to solutions in the public realm is at the heart of the democratic process. The media, with the critical role of purveying information, hold perhaps the strongest influence on this process of democracy. Developing an understanding about democracy and deliberation, however, is not innate.

How is it that we, as journalism educators, pass along the task — and the understanding — of creating deliberation and democracy through the media? What are professors teaching their students about this connection? How do they incorporate the topic into their courses? Do their syllabi reflect their focus on journalism and democracy? Do the chosen readings support the teaching of the journalism and democracy connection? What reactions do they see from their students? How does the inclusion of journalism and democracy elements alter the course outcomes? These are important questions since journalism professors are educating young people to tell the future stories of our communities and our world.

Without civic knowledge and understanding about where journalism connects with our democratic society, students are likely to be ill-prepared to tackle the issues that mean most to the citizens who make up their audience, and could possibly limit the possibilities for strangers to come together as Dewey described and form a public to address common public problems.

We need to know how journalism education helps or hinders citizen choices and deliberation within the democracy. When do journalistic norms come into play? What are the motivations for student work? When do the problems of linking journalism to democracy occur? Where are the innovations developing? And are there patterns to the teaching of future journalists at the college level?

To more fully examine these questions, in-depth interviews were conducted with 48 journalism professors from across the country. The names of more than 100 professors were drawn from a list of educators supplied primarily by the Kettering Foundation and the Civic Journalism Interest Group (CJIG) of the Association for Education of Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). During the interviewing process, additional names were obtained and included in the original sample.

By purposefully targeting university-level journalism educators who were most likely to hold an interest in the journalism and democracy connection, the assumption was these people also would be most likely to include this element in their teaching and syllabi. After excluding the educators who were no longer teaching, had never taught journalism courses, or declined to participate, the final sample contained 114 names.

Of these, only 48 made any explicit connection between journalism and democracy in their courses. When instructors who taught only media law courses were excluded, the number dropped to 29 journalism educators who included extensive connections to democratic principles in their instruction.

Because of the small sample, this study can provide only glimpses into how journalism professors attempt to educate students on the connections between journalism and democracy. Yet even this small number produced some interesting insights. One of the more surprising findings may be that so few journalism educators actually did develop this connection for their students. If this occurs in a population that is most likely to be making these connections, it raises concern that journalism professors as a whole are falling short of Carey and Dewey's ideal.

Dewey's sense of a deliberative public is a key element in understanding journalism/democracy connections, and it is missing from all but a few courses. Further, among courses that do make the connection, no clear format for presenting the materials emerges from this study. Instead, the spectrum of views found among courses offers wide, divergent, and sometimes uncomplimentary views of democracy. The conceptualization of this type of instruction varies from developing an understanding of complex community structures to viewing the citizen simply as an audience member.

There are some patterns. Innovations in developing new courses that do emphasize the democratic values and underpinnings in journalism appear to be coming from smaller liberal arts colleges. This is by no means universal. A few large universities are providing courses with solid, in-depth discussion of communities, citizens, democratic practices, and journalistic connections. However, this represents a minority of the schools studied.

The most troubling element to emerge from this project is the quick indoctrination of young journalism students into the traditional norms and routines of journalistic practice. While this study cannot show exactly when this happens, it certainly appears that student journalists can accept these powerful norms and routines within a semester or less of work at the student newspaper.

Journalism Education without Democracy

Journalism education has come to a split in the road and academics are struggling to find a cohesive middle ground between technology and civic engagement. Technological advancements have greatly improved some areas of journalism education, and many schools will make their decisions based on a need to keep up with the Joneses of the New Media Age. The road less traveled in this case will most likely be the one that creates a context and purpose for journalism education — a context firmly centered in the roots of democracy and the role of journalism within that democracy. Civic journalism, public journalism, community journalism, and democracy are all labels applied within journalism education today. However, it is unclear how teaching is conducted under these labels. Is it, as Carey said, public-spirited? If journalism and democracy are intertwined, this puts a special responsibility on journalism educators.

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Journalism within American society plays a primary role in mediating information between private citizens and public life. The constitutional protections afforded the news media and the near constant presence of media offerings place journalism in a unique position to mold and focus information as it transfers back and forth between the public and private realms. The process determines the content and how it is presented, which in turn directly affects the impact of the story and whether it moves viewers/readers to become involved. In this sense, public life is how and when citizens are involved in the consensus-building process in their own communities and the sense of responsibility they hold for the decisions affecting their communities and their own lives. Without quality information presented in a manner that allows the deliberative process to continue beyond the story itself, the capacity for public work by citizens is likely diminished. Deliberation is more than conversation. It gets to the very heart of the struggle and work citizens do in their own community through the exchange of ideas that lead to problem resolution.

It Is Not Democracy School

It might seem simple to say then, that academics need to understand and present to their students how a public is formed, the reasons for its formation and the benefits a public can provide to developing solutions within a democracy. This means that journalism educators will have to challenge their students to go beyond simply learning the skills of the trade to learning how to understand their communities. How else will newly minted reporters be able to understand the need to incorporate a wide-range of community voices into their stories? How will they be able to imagine the communities they cover and overcome old, tired stereotypes of communities for which they hold little knowledge? How else will these new journalists be able to construct reports that provide citizens with the information they need to have the agency to act in a public manner?

However, it is anything but simple. Of the 48 journalism professors and instructors interviewed, only 29 made an explicit connection in their courses. There is a deafening silence in journalism classrooms when it comes to connecting the profession to the grounding ideals democracy. These college professors seem to miss the opportunity to include a context of democracy as they formulate their courses for students. Even the faculty members most committed to the civic journalism ideals miss the mark on presenting the journalism-democracy connection in their courses. A handful of others made less direct connections in their teaching. Even Public Journalism advocate Jay Rosen doesn't assign his favorite thinkers (Carey, Arendt, Dewey, and Glasser) to his students. "It's not democracy school, it's journalism school," he said.

In their daily teaching routines, professors seem to place more emphasis on skills such as accuracy, objectivity, sourcing, and the inverted pyramid. This heavy focus on skills competency effectively pushes the teaching of the connection between journalism and democracy out of the classroom which, if incorporated into the pedagogy, would place their instruction within a larger context. Discussions of democracy are thus relegated to ethics and law courses where the focus is on cases, not practice. Thus, there are few places where democracy is discussed in the realm of news coverage. With limited classroom time, a focus on skills teaching, and a reliance on instructors untrained in democratic theory, this silence will be difficult to change.

Missing Dialogue

Daniel Yankelovich says in *The Magic of Dialogue* that dialogue is special, a form of deliberation, not devoid of feelings and personal convictions. He said, “People weigh what they hear from others against their own convictions. They compare notes with one another, they assess the views of others in terms of what makes sense to them and, above all, they consult their feelings and their values.” Journalists, he notes, are more likely to distinguish more clearly the delineation of facts and values, but the public does not.

Only a few journalism instructors focused on journalistic coverage of citizen dialogue. The ones who did tended to rely on the *Tapping Civic Life* publication from the Pew Center for Civic Journalism as a core reading for developing student understanding of the different types of conversations within society and how journalists might begin to tap those conversations and present them to their audience. My own civic journalism course attempts to focus on discovering and capturing civic conversations, but it is a difficult task. To accomplish this, I assign students to cover a geographic area near campus that is traditionally ignored by the media. Students begin with preconceived notions, which are quickly shattered during their first tour of the area. As part of getting acquainted with the people and communities within this area, students begin to develop new understandings of the issues affecting the residents. Students take a long time to grasp the concepts and an even longer period of experimentation with different techniques in the community to actually begin capturing the magical dialogue Yankelovich describes. For example, students tap into places rarely visited by reporters, such as barbershops, neighborhood association meetings, or bus terminals. Once students have a breakthrough experience with this type of reporting, they are readily able to adapt the technique to various types of stories. They also begin to see the richness and the depth of their reporting in new ways and begin using more citizen-focused terms to describe the quality of their stories.

University of Wisconsin professor Lewis Friedland uses a similar method. He requires students to explore the varied levels of civic discourse found in the *Tapping Civic Life* booklet. His students are not constrained to an area, rather they are sent out to develop news stories using at least three of the five types of sources — official, quasi-official, third places, incidental, and private — described in the booklet. This inevitably leads the students to explore communities in new ways to garner the required elements for the stories. Along the way, they begin to understand the dialogue within the communities they cover. At times, that dialogue is allowed to flow through the story.

A few other professors, including Cheryl Gibbs at Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana, and Kathy Campbell at the University of Southern Oregon, have managed to encourage students to incorporate dialogue into their news stories. Both Campbell and Gibbs have responsibilities as student newspaper advisors, which appear to give them more of a daily perspective on the coverage goals. This perspective may also be a result of how different faculty members think about democracy in relation to journalistic practice.

The interviews revealed an interesting insight into teaching variations. Some professors developed the concept of democracy using citizens as a key structural component, while others used a more complex conception of community that included an understanding of the interconnectedness of citizens and the networks created. For example, Friedland has his students do community mapping, a process that tracks the sociological ties in communities. How an instructor defines this core concept determines, in many ways, the depth of the teaching of democratic underpinnings of the media. This may be a result of citizens being seen as individuals rather than a part of a larger community. Treated as individuals, citizens are more likely to be viewed as sources or as viewers/readers who are disconnected from others in their community. It also misses the point that citizens can belong to multiple communities and that their membership may be fluid depending on their level of involvement. For example, a crime in a neighborhood is likely to increase the attendance at the neighborhood watch meeting. Those in attendance may be likely to do extra work to lessen the risk of crime in their community. Once the threat has passed, attendance will likely drop again until the next threat is encountered.

Trevor Brown, journalism school dean at Indiana University, specifically focuses his courses on the constitutional roots of citizenship and journalism. He details for his students the “I” focus of the Declaration of Independence and the subsequent “We” focus of the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. He said the move from the individual’s pursuit of happiness to “We the People” is a significant development in that it states that government is not separated from the individuals. His course includes exercises that help students think about the role of government and their own connections to it. This provides a foundation for considering the variety of roles of the press. It also provides a beginning for students to think in new ways about government, citizenship, and community and the balances that must be struck within the society.

Friedland focuses the majority of his course on developing a deep, contextual understanding of communities and then translating that into good reporting. Friedland described the formation of a public and its relevant components in this way: “I want them to understand how complex the community is and see the complexity of how the community fits together, then have some sense of how the public forms in a Dewey sense, how they see a common problem and then form to address it, and that these [problems] can be quite small and still lead to some sort of public action.”

My own course had students mapping the community just outside the LSU campus gates. Students were sent into the neighborhood to meet the residents, sit and talk to gain a deeper understanding of the networks of citizens, the variety of issues the community faced, and how some groups of people were working toward solutions. The reporting resulting from this experience showed greater depth, complexity, and included a citizen voice as an undercurrent to good reporting.

Other professors construct the community in a different way. They focus more on the connection between journalists and readers/viewers and how the reporter translates their understanding of the audience into their own reporting agenda. Edmund B. Lambeth, University of Missouri, said: “Public journalists do this differently ... it changes how stories look and the impact it can have on political knowledge.” Lambeth develops his course based on “public deliberation without compromising or getting so close to sources to compromise telling the story.” His approach is tempered by two elements: (1) his self-proclaimed conservative view of public journalism practice and (2) his belief that newspapers do not invest enough time, staff, or money to bring a pivotal change to the structure of newspapers.

A few professors made the connection between understanding communities and reporting a greater diversity of ideas from a wider variety of people. Don Heider, University of Texas-Austin, sees it as an opportunity to bring different values to the table when covering stories. He believes the diversity needed comes from understanding a variety of communities and the values members of those communities hold. Heider has some simple techniques for getting students to begin to understand different communities. He said, “I tell them to go to a different place to get their hair cut ... things like that to get a different understanding of the community.” Theresa Lueck, University of Akron professor, also uses the connection to democracy to stimulate discussion of inclusive coverage.

My civic journalism course also seeks to improve diversity of both sources and ideas. However, instead of conceptualizing it around changed patterns of the journalist’s regular routines, I present it as a change in the mental imagination that people — including journalists — maintain about communities, particularly communities where they have little or no immediate experience. These mental maps are helpful in allowing journalists to work effectively under deadline pressure. However, these maps are also likely based on stereotypes. To combat these stereotypes, students are sent into the community to create new civic maps to explore the resources, leaders, and connections within that community. These civic maps lead to improved mental images of communities and ultimately to better diversity in both sources and ideas.

Social Responsibility Theory

The Social Responsibility and Libertarian press theories were the focus for some faculty making the journalism and democracy connection. The undercurrent of these courses was that the traditional newspaper model worked. One faculty member framed his discussion of the connection between democracy and journalism around a watchdog emphasis with citizens on the sidelines. This points out that creating a connection between journalism and democracy does not necessarily mean citizens are included in that process. One has to go beyond classroom theory and move into the streets where deliberative democracy and political strategies are taking place at the network level. It is only here that journalists will be able to fully understand how citizens are wrestling with issues and to then convey it in their stories.

Journalists have a privileged position within the society that allows them to pay attention to public life as part of their job. Campbell believes students must be prepared to be conscious of their roles within a democratic society to help make public life go well. “It is our obligation [as journalists] to share our expertise with others to let them participate as well,” she said.

Following the Marketplace

A recurring theme in the interviews was the conflict between what is good for democracy versus what is good for the marketplace. Capitalism wins out in most cases. Carl Bybee, University of Oregon, said: “My general experience is that students have no idea what democracy means beyond a superficial idea of how culture depends on democratic institutions.” Similar comments resonated throughout the other interviews. Carol Dykers, Salem College, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, said of her students: “They are pretty convinced that journalists and journalism organizations are just out there to make money.” She says this cynical view hinders students’ ability to think about the media in other ways.

Richard Campbell, Middle Tennessee State University director of the school of journalism, said he tries to teach students to think of themselves as citizens as well as consumers because it seems that people

understand how to think about participating in the marketplace, but not necessarily how to participate in a democracy.

Brown's approach is to talk about what it means to live in an economic free-enterprise system. His approach is student-oriented. He simply asks students if any of them own stock. Invariably some members of the class do. He then asks why they own it. Typically, the answer is to make money. Finally, he asks what they will do if the price drops. "Sell," is the answer from students. Brown then explains to students: "Here is one of the challenges for the popular press. More and more of Americans own stock in the press. You are not interested in who is in charge of the company or the ethics of social responsibility of the company.... You don't hold the press to another standard than a financial one." This set-up leads to a broader class discussion of the marketplace forces in journalism.

Injecting Norms and Routines

Davis "Buzz" Merritt, III, former editor at *The Wichita Eagle*, wants to help students answer the question Jay Rosen posed in the title of his book: *What are Journalists For?* Merritt's classroom focus is on the routines that occur within daily journalism. He sees newsrooms as "habituating places, not the "learning places," he believes they should be. Merritt wants to create a mind shift and change the ingrained journalistic habits through his teaching of public journalism. This requires students to open their minds to new ways of seeing their roles in a democratic society. He also introduces the concept of civic practices, a way of telling community stories to encourage public problem solving. He hopes that these new civic routines become automatic within the newsroom. First, however, he believes changes need to take place at the universities, where professors train the next generation of journalists. Merritt isn't alone in his concerns about journalistic habits and their effect on reporting.

One theme emerging from the interviews with faculty who also were involved in some way with the student newspaper, was how quickly student journalists are acculturated into the norms and routines of journalistic practice. Many faculty members noted that after only one semester of work on the paper, students were often reluctant to look at other models of journalism or were quick to dismiss civic journalism as too large of a threat to objectivity. It is almost as if students were vaccinated against other forms of journalism when they arrived at the student paper. As Brown said: "Typically [students] have strong attitudes about the press." He also noted that students who work for the campus newspaper tended to have very conservative traditional views of journalistic norms and routines to the point of being out of line with the profession. Student journalists, according to Brown, hold to a level of objectivity that professional journalists find too stringent.

It shows up in my LSU skills courses as well. Student media workers tend to focus on conforming to strict rules rather than thinking critically about the best process to develop and convey truth and accuracy. Even students with limited campus media experience tend toward these extremely traditionalist rules. When asked to examine their position, they tend to have difficulty articulating the principles and values underlying their views. Other interviewees described similar situations.

Paul Voakes said: "Typically the skills oriented students who have put in a lot of time at the daily will deride [civic journalism] and debate it." He notes that the students with professional experience tend to see civic journalism as irrelevant. Voakes uses civic journalism as a method of encouraging more open-minded, creative thinking about journalism and the role of journalists.

Student Reaction through Faculty Eyes

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A majority of instructors interviewed said the connection of democracy to journalism or civic journalism is something most of their students have never stopped to think about. Gary Walker, an adjunct professor at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York, said students are reluctant to go out into the community to try these public journalism concepts, such as gathering people together to talk about issues. “The idea of getting together to do anything was rather foreign to them.” In some cases, professors were surprised at the lack of knowledge students had about democratic structures and how a democracy works. Professor Ken Smith, University of Wyoming, said: “It seems to open their eyes when they realize the role that journalism plays in making them better voters.”

Brown agreed, saying students leave his class being able to speak more critically about their own views of journalism. Brown also teaches a nonmajors course called “Hot Topics in Journalism.” He said his students come away from that class with a better understanding of why journalists behave the way they do and the political and market forces behind that behavior.

The problem in teaching public journalism is that students may simply try to please their professors, without understanding why they are doing the assignment. Voakes may have said what several professors were thinking when he noted: “I know that 100 percent don’t buy into it and some try to kiss my ass and write a pro civic journalism essay, but I am doing my job if I can open their minds to the idea that this is worthy journalism.”

Campbell sees the results of her efforts to connect citizens, government, and media practice. She said, by the end of one semester, about half of the students wrote in their journals about having a much better picture of the community and what their role could be as a journalist. “It is pretty awesome to see the lights come on in their little eyes. They really became sparkly in thinking about new ways to relate to their community.”

At Earlham College, Gibbs sees a wide range of reaction from students. She believes that, because she integrates civic journalism into her approach to journalism in general, most students pick up pieces of it. Student work may give a better view of her course impact. She says her students never write stories without talking to people in the community, no matter what kind of story they do.

Big Innovations at Small Institutions

Some of the most innovative courses making the democratic connections were at smaller schools. This is more than simply the result of a teaching focus, as these instructors also showed a solid grasp of the civic journalism literature. Large programs tended toward the seminar and theory approach in courses making the democratic connection, while smaller programs tended to weave the democratic principles primarily into courses with a strong skills component. The approach remained purposeful, with practice as a way of experimenting with the theories. Interestingly, some of the seminars used a conflict frame for the debate of civic journalism in the classroom. Of course, one of the things civic journalists try to avoid is the conflict frame in stories. However, in all but a few courses, citizen deliberation was still missing.

On the other hand, professors did provide interesting civic elements for students to consider. This was evident in both large and small journalism programs. For instance, Campbell raises students’ understanding of democratic principles by demonstrating ways journalistic practice affects democratic life. She has students create hypothetical beats to help them think about news in new ways. “I asked the question: ‘If every morning when you come in and call the police commander, instead you called the poverty watch

commanders,' and [students] then started thinking about other places to call," she explained. Her newest course takes this process a step further. Her stated goal is to have students experience democracy firsthand. The course schedule calls for students to go to community meetings for two hours each week and then write a reaction paper to it. "The students will write reactions to papers as a citizen and not a journalist," she said. This places students in citizens' shoes. It helps them consider their perspectives.

Walker is unique among civic journalism instructors. He is a leader in a civic journalism project in Rochester, New York for WXXI-TV (PBS). Walker had his students do a field project studying public affairs program content at one media outlet. Students kept journals on whether they saw conflict or usefulness in the news content they monitored. Usefulness was defined from a community vantage point. Was it information citizens could use to help them engage in the community? He said: For some kids it was like something opened up in their heads." They began to understand the importance of this type of coverage."

Syllabi

One way to better understand how professors teach these courses is to look at the syllabi instructors develop. Syllabi provide a sense of structure and emphasis that clarify the purpose of the course. The syllabi of the courses studied were developed primarily for undergraduate students, although a few courses allowed graduate students to enroll as well. Most of the classes primarily enrolled juniors and seniors who had already completed a beginning reporting course. The courses focusing primarily on civic journalism, as opposed to the broader journalism and democracy courses, tended to introduce the concepts first and provide a history of civic journalism at the beginning of the course. Then they jump directly into the practice of civic journalism. Journalism and democracy courses tended to follow a slower progression of understanding the theory, history, and context of journalism and then treated civic journalism as a natural progression in the development of journalistic practice.

The syllabi provided by all but two people, provide deeper insight into the structure of courses where a connection to democracy is clearly developed. Eight of the syllabi were specifically designed as civic journalism courses. However, among these eight there is a range from focusing on the history, theory, and ethics of civic journalism to the role of journalists as both professionals and citizens within a community network. Common themes within these courses included viewing the media as empowering the community, examining the roles and routines of journalists, and understanding citizens within the process.

Ten years ago, professors relied on articles from journals, trade magazines, or democratic theory books. Today, public journalism texts do exist. While the syllabi showed no real pattern among the secondary lists of readings for these courses, there was significant overlap in the primary texts. Art Charity's 1998 book, *Doing Public Journalism*, was popular, although some noted in their interviews that this book is a bit outdated today. Merritt's *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News is not Enough* was also commonly assigned. When it came to providing an understanding of the nuts and bolts of civic journalism practice, the Pew Center for Civic Journalism's *Tapping Civic Life* was the predominate choice. Finally, Jay Rosen's *Getting the Connections Right* was used, though it appears instructors are now replacing this with Rosen's book, *What Are Journalists For?*

In the interviews, professors noted that popular reporting texts failed to mention civic journalism. A quick glance through several of these texts found extremely short, conflict-framed essays on civic journalism. For example, in Carole Rich's *Writing and Reporting News: A Coaching Method*, the 581-page third edition devotes only a page to public journalism. The discussion is framed as pro and con through the lens of the *Charlotte Observer* (pro) and *The Washington Post* (con). This may be a reason many instructors choose a variety of short readings to supplement their chosen text.

Understanding journalism's connection to democracy is most likely to occur through the assignments. Faculty used a wide range of tools to help students grasp the materials. Professor Frank Fee, University of North Carolina, developed a course while teaching at Ohio University that allowed students to try out the concepts of civic journalism in a unique way. First, students conducted a survey of faculty, students, townspeople, and others to gauge core concerns. Fee tallied the results and then partnered with an interactive broadcast group for a series of five, live, interactive broadcasts on cable and the Internet. As part of this, his students convened a town meeting to discuss issues and then used a chat room on the Web to allow the conversation to continue beyond the meeting. Students covered the meetings and wrote stories for the Web site. "This fostered a dialogue between students and community," he said. Campbell uses traditional government meeting coverage with a new twist. She has her students seek out a variety of stakeholders so that they can include community-based perspectives in their report. This makes their stories much richer and more insightful than stories relying heavily on government viewpoints.

Professors determine student learning through multiple means. The spread across types of assessments was fairly even with about a quarter opting for tests, a quarter using term-papers, another quarter formulating projects in the community (a couple even followed through with the actual project) and a quarter having students use civic journalism techniques in their reporting for class. As one might guess, the more theory-based courses tended toward exams and discussion and the more skill-based courses focused on project development and reporting. Some of the projects were more elaborate, such as Fee's course, which used multiple media and a town hall meeting.

Conclusion

Academic freedom allows professors and even adjunct instructors great latitude in the formulation and presentation of course structure and materials. Since journalism professors tend to have professional journalism experience and many maintain strong ties to the profession, a substantive move away from skills-focused teaching and toward a democratic principles based mode of instruction is unlikely to happen quickly. The strong norms and routines of journalistic practice — objectivity, beat reporting, officials as primary sources — carry into the course materials, which is not hard to conceive. It stands to reason that these norms and routines are rarely discussed with students and thus are allowed to exist invisibly, much like the assumed connections between democracy and journalism.

The development of course models that make the connections would help improve the quality of instruction without hampering the autonomy of the professor. It appears that models would have to be placed along a continuum of journalism and democracy courses to capture the greatest number of faculty members. It is probably best to think of this as a progression of teaching rather than a comprehensive change. Much like news organizations, journalism schools have strong norms and routines that are threatened by change. However, with the looming massive technological changes in journalism, there may be an opportunity to encourage a progression toward a democratic model of journalism education. A greater focus on content structure within the new technologies might help academics embrace both technology and democracy together.

Among the true civic journalism courses examined — those that link democratic principles to journalistic practice — some interesting delineations emerged. There were two basic camps: one focused on theory, discussion, and debate of civic journalism and the other focused on systematically developing community sources and knowledge that not only enriched students' understanding, but also provided the basis for deeper reporting. The debate group tended to work toward having good discussions of the issues surrounding civic journalism in the classroom, almost to the point of placing a conflict frame around the discussion. The community group tended to work more toward practicing civic journalism, with the assumed belief that students have to experience it in the field to know it in their minds.

Certainly, there are strong pockets of journalism and democracy courses around the country. Some are formulated as civic journalism courses, while others have a strong link to understanding democracy, the constitutional foundations of journalism and the values journalists, citizens, and government share in a community. No one model of instruction stands out from the rest. Instead, there is a continuum of creativity with the same basic focus on journalism and its value to citizens within a democracy. This emphasis could provide the impetus for modification of journalistic training at the university level.

Journalism educators may be limited by students' lack of understanding of democracy, politics, and communities that they bring with them to the university classroom. For without a sufficient understanding of the workings of government and what it means to be a citizen in a democracy, it is difficult to make a civic journalism focus relevant to the future journalist.

One concern is the lack of open-mindedness when it comes to journalistic norms. By the time students enroll in their first journalism course, they have already absorbed traditional views of journalistic norms and values, which shapes their expectations of what a journalist is supposed to do. Professors leading the way in innovative thinking about how to improve journalistic practice somehow need to get to the students before the students get to the newspaper. This creates a dilemma given that most journalism students do not start their reporting courses at a majority of schools

somehow need to get to the students before the students get to the newspaper. This creates a dilemma given that most journalism students do not start their reporting courses at a majority of schools until well after their freshman year. However, many students who believe journalism is their calling will begin working for the student newspaper in their first year. One answer to this problem is for faculty to take a hands-on approach. For example, I often teach a civic journalism primer for new reporters at the LSU campus paper.

Because students may have a cynical view of a journalism practiced only as a puppet of the marketplace forces, they may have to struggle to see other models of journalism. It is important to develop models of courses and the corresponding materials to help motivated faculty develop and build better, more thought provoking courses that will challenge students to explore options for improving journalism.

Some of the innovations in journalism instruction can be seen at universities and colleges in this study. Much of the interesting civic journalism theory work is being done at large universities, while the applications of that work being innovatively practiced occurs at the smaller, liberal arts schools. The intersection between these two approaches will likely yield the greatest results.

A Selection of Interview Comments

What follows is a selection of perceptive comments, culled from the interviews, that give a sense of how journalism professors approach the teaching of democracy within the journalism curriculum. Some of these comments get to the heart of the intended goals for the courses, while others speak to the desired or even demonstrated outcomes. As a whole, these comments lend a sense of a group working to make a meaningful change in the way journalism is taught at the university level.

—The key concepts [of the course] focused on these questions: What is the public? How is it formed? What are its components? What are the networks and relationships in the community? How do we understand the different levels of networks? How are different kinds of communication reported on and why are some more visible to the media or community than others? In civic terms, I want my television students to understand that they will go through a fairly long period in TV before they will get to apply public journalism principles and that they can do it in small ways every day at nonpublic journalism stations. I want to build those students who can hang on with their fingernails until they get the opportunity to exercise their civic skills. — Lewis Friedland, University of Wisconsin - Madison

—They come to the class with assumptions about the press but they don't understand how the press operates. I want them to be more informed when they offer opinions about the press and that they will be more critical of their own opinions about how the press fits into both society and a profit-seeking enterprise. — Dean Trevor Brown, Indiana University

—In the course of our class conversations, it is easy enough to ask them questions about how what they are doing affects democratic life or the democratic process. I use this class as a consciousness-raising class — conscious of their roles in a democratic society and their role in making public life go well. Instead of teaching them to expose the scoundrels no matter the cost — the class is moving around the corner a bit and taking an equally hard-edged approach that says: “How can we make this whole rascally process go a little better?” — Kathy Campbell, University of Oregon (formerly University of Southern Oregon)

— I assign a lot of readings to explore the connection between democracy and journalism. This gives grounding in a philosophical sense. Even at a good J-School like K.U. not many had made the connection.... Rosen’s question of what are journalists for is my focus. I wanted to have them make what they do more useful to citizens. — Davis “Buzz” Merritt, III, University of Kansas

— I present what it means to address people and approach them as citizens instead of as readers, viewers, consumers or even just people. I think about it as reversing the normal assumptions that journalism is essential to democracy to say the democracy is important to journalism. Democracy is worth studying. But journalism’s worth is found in its usefulness to democracy. — Jay Rosen, New York University

— The connection between media and democracy is what gives journalism its point. — Phil Meyer, University of North Carolina

— I think the students gained a better understanding of public participation. It allowed people to become reconnected.... The students admitted that they were looking at things in different ways. — Frank Fee, UNC-Chapel Hill (formerly from Ohio University)

— One of the big responsibilities I have is to teach students how to make good news judgments, how to go to nontraditional sources, and how to give people voices who have not had them before. So when they walk into their first job they generate story ideas every day and different story ideas than they have seen in the past. — Don Heider, University of Texas

— It is how journalists connect with their readers and viewers and how they come to understand or translate reader and viewer concerns into their own reportorial agendas — and public journalists do that differently — it changes how stories look and the impact it can have on political knowledge. — Edmund B. Lambeth, University of Missouri

— I sometimes grade a beat memo instead of a story. I require some components of civic journalism there, too. For example, on a beat memo, students tell me about how they gain information and develop sources. — Dean Paul Voakes, University of Colorado (formerly from Indiana University)

— It was great because the kids weren’t buying anything and after a few of the journals they started saying that things aren’t quite right and they started thinking about other ways to do news.... Student response was very, very positive. Some said this is really still not relevant in my life and for the most part they said we never thought about the media having an effect on public life. We are not sure what to do with it. — Gary Walker, St. John Fisher College adjunct and Vice-President, WXXI-TV

Booklist

— 14

Professors use a number of different books and articles in their classes to introduce students to journalism and democracy. The following booklist was created from the professors' interview responses and, while not inclusive, it does provide insight into some of the standard texts used in this field of inquiry.

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Gans, Herbert J. *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. 1st Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1980.

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