

## **Editing the Journalism Major**

The Internet, and more recently, social media and blogging, have changed the way traditional media operates, leading some consumers to question the value of journalism degrees. But New American Colleges & Universities have always prepared their students for the real world, and the case is no different for today's journalism students. As the communications industry has changed, so has the curriculum.

At **Drake University**, students learn to communicate across multiple media platforms. In their first semester they take a Multimedia Lab in which they learn the basics of digital audio, video and photography, plus page and Web design. Nearly every class they take builds on those basics. Even traditionally print programs, such as Drake's award-winning magazine program, have incorporated evolving media (including social media) into classwork. All student-run media — the student newspaper, magazines, radio and TV station — publish companion Web sites.

"It's not that we think that traditional media are dying; there are still plenty of opportunities for our students at magazines, newspapers and broadcast stations, as well as PR and ad agencies. But the skill set required to be successful in the industry has grown," said Kathleen Richardson, director of Drake University's School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

**North Central College** embraced multimedia with the creation of its Interactive Media Studies major – a combination of journalism, communication, audio, video, and technology skills. In just four years, the program has grown to 85 students. Professors who teach in the interdisciplinary program have backgrounds in art, computer science, English, journalism, mass media, and broadcast/speech communication.

"Our goal is simple. We want our students to effectively communicate in any medium," said Stephen Renk, professor of computer science and coordinator of the Interactive Media Studies program.

**Drury University** merged its print and broadcast journalism majors and now includes "new conceptions of journalism" (social media, documentary videos, blogging) in the curriculum, according to Jonathan Groves, assistant professor of communication and a former newspaper editor and reporter. With an emphasis on software and technology, all students learn Final Cut Pro, Photoshop, and Dreamweaver so that they can create messages in a variety of media. In addition, Drury added an investigative reporting class for students to learn computer-assisted reporting techniques.

At **Hampton University's** Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communications, proactive scheduling brought efficiency to multimedia education.

"Since fall 2009 I have scheduled the senior capstone print, broadcast and public relations classes to meet during the same time block so students and faculty can collaborate on cross platform media assignments. This was my method for creating a quick and easy

multimedia, cross platform environment,” said Rosalynne Whitaker-Heck, interim dean at the Scripps Howard School.

Institutions have not needed to convince students that these curriculum changes are necessary. In some cases, students have even served as the catalysts for change.

“Students are coming to us wanting to be more than just a print journalism major. They want to know how to shoot and edit video; they want to know how to post content to the Internet. The great students have already experimented with that and have started their own websites or blogs. In some cases, we have students who are already shooting video on their own and creating programming for YouTube,” said Battinto L. Batts, Jr. assistant professor at Hampton. “Our challenge as faculty is to remain relevant and not just see the Internet as another platform. It is THE platform. And we want our students to be prepared to make their mark on it not just as producers and contributors, but as owners and entrepreneurs.”

### ***Classroom to Real World, for the Greater Good***

To incorporate civic engagement, a hallmark of New American Colleges and Universities, Drake students apply their "new media" skills in hands-on projects for non-profit clients. For example, public relations seniors are doing a multi-pronged campaign for the local Anawim Housing charity for low-income Iowans, and the Media Responsibility class is doing on-air work for the Iowa radio reading service for the blind. One journalism professor this fall took her students to the Harkin Steak Fry, a political fundraiser, in which they reported and posted stories remotely from rural Iowa. Last year, a group of students from all majors organized the social media promotion for a local homebuilder's "9 Homes in 9 Days" charity for homeless Iowans.

Interactive Media Studies major Kelly Rivard, a third-year student at North Central, applied her writing, video production, and social media skills to the real-world and earned recognition for her innovative use of social media as a forum for discussing agricultural issues. While interning for AgChat Foundation, she created a video titled “The Evolution of Online Agvocacy,” which was presented at the opening session of AgChat’s first Agvocacy 2.0 Training Conference.

Michelle Corless, a 2010 North Central graduate, recently won the Collegiate Broadcasters, Inc.’s prestigious National Student Production Award for Best Radio News Reporting based on her coverage of 2010 Winter Olympic Gold Medalist Evan Lysacek Day last winter. When Day was honored in his hometown, Corless covered the event for WONC-FM 89.1, North Central's student-run radio station. Corless didn’t think her entry was good enough to submit, but her use of audio, including background sounds of cheers and chanting, gave her coverage an edge.

### ***Many Roads to Post-Graduation Success***

Richardson noted another big shift. Students aren’t as likely as in the past to work at the same media company for their entire careers. Instead they must create their own careers. To that end, Drake works to instill entrepreneurial skills in their students through in-class

and out-of-class community projects. Drake is also exploring collaboration with the College of Business' Entrepreneurial minor. Richardson tells prospective students that journalism is a great undergraduate major because it provides the communication skills one needs to be successful, no matter what field of work.

“They should think of their journalism education as providing the ‘tool kit’ that they can take out into the world,” she said.

Marc Allan, **Butler University**'s associate director of public relations and adjunct journalism professor, was a newspaper reporter for 24 years. He also believes that journalists' skills are applicable to many fields. “Journalists know how to find information and distill large amounts of information to its essence. That is, they know how to find the story, whether it's in piles of data or in a conversation with someone,” he said. “I tell my students, even if you never work in journalism a day in your life, the skills you learn by studying it will help you.”