

STANDARDIZATION OF MEDIA
EDUCATION IN CONSULTATION WITH THE CONCERNED

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“The Foundation of Every State is the education of its youth” (Anon.)

The foundation for today’s journalism was laid centuries ago when man learned to communicate. Ballads and drama were then an important component of oral communication to a large gathering. The word ‘journalism’ is derived from the French word ‘journal’ which in turn comes from the Latin word ‘*diurnal*’ or daily. In ancient Rome, the ‘*Acta Diurna*’ a handwritten bulletin was put up daily in the Forum, the main public square and may well be termed as the world’s first newspaper.

The revolution in communication technology today has thrown open to the public a much wider world. Therefore, the principles of good journalism need to be directed towards the highest quality of news reporting in public interest. With globalisation there has been an increased recognition of the crucial role of journalism in promoting democracy and lending voice to the people. It has also emerged as profession of choice by virtue of the power it can wield and this has created an urgent demand for well-trained journalists. Journalistic skills, are essential tools for the underpinning of key democratic principles that are fundamental to the development of every country. IT revolution in our country has contributed to revolution of media. Media’s impact on diverse sections and strata has been phenomenal. Media has become a strong tool to mediate the understanding of society and this increasing power of media is contributing to vitality of our vibrant democracy.

As a source of information, analysis and comment on current events, journalism performs a number of functions in modern societies. The basic goal of most journalists,

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however, is to serve society by informing the public, scrutinizing the way power is exercised, stimulating democratic debate, and by such action aiding political, economic, social and cultural development. Journalism education should teach students how to identify news and recognize the story in a complex field of fact and opinion, how to conduct journalistic research, and how to write for, illustrate, edit and produce material for various media formats (newspapers and magazines, radio and television, and online and multimedia operations) and for their particular audiences. It should give them the knowledge and training to reflect on ethics of journalism and best practices in journalism, and on the role of journalism in society, the history of journalism, media ethics, media law, and the political autonomy of media (including ownership, organization and competition). It should teach them how to cover political and social issues of particular importance to their own society through courses developed in co-operation with other departments in the college or university. It should ensure that they develop both a broad general knowledge and the foundation of specialized knowledge in a field important to journalism. It should ensure that they develop — or that they have as a prerequisite — the linguistic ability necessary for journalistic work in their country, including, where this is required, the ability to work in local indigenous or vernacular languages. In a rapid changing scenario of media functioning globally in this subcontinent education in journalism should prepare them to adapt to technological developments and other changes best suited for the news media.

Journalism education is offered in different ways by different organizations with different educational traditions and resources, in different settings, circumstances and cultures, and in different political conditions. The guiding principle should be to develop

a strong core educational structure with a balance between the practical and the academic. The study in university disciplines should continue to be seen as basic to professional training in journalism, and focus should be on journalism education as offered in universities at undergraduate and post-graduate levels.

Success of any curriculum depends on having good instruction and a good environment for achieving its goals. The curricula should aim at educating students to practise journalism, as distinct from preparing students for the academic study of the way people and organizations communicate through the mass media. However, the curricula should include coursework which helps students to understand the context for the practice of journalism, including its history and ways in which the news media are organized and function in a society. The curricula should aim to prepare students to be critical of their own and others' journalism practice.

The UNESCO International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems said in 1980s, in its report: "In many countries even today, journalists are not regarded as members of an acknowledged profession and they are treated accordingly. To overcome this situation, journalism needs to raise its standards and quality for recognition everywhere as a genuine profession. To be treated as professionals, journalists require broad educational preparation and specific professional training. Programmes of instruction need to be developed not only for entry-level recruits, but also for experienced personnel who from time to time would benefit from special seminars and conferences designed to refresh and enrich their qualifications."

Journalism education in universities is normally organized around three curricular lines of development:

1. An axis comprising the norms, values, tools, standards, and practices of journalism;

The coursework along the first line prepares students to report, write and edit for the various media. It represents the core of any program designed to prepare students for careers in journalism. It should be noted, however, that the professional skills of journalism involve methods of knowing and thinking as well as recording and representing. Weakness of much of journalism education often arises out of a failure to grasp the degree to which education in university disciplines constitutes (with reporting and writing) the foundations of the practice of journalism. On the other side of this equation, journalism students of journalism need training in the techniques of journalism and the use of equipment, by competent practising journalists and academics, not just as casual visitors but as respected and appropriately paid members of the teaching staff. To enrich the practical side, it would be only appropriate that every program should include an internship (or placement) at a news media outlet, and journalism schools should develop partnership with local news media. Such partnership may include practical seminars conducted by instructors working or having close liaison with reputed journalists, sending of faculty to news media outlets, and participating in joint projects. Colleges / Institutes may arrange for seminars to be held on site at the media organization with the aim of giving students access to technology and information services that they do not have at educational premises. Such partnerships may serve to narrow the gap between academic journalism and the journalists operating in media industry. The news media industry should be encouraged to give journalists reasonable time to engage in

university or college study, and to give journalism instructors the opportunity to upgrade their professional skills.

2. An axis emphasizing the social, cultural, political, economic, legal and ethical aspects of journalism practice both within and outside the national borders. The coursework along the second line elucidates the institutional and societal contexts within which journalists function and connects the practice of journalism to related human activities. Such studies strengthen professional identity, values, and goals through an understanding of democratic functions and legal and moral constraints. They should emphasize professional and ethical attitudes and knowledge and the importance to democracy of independent journalism.

3. An axis comprising knowledge of the world and intellectual challenges to journalism.

The coursework along the third line exposes students to multifaced knowledge required in rapidly changing modern society. In this respect, journalism is not a stand-alone discipline. It should be combined with education in the disciplines of arts and sciences, and should encourage journalism educators to steer their students towards study that expands and enriches the language of public life. Journalism educators should be encouraged to collaborate with their colleagues in related fields.

A curriculum in journalism education should include the foundations of journalism, which are designed to promote prerequisite intellectual and craft skills. These foundations include:

- An ability to think critically, incorporating skill in comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of unfamiliar material, and a basic understanding of evidence and research methods.
- An ability to write clearly and coherently using narrative, descriptive, and analytical methods.
- A knowledge of national and international political, economic, cultural, religious, and social institutions.
- A knowledge of current affairs and issues, and a general knowledge of history and geography.

Draft media curricula should lay foundations for undergraduate programs, because a number of basic skills and capacities cannot be assumed when students begin their undergraduate studies in journalism. The axis that guides the portion of the curriculum dedicated to intellectual development, therefore, includes journalism as well as arts and science courses. I also feel that the best way to learn is to pass through the process. Therefore, the curriculum should include practical tests on how the students would, in practical life, act in a given circumstance.

The draft media curricula for Journalism education should reflect the principles of the three axis. But there are two other principles that should also guide our work and that should be noted at the outset.

One leads to a special emphasis on writing and reporting; the other leads to a careful allocation of time in the curriculum to ensure that courses dedicated to content and intellectual development are not marginalized. In each of the model curricula below,

it should take care that reporting and writing courses develop through a number of tiers in each semester of the course. As these courses constitute a curricular core, which promotes the refinement of writing and craft skills, which makes it possible to offer journalism education even without the latest equipment (though computers are essential), and points the way, where there is time in the curriculum, towards specialization in a single field such as politics, economics, arts and culture, social issues, international relations, and natural and physical science and associated subjects such as the environment, health, and technology. The goal should be to form journalists who are in command of the complex skills marking the craft and are also in command of the knowledge and thought to support the reporting and analysis called for in a beat. The vision guiding the formation of journalists should emphasize intellectual development and the crafts of reporting and writing over sub-specialization in the various media.

The second goal is strongly related to the first. Draft media curricula for Journalism education should encourage the development of intellectual capacities, begun in the units of the journalism foundations course and should be pursued not only in journalism courses but also in arts and science courses that would include, in the case of university students, a specialized academic field. The coursework in the arts and sciences would not simply provide a general background to professional courses, but would also include a disciplinary specialization. A university may combine the study of journalism with any discipline or interdisciplinary field of study providing it offers a minimum of three tiers of study (in a three-year degree) or four (in a four year degree) in that discipline or field. The journalism student would thus be able to take three or four full-

year courses in such a discipline or field while progressing through three tiers of reporting instruction.

The journalism students in university programs should qualify not only in journalism but also in a separate academic field, though this may not be possible in all universities. Where fewer resources are available, the program could offer something more modest. The principle, however, remains, that concentration in a second discipline enlarges students' grasp of ways of thinking and sets them up for specialization later in their career.

The Press Council of India in its anxiety to ensure that proper education is imparted to journalism and mass media courses both at under graduate and post graduate level so that properly trained journalists and media personalities enrich media functioning of the country, has organized today's workshop with the Makhanlal Chaturvedi National University of Journalism and Communication, the first of its kind in Asia and wholly engaged with various courses in diverse specialties in the field of journalism and mass communication and research work so that a pointed thinking for proper study in the field of journalism and mass communication begins in the right direction.

I am sure that this workshop of eminent media professionals, academicians and public broadcasters will facilitate to suggest and draft media curricula of Journalism and Communication education which can be helpful for standardization of media education.

Aiamarabha Subhaya Bhabatu (Let this be an auspicious beginning)
