

Introduction

Gene Allen

With one exception (the keynote address by Robert Picard), all of the essays in this volume are expanded versions of presentations made at the conference “Toward 2020: New Directions in Journalism Education,” held at Ryerson University in Toronto on 31 May 2014. Testifying to the urgent interest in professional renewal among journalism educators, more than one hundred people from Canada, the United States, Europe, and Australia attended the conference. The papers published here represent a reasonable cross-section of the issues discussed. The authors advance different ideas about where journalism education should go from here; at times they disagree with one another, but all share the underlying view that if business as usual was ever a viable option, this clearly is no longer the case.

Robert Picard’s provocative and plain-spoken keynote address to the conference captured the sense of urgency well. While some in the audience disagreed with aspects of his critique (as do some of the papers in this volume), others found his candour in enumerating the ways that journalism education “must do better” refreshing. The conference participants were not aware of Picard’s analysis when they developed their initial proposals, so the essays here should not be read as explicit responses to his analysis. In the aggregate, however, it is striking that most of them address one or more of the principal needs he identified, including an end to journalists’ tendency toward self-satisfaction about their role in society and their established practices; a stronger culture of critical, scholarly research in journalism education; more rigorous and specialized academic training for journalism students, with more focus on critical reflection and less on the acquisition of specific professional skills; and a clearer understanding of how journalists must respond to changes in the business aspects of their field, including its entrepreneurial aspects. Ivor Shapiro’s essay, for example, explicitly questions whether the main goal of journalism programs is, or should be, to prepare students for careers as professional journalists. “Journalism is an approach to knowledge, not just a job,” he writes, “and journalism education is therefore about teaching a distinctive epistemology that enjoys broad professional utility.” Chantal Francoeur scrutinizes journalism’s claim to independence – in this case, independence from public relations practitioners – employing Michel Foucault’s analysis of power relationships. Similarly, Mary-

2 Toward 2020

Lynn Young and Janet Giltrow identify problematic aspects of the “teaching hospital” model of journalism education; using concepts from the scholarship of teaching and learning, as well as genre theory, they seek ways in which “new knowledge – rather than replicated practice – [can] enter the profession.” With frank scrutiny of her own professional career and transition to teaching, Sally Haney argues that deadline-driven daily journalism is often characterized by an absence of self-critical reflection, and urges a collective “search for models and frameworks that will not only help us dissect our shortcomings in the classroom, but also [understand] how those shortcomings are inextricably linked to often unexamined beliefs, values and judgments we carried as working journalists.”

Other contributions to this volume have a more specific focus. The three papers by Meredith Levine, Paul Benedetti, and Mike Gasher were initially presented as part of a single round-table session examining the trend towards entrepreneurial approaches in journalism education and (a related issue) the shifting relationship between journalism’s commercial and public purposes – a shift made possible by, among other things, our growing ability to understand audience preferences through the use of analytics. Levine argues strongly that much of this discussion relies on poorly understood notions of what entrepreneurship actually involves, to our students’ detriment. While recognizing that tensions between journalism’s commercial and public purposes have a long history, Benedetti asserts that newly emerging practices such as “sponsored content, native advertising, custom content, and brand journalism” represent a radically new and problematic departure, in that “all have the common feature of leveraging the trusted name of their publications to produce advertising content that is virtually indiscernible from regular news.” Mike Gasher’s brief but elegant essay wraps up this discussion by stressing the need for clear distinctions between education and training, between content and form, between journalism and the news industry, between markets and publics, and between production and distribution (among other things).

Two other essays address more specific questions still. Jordan Press (the only working journalist among the authors) urges journalism educators to expand their connections with the broader university community by offering instruction in news literacy to students outside their own departments. “No longer should journalism schools think only about preparing the next generation of journalists to report the news — schools should also help prepare the next generation of news consumers to navigate the modern news ecosystem.” In the only paper in the volume that explicitly addresses the possibilities of new journalistic forms, Gavin Adamson contends that short online videos, presented in a live blog format, offer great potential for audience engagement.

The volume concludes with edited transcripts of two round-table sessions in which prominent working journalists discuss current and emerging trends. One panel, organized on the premise that most journalism educators have been away from newsrooms for at least a few years, is essentially a primer on analytics – the rapid, detailed, and constant flow of information about audience response that is now

available to journalists – and how this information can best be used. In the second panel, senior journalists (one from a transforming legacy organization, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and two from digital-native organizations) offer their predictions about what the rapidly evolving journalistic landscape will look like in 2020 and which aptitudes and capacities journalism graduates will need to succeed in this environment. The changing and increasingly porous boundaries of what counts as “journalism” are a defining characteristic of the current era; as these panels suggest, this redefinition is taking place within journalism organizations as well as outside them. If journalism education has erred by overemphasizing established journalistic formats, failing to explore and experiment with the possibilities of emerging practices would be just as great an error.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the many people whose assistance has made this volume possible. My co-editors – Stephanie Craft, Christopher Waddell, and Mary-Lynn Young – have been tireless in their assessment of proposals and completed papers despite many competing demands on their time. Their detailed assessments have strengthened every paper in this volume, and their broader advice about the overall shape of the volume and our path to publication has been invaluable. I could not have wished for more helpful, thoughtful colleagues. (Please note: Allen and Young were not involved in the assessment of their own submissions to this publication.)

Among my colleagues at Ryerson University, I owe a special debt of thanks to Ivor Shapiro, who encouraged me to organize the conference on which this volume is based; and to April Lindgren, the director of the Ryerson Journalism Research Centre, who has generously supported its publication. Thanks also to Jaclyn Mika for her exemplary organizational work for the initial conference, to Sally Goldberg-Powell for the cover design of this volume, and to Sally Goldberg-Powell and Lindsay Smith for their assistance in making it available online. Matthew Kudelka, our efficient and helpful copy editor, has been a pleasure to work with. A final word of thanks goes to the authors whose work appears here. This has been a long process for everyone, and many authors have undergone multiple rounds of revision with good grace. We now present our collective work to the community of journalism educators more broadly, in the hope that they will find it both thought-provoking and useful.