

To Turn or to Burn: Shifting the Paradigm for Journalism Education

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Journalism education means preparation for a career in journalism: true or false?

The best answer is, sometimes. This paradigm – *journalism education is preparation for a career in journalism* – has been self-evident to most educators, students, and others since the discipline’s beginnings. Yet it has long been equally self-evident that a substantial number of journalism students’ futures lie elsewhere than in journalism careers. Certainly, the number of journalism graduates far exceeds even the most optimistic number of feasible entry-level jobs in journalism. Indeed, a substantial number of “journalism” undergraduates have, by the time of graduation, no intention of pursuing careers in journalism.

This paradigmatic tension matters because a program’s success is most usefully evaluated against its own core mission. An engineering degree, for example, is clearly intended to produce competent and trustworthy engineers, and its success or failure should be evaluated in a way that is consistent with that mission. A history degree has a different paradigm: producing historians (i.e., history scholars) being one of several desirable outcomes of a good history program, especially at the undergraduate level, dedicated history teachers would happily judge their success according to the knowledge and understanding of history with which students are left.

In arguing that journalism education’s paradigm deserves to be revisited and revised, I will acknowledge two unproven assumptions, each based at least as much on personal experience and peers’ anecdotes as on hard evidence.

First, I assume, based on my nearly fifteen years as a journalism educator, that most peers nationally, like most of those with whom I have personally worked and exchanged ideas, currently see the training of future journalists as our collective core mission.

Likewise, I assume that a significant number of journalism graduates will not become journalists. Beyond what my own school knows about graduates’ career paths, there is fair

reason to consider this assumption safe on a national scale. In 2007, Knox and Goodrum identified forty-five journalism schools in Canada, including twenty-six based in community colleges and nineteen in universities. (These numbers included eight hybrid university–college programs.) Combined, these programs reported an estimated 4,802 enrolled journalism students, and 1,606 graduates per year; 39.4 per cent of these graduates were from universities. (Knox and Goodrum 2007) A very few small programs have been closed or suspended since that time (Coulson 2014; Reid 2014), but to the author’s knowledge, based on information exchanged among j-school chairs and directors, the Knox–Goodrum estimates remain roughly correct. (Academic leaders do report steady reductions in application numbers for undergraduate and graduate programs, but these reductions have only to a much lesser extent affected actual enrolments¹ or, at least according to informal reports from some leading schools, the quality of student bodies as measured by incoming grades or achievement.)

Nor is the population of journalists known with precision. According to Statistics Canada’s occupations survey, approximately 13,000 Canadians defined themselves as journalists in 2011; this included those who were employed in news or other organizations, whether full-time or part-time, and the self-employed (Skelton 2013). My own current research (not yet published) suggests that roughly 4,000 people are on salary as English-language journalists with news organizations, large and small, on all media platforms combined; with some justifiable but not verifiable guesswork, this might support an estimate that somewhere between 10,000 and 13,000 Canadians earn at least part of their living by doing journalism in any language. Reductions in the number of actual journalism jobs are, while not yet convincingly documented, unlikely to be disputed by an informed observer. The Canadian Media Guild estimated in 2013 that 10,000 jobs had been lost in the broadcast and print media industries (three-fifths of them in print, the rest in broadcast), but those jobs include both journalists and non-journalists (Wong 2013).

Given all these rough numbers, it would seem foolhardy to suggest that a significant majority of journalism graduations translate as the beginning of professional journalism careers.² Conversely, and a little brutally, it seems safe to suggest that journalism educators’ current sense of mission is driven by the realistic career aspirations of what may be a minority of their students. There is another, more positive, way to state this: that the range of journalism graduates’ realistic career prospects is significantly more diverse than the range of paths encompassed by the usual meanings of “journalism” work.

Whichever way one prefers to think, the paradigmatic challenge is clear: if we see our mission as training people for a specific career, and around half of those whom we train have

no realistic chance of working in that field, then we fail in our core mission about as often as we succeed. On the other hand, if we think (as I believe most journalism educators *do* think) that we do effective work with young people regardless of whether they proceed to work as journalists, then our mission cries out for a restatement.

The alternative – holding course with the current paradigm – is, in my view, approximately as wise a tactic as it would be for a pilot who, flying blind through cloud with dead instruments, knows that a mountain lies straight ahead.

“Turn!” this steadfast captain’s co-pilot might suggest, with restrained frenzy.

“Why?” the pilot might respond. “Flying straight has worked out pretty well so far.”

“But – the mountain!”

“True,” quoth the pilot, “but there are other mountains.”

“Captain, we must turn!”

“Perhaps, but which way?”

With luck, we may find an answer before flames engulf us.

Popular Adjustments to the Paradigm

The fact that many journalism graduates proceed to careers other than journalism is neither new information nor any more innately problematic than the fact that few history, political science, or psychology graduates make a living as historians, politicians, or psychologists. But while an academic program’s success is not best judged by graduates’ career paths, a different logic is demanded of programs that teach professional skills and habits; these “preparation” programs, as Stark terms them, must and do live in the shadow of graduates’ career paths, and the way educators discuss such programs’ goals, curriculum, and success, day by day, is profoundly different from the discourse of social science and humanities teachers. We may or may not think of ourselves as running “trade schools,” but our curricula are clearly and obviously driven by the teaching of a trade – the skills, values, and habits that pertain to the doing of journalism. As Stark put it: “Faculty in the preparation programs teach academic content, necessary professional skills, and the context of the profession, thus preparing the graduate to enter practice at a basic competency level” (Stark 1998).

Do all law school graduates go on to practise law, and all nursing students to be nurses? Of course not, but if, in fact, the ratio of practitioners to non-practitioners among their graduates should turn out to be as low as appears to be true for journalism graduates, then I would argue that those schools, too, were due for a paradigm check, notwithstanding that those disciplines, too, are excellent preparations for a variety of walks of life.

One common response to the paradigmatic challenge is the “vote with your feet” argument, which runs this way: these are journalism programs, so if students don’t want to be journalists or are not suitable for that career, they should not be admitted those programs, or, once admitted, they should understand they are in the wrong place – and leave. This response, while strictly logical, is unlikely to be written into a journalism school’s business plan, and it is also a rather harsh message to deliver to, say, a twenty-one-year-old undergraduate with two years’ worth of more-or-less untransferable professional credits already under her belt.

More commonly, educators acknowledge that a professional program should indeed be guided by the presumed requirements of its graduates’ realistic career trajectories, while taking a broad view of those trajectories. Classically, this response will prominently include the word “transferable” in regard to skills learned in a journalism program: research, interviewing, communication, and more.

There is no disputing the transferability of learned journalism skills: while carrying out increasingly complex journalistic tasks, students learn how to ask strangers for information, to conduct in-depth research, to think sceptically, and to craft raw information into effective stories using multiple media forms. These are indeed valuable competencies for diverse careers (public policy, investment analysis, scholarly and applied research, teaching, law, public relations, nongovernmental advocacy and more), and to study and work in a place where these skills are learned and practised daily is not just a challenging, stimulating, and useful educational experience for all concerned; it’s also enormous fun.

One conclusion that might be drawn from the foregoing description of journalism study is that the variety of career outcomes is best ignored, because practical pedagogy depends on a pragmatic focus for its effectiveness. Therefore, in this view, the individual student’s realistic career goals and capacities are largely irrelevant to curricular development. At its baldest, this argument states that the realistic career prospects of the majority of our students are *accidental side-effects of how we spend our time and energy as teachers!* Few would be comfortable with saying such a thing out loud, whether to students, their bill-paying parents, or academic colleagues in other disciplines. Or, for that matter, to taxpayers: many professional programs, including journalism, rely on substantially smaller class sizes than do arts courses – a greater cost than can easily be justified without arguing that the professional degree is more *useful* than the arts degree. And such an argument is patently damaged by what can only be termed a “career-agnostic professional” (!) approach.

For these reasons, however pragmatically appealing it may be to believe that diverse career paths should not be an active consideration for curriculum, such a course is inconsistent

both with accountability (how we measure success) and with transparency (how we justify and market our schools). What might replace the lucky-accidents paradigm for journalism education's mission? In the remainder of this paper, I will argue for the following answer: *journalism is an approach to knowledge, not just a job, and journalism education is therefore about teaching a distinctive epistemology that enjoys broad professional utility.*

Journalism as an Approach to Knowledge (Not a Job)

Knowledge is a "true belief that has been justified and not defeated" (Lyne 1981, 146; Lehrer and Paxson 1969, 225). For convenience, we might give a one-word name to this process of becoming convinced of a belief's authenticity: let us call it *factualization*. Factualization lies at the heart of various kinds of scientific work, of course, but it is also close, at least, to the heart of what journalists do. As Zelizer put it, journalists are "preoccupied" with ideas about truth; they exhibit a "reverence for facts" that frequently attracts justified criticism as displaying indifference to factualization's cultural context (2004, 187). Of course, every discipline rests on some kind of epistemological framework, whether explicit (as in more academically oriented areas) or implicit (as in more practical or "trade"-based education). What makes journalism's approach to factualization distinct can be described under at least three headings: its scope or subject matter, its purpose, and the nature of what passes for fact.

Regarding the subject matter of journalistic factualization, Park's description of news as a set of transient, ephemeral, and isolated events continues to resonate. Today's journalist, at least, pays substantially more attention to causality and context than Park contemplated, but he was right to distinguish journalism from history precisely by their distinct stances with respect to connections drawn across time: the journalist, he said, is "concerned with the past and future only in so far as these throw light on what is actual and present" (1940, 675).

With an eye to purpose, a journalist's job may be seen as knowledge transportation: she moves pieces of information, one by one, from private places, where they are "known" to a few, to public places, where they will become "known" to many. This impulse to publicity seems so fundamental to the profession as to merit part of the definition of journalism itself, as I have suggested previously: "The word journalism is not used for insider-to-insider communication within organizations and closed communities; rather, journalism seeks, by definition, to broaden the boundaries within which information is known and understood. Implications of this idea include that journalists prefer plain language and engaging media forms, and that they see themselves as accountable not just to employers or peers but to a broader public" (Shapiro 2014, 560).

Beyond its timely, event-driven subject matter and its driving impulse toward engagement with wider audiences, how discrete is the way that journalists think about factualization? Here we arrive at the root epistemological question: What counts as truth in journalism? In a much reprinted and cited work, Ettema and Glasser sought to establish a binary difference between two different journalistic epistemologies. They depicted the daily reporter as something of a simple-fact-channelling bureaucrat, less concerned with veracity than with accurate attribution, whereas the “investigative” journalist pores through a wide array of types of facts, assessing their quality and connecting the dots to “justify the larger truth of the story” (1985, 188, 202) It seems doubtful that journalistic knowledge ever fell so neatly into just two baskets; certainly, in the contemporary newsroom, daily reporting may include investigative aspects, and investigations must sometimes be completed on deadline; besides, the *n* of self-styled journalists includes workers in the fields of sports, arts, and lifestyle, and others whose approaches to knowledge likely fall somewhere on the spectrum between the Ettema–Glasser types.

A 2013 study led by Colette Brin and myself suggested that journalists’ reconstructions of their approaches to and processes for verifying facts seemed driven only in part by the professional locus of the reporter and the presence or absence of deadline pressure. At least as significant was the type of “fact” being interrogated (or not): the spelling of a proper name, for instance, assumed more importance than aspects of a source’s personal history (unsurprisingly, demonstrable accuracy in defamatory material was most important of all) (Shapiro et al. 2013). This suggests that journalists adopt a pragmatic, utilitarian approach to factualization.³ When a journalist thinks about how she knows what she knows about current events, her concern is neither abstract nor ideological; she lives, as Carey put it, in “a world of practices” rather than “disembodied ideas” (1997, 331). Indeed, all journalism is a “concrete discursive practice situated in a particular place and time” (Charron and de Bonville 2004, 33).

Journalists, then, are not much concerned with the idea or nature of “knowing,” yet they are preoccupied with the quest to know. Their “knowing” is event-driven and time-sensitive, motivated by an impulse to engage broad audiences with information that is useful insofar as it is reliable. Their epistemological homeland is the swath of ever-shifting sands lying between the city of Belief and the village of Proven Fact. Journalists wander this dust-blown landscape, little interested, professionally speaking, in either town; beliefs are mere questions, at best, and by the time something is a known “fact,” the journalist’s attention has long roamed elsewhere.

But journalists share this wild midland territory with fellow-travellers. The journalistic approach to knowledge – temporal, pragmatic, and outwardly focused – is also the approach of others whose professional interests include understanding and explaining current events, and who therefore may frequently adopt a similar epistemological stance. And this is why journalism education may redefine itself legitimately as broad career preparation – not accidentally (as a side effect of training for a particular job) but paradigmatically (as the teaching of a particular approach to acquiring, parsing, and mobilizing knowledge about current events).

Given its scope, motive, and pragmatism, how may this “particular” approach to knowledge be recognized and learned? I have previously argued that the practice of journalism comprises, by definition, the array of activities intrinsically connected with “an independent pursuit of accurate information about current or recent events and its original presentation for public edification” (Shapiro 2014; see also Brethour et al. 2012) If so, then journalism itself may be seen as built upon four key epistemological principles according to which knowledge of current events (1) may practically be pursued independently, (2) is rendered reliable through a process of verification, (3) may aptly be understood as comprising narratives, and (4) is efficiently disseminated through clear and engaging styles and formats.

None of these statements is self-evident; each deserves more extensive analysis than is possible here, but I will nevertheless explain a little more fully what I mean by them.

(1) Knowledge about current events may practically be pursued independently

It has long been established that an “objective” representation of events is impossible, that many journalists continue to aspire to some version of this impossibility as an ideal, and that the adoption of objective “voice” in journalistic performance has aspects of insidious ritual (Broersma 2010; Deuze 2005, 446–47; Tuchman 1972; Soffer 2009). But from an epistemological (rather than performative) perspective, the idea of “independent pursuit” is both more modest than either ontology or ethics, and, in a sense, more scientific – or at least science-inspired. Just as a reputable piece of science must be conducted in the absence of biasing factors, so is it “definitive,” as I have previously argued, that “journalists seek information ... based on that information’s interest to themselves and to their audiences, rather than their, their employer’s, or their sources’ interests in [achieving] a particular outcome” (Shapiro 2014, 560). When an airline’s public relations officer interviews a maintenance manager about safety procedures, the PR man’s interest in the obtained information’s becoming more widely known (or not) is directly aligned with that of the manager, or at least

of the manager's employer: if the airline prospers from the result of the work, then so, in principle, will the PR man. A journalistic investigator conducting the same interview might benefit from a particular line of inquiry (e.g., her reputation might rise through a scandalous discovery), so she is far from "objective," but her stake in the outcome is definitively distinct from (independent of) the consequences for source and company.

This independence is substantially less than perfect (compared, for example, to that of a double-blind clinical study conducted by medical researchers using arm's-length funding) but may be seen as an effective pragmatic stance toward the collection of information that, in combination with the following additional elements, is likely to produce a broadly acceptable degree of factual reliability.

(2) *Knowledge about current events is rendered reliable through a process of verification* Kovach and Rosenstiel famously described the "discipline of verification" as the "essence" of journalism (2007, 12–13). Those authors are among others who have redirected the conversation about journalistic objectivity from the journalist's state of mind to her method of inquiry (Turner and Kearns 2010; Ward 2004; Figdor 2010). Epistemologically, this translates into a statement that the extent to which beliefs about current events are legitimated as knowledge will reflect the degree of rigour with which the inquirer (e.g., the journalist) brings scrutiny to bear on alleged facts. As an intellectual activity, this investigative approach to available information may (with unsatisfactory imprecision, in my view) also be described as critical thinking. The standards for this process of examination operate not only on a wide spectrum of acceptable degrees of factuality (see the Shapiro–Brin study referred to above) but also on a spectrum of acceptable depth from "mere" accuracy (the correctness of individual facts) to contextualized factuality, which implies relevance to the purpose and social importance of the inquiry.

(3) *Knowledge about current events may aptly be understood as comprising narratives* A unit of journalistic work is most commonly termed a "story," and G. Stuart Adam has argued persuasively that an approach to narration must be counted among the essential elements or principles that make up works of journalism. Although forms of narrative will vary among different "story" types and media, Adam writes that the narrator in journalism uses the same devices as do all storytellers: "plot, characterization, action, dialogue, sequencing, dramatization, causation, myth, metaphor, and explanation." Part of what makes the journalistic approach to knowledge distinct from that of much science, including social

science, and from most humanitarian work, is that it places a premium on sorting information into these building blocks of character and action, whether this story is delivered as the simple who-what-where-when-why of the basic news story or in a deeper form that foregrounds more complex elements of causation, character, and context (2006, 358–60).

(4) *Clear and engaging styles and formats are efficient methods of disseminating knowledge about current events*

The roots of this point, once again, have been classically articulated by Adam: “Whatever else might be said about the language of journalism, it is fair to say that it is disciplined by its public and empirical character. Its vocabulary is the vocabulary of public discourse. It may strive to represent scientific ideas or the abstract notions of philosophy, but it ... always uses a vocabulary that can be understood in the street or in the marketplace” (2006, 358).

The preference for plain language is no mere habit of journalistic practice; it goes to the very purpose of knowledge within journalism’s epistemic framework, which is, as noted above, the transfer of understanding from insider-knowers to outsiders who might thus become knowers (Shapiro 2014, 560).

The Journalistic Epistemology as a Paradigm of Journalism Education

Given what has been said about journalism as an epistemology, it follows that the operating paradigm of journalism curriculum might be redefined without reference to job training, and without loss of substance, as follows:

Journalism education is the teaching of an independent approach to the discovery, interpretation, and communication of knowledge about current events that seeks to identify and convey demonstrably accurate facts in the form of engaging narratives for public edification.

This paradigm may be parsed into five key elements. First, the *subject matter* of journalism’s epistemological framework is, by definition, restricted to knowledge of current events, not, for example, conditions of nature, philosophical arguments, or historical inquiry. Second, the *stance* of the seeker of knowledge is similarly definitive: the inquirer adopts a position, with respect to the knowledge sought, that is independent of the consequences of the discovery or dissemination of such knowledge. Third, the seeker adopts a critical *lens* with regard to alleged information, which involves a questioning attitude and the submission of

obtained information to some form of verification, although the investigative norms adopted will vary from one situation to another. Fourth, the seeker's task will be focused on finding and constructing *narratives* about people, rather than "bare facts" or abstract accounts. And finally, because the entire effort of inquiry is strategically oriented toward *dissemination* for a wider audience, the narrative techniques adopted will be calculated to achieve maximum clarity and engagement with non-knowers.

It is no accident that the logic of this paradigmatic approach (subject matter >> independent stance >> critical lens >> narrative focus >> engaging technique) echoes the process of the journalistic craft (roughly: topic choice >> sourcing and research >> verification >> story-shaping >> production). Nor, therefore, should it surprise that the logic of a curriculum driven by the proposed epistemology-centred paradigm would, in some large measure, reflect that of the existing craft-centred paradigm. Nevertheless, the change of paradigm would (or at least should) make a practical difference to learning and teaching.

One thing that would shift is discourse, both within and outside the classroom. To the extent that ideas about knowledge are present in current journalism-education discourse, these ideas tend to be items of rhetorical rather than curricular interest— that is, the conversation tends to be about making the argument for journalism education, rather than about what we teach or how we teach it. When journalism educators discuss course changes, describe existing courses, plan course delivery, or hire for course teaching, they tend to divide courses into two quite distinct categories, often called "theory" and "craft." The theory courses may or may not address general epistemological issues related to journalism; the craft courses rarely do so, at least not explicitly. So we may talk *about* journalists' approaches to knowledge, in theory, and we may teach future journalists *how* to do things that have epistemological implications or roots. But we rarely connect the dots between *about* and *how*.

A new paradigm would change discourse in two ways. First, to some degree, the presence of such a paradigm should encourage teachers of craft to lead their students in reflection about questions such as what it means – at least for the purposes of journalism – when we say that something is "known." This is by no means alien territory; many journalism students are, I am sure, frequently enjoined to ask questions that are essentially epistemic, such as, "How do sources of alleged information know what they say, or think they know?" Or, "What story does this set of information seem to tell?" Or, "How may this knowledge be shared with other people in a clear and engaging way?" But the more important dialogical transformation would be in frame of reference: instead of speaking about journalism as *the* career for which we are training, we would be speaking about professional journalism as an

example – even the archetypal example – of knowledge work for which our students are being prepared. This would not be much different from the idea of education in history or chemistry: every student and instructor in such programs knows that some archetypal graduates will become professional historians or chemistry researchers, even as most students expect to use the knowledge and habits learned in other ways (as teachers, lawyers, politicians, health-care practitioners, engineers, and more).

Similarly in a journalism program, a future lawyer should not feel like a second-class beneficiary of side-effect education. Today, the journalism freshman's first exit from the classroom to interview people is seen as boot-camp training for a future based outside the newsroom; tomorrow, the same activity might be seen as more like a gross anatomy class for most first-year medical students: even though few will become surgeons and fewer will be pathologists, they cut up cadavers because it is a pragmatically effective way to begin understanding how the human body works and thinking about it unsentimentally and mechanistically. No less do journalism students need to develop new habits of thinking and discovery, from the get-go.

The skills learned in the course of a knowledge-centred program would be skills already recognizable among quality career-centred journalism programs today – skills like news-driven story-focusing, inventive sourcing, exploratory interviewing, fact-checking, plain writing, arresting photography, data analysis and visualization, multimedia production, and many more. For the future investment analysts, lawyers, policy advisers, researchers, and, yes, producers and reporters and editors whom we teach, the writing of a news report or a feature article, or the production of a broadcast news item or documentary, or the interactive, questioning engagement with knowledgeable people and ordinary people, or the compiling of data into a current graphic, or the understanding of what makes a “story” new or fresh will be seen and described as practical tools for gaining and disseminating knowledge about current events. But, under the new paradigm, the content of craft courses might, as students gain experience with basic news forms, branch out to trying the epistemological tools associated with “non-journalism” pursuits such as social policy research or public opinion polling, as well as experimentation with wholly new tools and forms.

There is a potentially (but not necessarily) problematic flip side to this prospect: at the moment, journalism educators often see themselves as in partnership with, and even accountable to, the news industry. Some teachers may even see their core task as being to mirror industry practice in the classroom. Industry partners might not be enthusiastic about an

approach to education that takes a broader approach to its purpose and accountability. Changing these widespread expectations of industry mimicry would not be easy.

At the same time, I suspect, reconceived journalism degrees might a little more closely resemble the humanities and social sciences than other so-called professional programs. Understanding of society, its history, economics, politics, and culture, would no longer be seen as something to be learned in the student's academic elective courses but as part of core program curriculum, just as calculus and biology are core knowledge for engineering and medicine, and macroeconomics for political science. Assignment descriptions might be slightly tweaked to draw more explicit emphasis to knowledge questions, thus:

- “How badly damaged is the clinic that burned on Mulberry Street yesterday, and how will this affect medical care downtown? Give your findings in the form of a 400-word news report (or 90-second video news report).”
- “How have sale prices for new and used cars risen and/or fallen since the Saudi King's death, and why? Answer this question in a news feature based on a minimum of four expert interviews plus bibliographic research.”
- “Is sexual harassment of men by women more or less frequent now than in the past? How much? How does it compare to the harassment of women by men? Your 5-minute audio mini-documentary should reflect the weight of published research data, and a range of informed opinion, and be supplemented by an annotated bibliography ready for web-publication.”

At a certain point, roughly equivalent to the point at which a major needs to be locked in within many general arts programs, I suspect that students would stream themselves into specialization either in the professional application of the news epistemology (i.e., journalism craft) or in broader reflection on the nature of knowledge of current events (in preparation for non-journalism careers or graduate studies in a related disciplines). It is at this point that the weight of “theory” and “practice” might shift toward one pole or another of the praxis continuum.

These thoughts on a paradigm adjustment's curriculum effects are merely speculative. Curriculum revision is complicated, as anyone involved in it can attest, and its possibilities are interwoven with too many variables (involving logistics, human and financial resources, and institutional context) for any single voice in the process to mean as much as outsiders might imagine. But one thing would necessarily change, perhaps profoundly, as a result of the kind of

paradigm adjustment floated here: the articulation and measurement of success in curriculum design and delivery. “Success” for a journalism educator, course, or program would need to be described in terms of learning outcomes, not hiring patterns. If a graduate were demonstrably able to articulate a clear research question on a matter related to current events, to plan a research strategy that included appropriate verification measures and engagement with people’s stories, and to disseminate the knowledge gained in a form that widened the realm in which knowledge of these matters were appreciated, then that graduate would be a success story, no matter where she ended up, career-wise.

Conclusion: A Turn for the Better?

Relying on learning outcomes rather than career paths as a benchmark for success would pull journalism programs subtly closer in purpose to the humanities and social sciences. This movement would be reinforced by other effects of paradigm change, including a more cohesive integration of theory with practice than in past years (Gasher 2005). But the non-fiction story in all its forms (e.g., news, feature, documentary, multimedia, live blog) would remain the principal form of focusing, crafting, and disseminating the fruits of knowledge about current events. And the ways in which students gain adeptness in the seeking and dissemination of knowledge will continue to feel practical, challenging, and fun.

All students – not just those bound for journalism careers – would potentially benefit from this refocused approach to program. But this does not mean that the transition would be simple; to the contrary, our carefully turned aircraft would likely confront obstacles that could be higher, even, than the avoided mountain. The most obvious of these obstacles include current faculty members’ preparedness to teach a curriculum that has been conceptualized around knowledge rather than craft, and the daunting challenge of articulating and “selling” a program that groups hitherto diffuse career paths into a single category. One especially important rhetorical and promotional puzzle concerns naming: What are we to call a program that is conceived around an epistemological framework rather than a readily identifiable discipline or career? One of my colleagues recently suggested that our own journalism school offer a “BA in Non-Fictional Representations of the World of All Kinds.” I am not fully certain he was joking about the name, but he was implicitly floating a paradigm shift not greatly dissimilar from the one proposed here.

Another problem with the new paradigm is especially ironic, given that its motivation is at least in part an attempt to close the gap between curriculum focus and realistic career prospects. It is a truism that a substantial number of journalism graduates see their education as

excellent preparation for public relations or various other types of professional communications work. Indeed, intimacy with journalists' workflow will benefit any career involving media relations. That intimacy will continue to be inculcated by any practice-based journalism program, including one built upon the paradigm proposed here. Yet a more canonical emphasis on independent stance and critical lens will hardly help attract potential students, or comfort current ones, who are bent on PR careers.

On the other hand, that same canonical rigour will keep us honest and untie our aspirations from the exigencies of failing business models. In moving away from mirroring current industry practice as a universal norm for classroom practice, programs would almost automatically foster greater intellectual risk-taking and experimentation with forms and approaches (Stephens 2000). Too often, industry practices are of the lowest-common-denominator type, driven more by commercial considerations, such as productivity, than by what Stephens calls "quality" or "wisdom" journalism, by which he means journalism that goes beyond bare reporting, laying out the five W's in clear writing, to the production of "stories that are interpretive, informed, intelligent, interesting and insightful" (2009).

I suspect that many journalism educators consider themselves to be already on that journey. The paradigm shift I have suggested may or may not be the right turn to take, but turn we must, lest our fate be similar to those faced by news companies that denied the looming crash until they, too, felt the flames

NOTES

¹ My own j-school, Ryerson, voluntarily reduced new enrolments by 20 per cent effective September 2015 to maintain admission standards in the face of declining applications.

² This paper attempts no distinction between the ideas of "professional journalism" and "journalism craft" and uses the term "professional education" to distinguish between purely academic programs and those focused on career preparation. It therefore intentionally avoids the enduring controversy over whether or not journalism is usefully described as a profession. (Aldridge and Evetts 2003; Allison 1986; Banning 1999; Beam, Weaver, and Brownlee 2009; Davis 2010; Deuze 2005; Singer 2003)

³ Brin and I suggested that journalists' descriptions of verification echoed Tuchman's (1972) idea of "objectivity" as a "strategic ritual"; that is, verification might function as a pragmatic norm that legitimizes a journalist's distinct social role.

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