

School of Journalism and Mass Communication
Assessment Update 2009

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication introduced a new curriculum in 2000 that sought to reconcile our teaching to a rapidly changing media landscape. For more than four decades, much of our instruction was organized around specific media industries, that is, newspapers, advertising, public relations and broadcast news. This "silo" approach possessed many weaknesses. Backward-looking, it gave insufficient attention to new technologies. Then, too, it failed to prepare graduates for changes in their professional lives, for example, the many who left one trade (say, newspapers) to another (public relations). Relatedly, we abandoned the increasingly anachronistic instructional distinction between advertising and public relations. Our students needed to regard themselves as professional communicators who could excel in any number of media industries, including ones that didn't exist nine years ago.

Our new curriculum became more demanding, especially in our introductory courses, J. 201 and J. 202. This had the effect of attracting better, more dedicated students to Journalism.

Approaching the tenth anniversary of the new curriculum, we have ample cause to be very pleased. Employers regularly praise student interns or graduates they hire (this wasn't always the case in the 1990s). Members of our board of visitors regularly meet with our majors, and come away impressed. A common refrain is how much better the students are than when they were at the UW.

Although we love the praise, we are seeking more systematic evidence. Our Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC) is launching a major review of the curriculum. It will examine how well we are, in fact, achieving the objectives upon which we agreed in 2000. Do advanced courses meet the goal of being attentive to new technologies and professional integration? At the same time, UCC will survey recent graduates to measure their satisfaction with their Journalism instruction.