It is difficult to provide a journalism and mass communication curriculum that is all things to all students. We should be asking ourselves: What is it we are preparing the “journalism or mass communication” major to do? As well as, should curriculum kowtow to the media industry so that we are in essence a training ground for the media industry? It is these types of questions that are addressed in this article along with a review of recent trends in journalism and mass communication education to devise pedagogy that meets the demands of the changing digital media culture.

Educators have been working hard to meet the challenges of today’s media culture in the classroom, some with success and others not favorably. Those working in the media industry also have experienced challenges in creating sophisticated media products. But for them, the challenge is staying competitive in the marketplace and how best to invest and develop (or redevelop) products for their audiences. Both professionals and educators need to work together to possibly reinvent journalism and mass communication education. The mindset should not be about creating new forms of journalism or mass communication, but about new ways of reaching and engaging audiences. The same holds true

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for educators. Just as the media look to innovative techniques to reach audiences, educators should be asking themselves if they are doing everything possible to reach and engage their students. Some questions that still need to be answered are as follow:

- What is it educators are preparing the “journalism or mass communication” major to do?
- What are educators going to do to keep up with the technology changes in the media industry?
- Are educators going to reinvent themselves every time another media technology is invented?
- Is there an all-purpose solution for educators?
- Should curriculum kowtow to the media industry so that education is in essence a training ground for the media industry?

It is these types of questions that I attempt to address in this article. Specifically, I review and synthesize recent trends in journalism and mass communication education so that there is a better understanding of how to devise pedagogy that meets the demands of the changing digital media culture.

**JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION EDUCATION**

It is now commonplace in the entertainment industry to see crossover between broadcast, online, and advertising such as the hit television show *Heroes*; and even more recently with news and information organizations such as *National Geographic*. For this reason, Deuze (2004) asserts that it is helpful to look at convergence from an institutional perspective. Institutional convergence includes partnerships with other media and news organizations that may promote, repurpose, or share news; cross-media or integrated marketing services; research and development projects; as well as knowledge of local legislation and governance. Convergence from an institutional perspective comes in all shapes and sizes and may be implemented differently depending on the news and media organizations involved.

According to Deuze (2004), convergence is the “collaboration between formerly distinct media newsrooms and other parts of the modern media company” (p. 140). Based on this definition, multimedia journalism includes the cross-promotion of news and information. On a small scale, this includes the written story presented on camera for the company’s television counterpart, to a fully converged multimedia scenario that entails a team of news workers from print, broadcast, and online to join forces to gather news and information for distribution across all media platforms, including mobile devices and social networking entities. To be clear, this is not the same as online journalism; rather, multimedia journalism includes online reporting along with shared news operations between print and broadcast media, as well as cross-promotion of projects, to cross-media advertising, news sharing, and at times full integration of newsrooms as well as with other parts of the media organization.
On the surface, it appears educators are embracing convergence, yet are less than decisive when it comes to how best to address issues of convergence in the classroom. There has been a lot of discussion by educators of what they think needs to be done, but a struggle with implementation. There also are conflicting attitudes toward an integrated curriculum in journalism and mass communication schools (Claussen, 2008; Finucane, 2006; Griffin, 1991; Pasadeos, 2000; Thorson, 2005). Prior to media convergence, journalism (including print, broadcasting, and photography), public relations, and advertising traditionally have been taught as separate units in academia; but recent technological innovations and newer media devices have pushed educators to question existing curriculum. Although there are basic conceptual differences among these areas, continued innovation in technology brings them together. Thus far, faculty has been less inclined to embrace an integrated or converged curriculum concept.

Although several studies have examined technology in the classroom (Dickson & Brandon, 2000; Fee, Russial, & Auman, 2003; Ha, Beard, & Kelsey, 1998; Lowrey & Becker, 2001; Russial & Wanta, 1998), few have examined how best to approach an integrated or converged curriculum. Although many journalism and mass communication programs have been quick to respond by “converging” curriculum, this too often has been addressed by adding a class or two on new media and is really a band-aid to the changes occurring outside of the classroom. It is also incorrect to say that existing curriculum is out of date. There are core competencies that, regardless of presentation and output, must be included in journalism and mass communication education; nevertheless, there also needs to be room for technological advancements in delivery methods and presentation styles.

Lowrey, Daniels, and Becker’s (2005) survey of journalism and mass communication administrators indicated that many programs are moving toward a converged curriculum such as the merging of knowledge with particular media platforms. The move toward converged curricula is mostly because many perceive the news and media industries are looking to hire students with multiple skill sets. Lowrey et al. also found that many programs have moved away from training students for specialized media forms; however, things are moving slowly. Similarly, Kraeplin and Criado (2005) examined how educators adapted their curriculum to emphasize convergence. They found that most journalism programs have implemented more of a multidisciplinary approach in the guise of converged curriculum. They suggest that for convergence to be effective, “the different media involved must contribute to a process that yields a truly integrated product” (p. 49). An example of this is streaming audio and video included with a print story on a web page with extra content-related links presented on a web page. According to Kraeplin and Criado (2005), “A journalism curriculum that provided students with the conceptual, analytical, and practical skills to achieve this would be on its way toward achieving interdisciplinarity” (p. 49). Another example of a converged curriculum is at the University of Southern California (Castañeda, Murphy, & Hether, 2005), where the Convergence Core Curriculum aims to teach journalism students thinking, reporting, and writing across media platforms. Despite the skepticism first met by both faculty and students as to a
converged curriculum, they have found that students’ journalistic skills greatly increase over the course of a semester.

Even Medill, Northwestern University’s School of Journalism (Claussen, 2008), recognized the need for a fully converged curriculum. In 2006, Dean Lavine unveiled a new strategic plan for a converged curriculum “between the journalism and Integrated Marketing Communications programs” (Kwan, 2006). As quoted in Kwan’s article, Dean Lavine said, “In a world of abundant choice for consumers and fierce competition for their time, journalists need to learn how to reach their audience with compelling stories and presentation, while marketers and communications students must understand how to think and write with the clarity of journalists” (n.p.). In this regard, Medill provides a curriculum that is both relevant for a digital media marketplace and not afraid to take chances. Although not everyone was on board with this change in pedagogy (Claussen, 2008), it did address a way of teaching that according to Dean Lavine was not working given today’s technological innovations and changes in communicating news and information to audiences.

Based on readership surveys, newspapers already have recognized that construction of the news includes a strategy that acknowledges marketing and advertising to audiences (Claussen, 2008). It is unrealistic to still follow the assumption that the news business is not interwoven with marketing and advertising. Yet if this is the case, why then is this not addressed in curriculum that prepares graduates to communicate and prosper in the present and future digital media culture? An integrated curriculum such as that at Medill’s encompasses, for the first year, the traditional introductory mass communication survey class with content updated to focus on media in the 21st century; reporting and writing across all media platforms; and multimedia storytelling that includes an introduction to Web-based journalism and media. Curriculum in the second year includes courses on enterprise reporting in diverse communities and media presentation. During the third year, curriculum includes storytelling, media law and ethics, and a journalism residency. Starting with students’ second year, there is a variety of elective classes to choose from such as Literary Journalism, Journalism of Empathy, Documentary, Legal Journalism, Business Journalism, Environmental Journalism, Health and Science Journalism, Military and the Press, Investigative Journalism, Building Interactive Communities, Ad Creativity and Innovation, and Direct and Database Marketing.

Another critique of present curricula (Schaffer, 2006) considers, if we require students to take a whole semester on the history of journalism, why curriculum does not reflect on the future of journalism. By revising the core classes that most journalism and mass communication students take on the social and historical implications of the mass media, to a course that examines media in the 21st century such as at Medill, students are better equipped with the knowledge of media’s place in society and how integration occurs. Although the curriculum technically is considered converged, the marketing, public relations, and advertising portion mostly is elective-based. Still, all journalism and mass communications students are provided with a curriculum that more realistically meets the demands of a technologically changing digital and media driven economy. So,
although many have barked at the audacity of such a curriculum, Claussen (2008) remarked in a recent diatribe in *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, “the Medill 2020 curriculum has sold out journalism how, exactly?” (p. 340).

**MEDIA CONVERGENCE IN THE INDUSTRY**

Although still in its formative stage, convergence in the news and media industries continues. The late 1990s and early 2000s may have been a period of change for those in the journalism and media industries, and the belief by many is that the present and future news and media products are beholden to modern technology. However, it is not just about creating new forms of content, it is also about new ways to invest and develop news and information so that audiences are engaged and interested in what news and media organizations provide.

Journalism and mass communication education should not only be concerned with traditional print and broadcast journalism. Nowadays, the entire industry is converged, so that entails equipping students with a well-rounded education that focuses on developing writing and storytelling skills, coupled with critical thinking, visual literacy skills, as well as how to package stories for various media outlets and an emphasis on strong professional values. For example, Garrison’s (2003) observations and interviews of the News Center that housed Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com) with *The Tampa Tribune* and WFLA-TV revealed a fully integrated newsroom. This four-story center was built to house the staff of all three news media and to foster interaction and coordination between the staff. Five dominant educational themes emerged concerning convergence and its place in curriculum:

1. Students need to be well versed at one task or skill, yet be able to execute others well, also.
2. Writing and reporting skills are vital regardless of platform
3. Students need to be able to adapt to different platforms.
4. Good communication skills are essential
5. Students need experience working in a converged newsroom, such as an internship.

Following Garrison’s (2003) case study, Kraeplin and Criado’s (2005) survey of newspaper and television professionals and educators also found that new hires typically have a range of convergence skills. Both professionals and educators agreed they should equip students with an education that prepares students conceptually, as well as giving them the skills required to blend together a mixture of media formats within a digital environment. Likewise, Lepre and Bleske’s (2005) survey of magazine editors and educators found that both educators and editors agreed that the fundamentals of writing, reporting, and editing skills are important. Still, some discrepancy exists between what editors think new hires should have compared to what educators said they should have. Editors reported that they look at the overall package of a new hire, such as a well-rounded education, interpersonal skills, clerical skills, and evidence of eagerness and enthusiasm.
during the job interview. In contrast, educators responded that magazine courses and portfolios were important, along with prior knowledge about the magazine before going to the interview; editors did not even mention portfolios. Lepre and Bleske suggest faculty rate these classes higher because these are the classes they teach, and are less likely to admit that an English major is just as likely to be hired because he or she has a well-rounded education. Magazine editors also reported that they can always teach a new hire about the magazine industry, but they cannot teach a person how to write or think creatively.

More recently, Huang et al. (2006) conducted a national survey of college professors, news professionals, and news editors to determine how best to teach media convergence when journalism and mass communication programs typically have separate majors—print, broadcast, photo—and media jobs are more demanding. Respondents also indicated that teaching the fundamental skills of critical thinking and writing are necessary, along with technology. Although Huang et al. found a number of journalism and mass communication programs have redesigned their curriculum or developed new courses to embrace media convergence, most still need work when it comes to providing students with technology skills. Professors also reported difficulty staying up to date with technology while also teaching and conducting research. Team teaching was one approach used to circumvent the challenges faced by faculty no longer working in the industry and therefore outdated when it comes to technical skills. Overall, Huang et al. suggest that “A balanced curriculum can help students better gather, produce, edit, and deliver quality news; more creatively and professionally materialize their ideas; and make them better fit into the market, especially in an economic downturn” (p. 255). That being said, technology should not dominate the curriculum; students from all sequences would benefit from both reporting and technology skills regardless of the deliverable.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CHALLENGES TO A CONVERGED CURRICULUM

Although educators have long disagreed on the core concepts of what to teach (Hansen, 2005), the struggle gets more difficult with each “new” media technology (Dennis, 2003; Pavlik, 2003). According to Hansen, “The very terms ‘values’ and ‘competencies’ suggest that journalism educators may be trying to locate this balance between habits of mind and skill acquisition that could resolve some of the historic ambiguity of purpose in journalism education” (p. 131). To say this is a challenge is to undermine the concerns educators and industry professionals face. Yet, why is it easier for professionals to adapt to change than educators? My guess: profits. The industry is driven by the marketplace; those who do not adapt cease to exist. This same philosophy does not transcend as easily to faculty, or at least a decade ago did not. Times are changing, particularly when technological innovation occurs at a quicker pace and the learning curve between student and teacher is closing. It used to be that students entered college knowing little or nothing as to technology and the devices used to construct media messages. Now however, faculty often have to work twice as hard to
EXPLORATIONS IN MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

stay one step ahead of incoming students. Surprisingly, there are still faculty unwilling to acknowledge that what we teach and how we teach our students may not fit with the technological advancements of the present and future media and information culture.

According to Pavlik (2003), “Our students have changed dramatically, in terms of who they are, how they use media and how they have been prepared prior to entering college or graduate school. Their expectations and needs are also quite different. But we in the education field have done little to adapt our educational system to this new set of circumstances and requirements” (p. 315). Newer technologies will continue to enter the marketplace; with that in mind the basics still apply: sound critical, analytical reporting and writing skills, coupled with presentation and technology skills. Therefore, journalism and mass communication education demands curriculum that fosters a learning environment that exposes students to a wide spectrum of media literacy and that also includes basic visual and technology literacy skills so that students will be more than competent when it comes to creating and executing sophisticated media products. Technology changes rapidly, so although it is important to expose students to the latest trends and techniques used by the media, it is unrealistic to expose students and even faculty to all the never-ending technological advances in delivery methods and presentation styles.

In journalism and mass communication education the criticism has been that too much emphasis is on teaching job skills and less on the conceptual and practical implications (Thompson & Wassmuth, 2001). One possibility entails an integration of conceptual and theoretical practices with technology so that students receive a better understanding not only of how to use the technology properly, but also of the reasons why a particular technological tool is being used (Dickson & Brandon, 2000; Garrison, 2003; Huang et al., 2006). Consider this: Students will be better prepared if they are taught both the visual concepts related to desktop publishing as well as the history behind desktop publishing, what the technology is capable of doing, how it differs from previous methods, and how it functions in the marketplace. Another approach is to explain how best to use Flash versus html and CSS when designing a nonlinear story for the Web; or how to use a camera to evoke a mood or properly light a subject; or how best to optimize images for display on a Web site; as well as how to work with color and type so it renders correctly on a computer screen or television set. In this way, students are provided with a broad understanding of media literacy and how it relates to the present digital media culture.

Even though most students are familiar with a lot of technology, when probed, often times they are limited to the basics—if that—and have very little experience with advanced technology. For example, many students know the basic Internet applications such as a web browser or e-mail application, search engine, MySpace.com, or word processing program such as Microsoft Word, but have limited to no experience with advanced applications such as Flash, Photoshop, or InDesign. Students may communicate using MySpace.com, but to be successful upon graduation they must learn how to construct messages appropriate for this vehicle. They also must learn that MySpace.com is a preconstructed
Web site that allows the user to upload information and customize it to fit user preferences, compared with Dreamweaver, which is an application that allows the user to build a Web site entirely from scratch. The underlying difference is that the user of MySpace.com is literate in technological skills, whereas the user of Dreamweaver is proficient in Web design and has a greater understanding of the complexities of building a Web site as well as how best to communicate a message to an audience using this particular delivery method and presentation format. For the journalism and mass communication student, the difference between a basic understanding of Web applications and advanced delivery methods and presentation techniques is a greater understanding of technology and the power they have over technology to disseminate content. This knowledge will help students execute their tasks more effectively and with a critical awareness they would not have if they were just taught how to use the technology.

Despite the merger of skill sets, many journalism and mass communication curricula lack theoretical or philosophical content related to visual literacy for majors in print journalism, advertising, photography, and television. Even if the news article is only text, the way it is presented on the web page lends to visual meaning, just as with a nonverbal message such as a map or illustration. Then, there is also the combination of a television newswoman talking with a graphic of the crime scene positioned off to the side while they report on the news event shown in the graphic, sometimes text under the graphic for contextual information. Yet, in most journalism and mass communication curricula, visual communication remains narrowly defined.

Theories and methods for analyzing the increasingly ubiquitous juxtapositions of electronic and photographic images and words jostling across the television screen, [computer or mobile,] are still not central concern for most academic programs. We can no longer afford to pretend that the study of television news is separable from the study of photographic image making, or that the study of advertising occupies a separate ‘track’ from the study of visual representation. The study and practice of communication can no longer be conceived in technologically specific terms, with different people learning different technical skills to perform different media functions. (Griffin, 1991, p. 15)

The point I am getting at is that visuals are inextricably linked with text, “in fact, messages in any media format belong to the phenomena of both language and images” (Schamber, 1991, p. 16). Therefore, journalism and mass communication curricula will benefit from an integration of visual literacy in all majors, not just photojournalism or advertising design. Once students are equipped with the ability to read visual messages, they have a better understanding for the arrangement or relationship of elements. In this way, students come to appreciate how both words and visuals work together to form a whole message. Writing visually encompasses composing visual messages starting with an idea or concept, collecting and organizing elements, and using tools to manipulate parts of the message. “Tools” does not necessarily equate to the computer. Space is a tool used to a highlight a message on a crowded page, or a border is tool that may
be used to frame a message, just as a computer is a tool that may be used to assemble a message. Evaluation includes the ability to analyze and criticize the visual product. It is not enough to say, “the painting is nice,” or “I like this photo.” Students need to be able to think about what they are looking at and outwardly express what makes them say, “the painting is nice.” Is it the overall use of space, arrangement of the elements, color scheme, and so forth, that appeal to me? So whether assembling a newscast, putting together a story for the Web, or putting a message together for a social networking site, visual skills are essential in communicating and executing messages. In a curriculum that takes this approach, students will understand the techniques used to communicate both verbally and visually, will have a better appreciation for the structure and composition of the messages they produce, and will be able to evaluate media messages.

Maybe then, what journalism and mass communication education needs is a convergence of all of the above skills—a curriculum that makes sense of all media used and teaches how to analyze, interpret, and produce media for desired outcomes. A curriculum such as this consolidates all the different aspects of literacy that correspond with the convergence of text, sound, visuals, interactivity, and moving images so that students have the ability to access, analyze, and evaluate media messages for desired outcomes in a wide variety of forms. This entails devising a curriculum that provides students with the ability to interpret and understand the nature of today’s news and media: how it functions in society, including emotional and moral implications, the techniques used to construct messages; commercial, ideological and political implications; aesthetic codes; and a general understanding of each media’s industry (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1992; Christ & Potter, 1998; Messaris, 1998; Potter, 2001; Schamber, 1991; Tyner, 1998). This same curriculum also must address critical thinking, problem solving, ethics, research, reading and writing, and math skills, as well as reinforce the core concepts of journalism—relying on trustworthy sources; fact-checking; fair, accurate, and objective reporting; asking tough questions; and having high ethical standards. It must instill professionalism and stress the importance of interaction between reporters, photographers, designers, videographers, advertisers, marketers, and so on, so that a collegial environment prevails (Deuze, 2001, 2004; Pavlik, 2003; Pavlik, Morgan, & Henderson, 2001).

Herein lies the challenge. A curriculum that addresses the competencies outlined here is a shift in pedagogy from concentrations or majors along media types to content specialization such as writing or visual; and, within these areas of specialization, focus on the types of news concentrations such as health, environmental, public affairs, business and finance, arts, and so forth (Pasados, 2000; Schaffer, 2006; Sundar, 2003). It might just be that the best way to approach curriculum is to break down previous walls that have hindered crossover in what we do (Barnhurst, 1991; Dennis, 2003; Griffin, 1991; Heller, 1991; Pasados, 2000; Pavlik, 2003; Pryor, 2003). Although some of these ideas have been incorporated into existing curricula, the biggest change yet to occur is a shift from concentrations or majors along media types to content specialization. For this to occur effectively, there needs to be synergy among faculty. This entails
faculty with a good rapport and coordination of efforts, as well as a willingness to be open to change, getting past doing things the way they used to be, and willing to embrace the possibility that there might be a new way to do things. We might call this an integrated learning experience.

It is not enough that educators are willing to teach these media tools in the classroom. Educators also need to be up to date on the media tools and how to use them before they get into the classroom (Pavlik, 2003). That being said, administrators and institutions also must be willing to provided the necessary resources for educators willing to sustain this education in the classroom (Seelig, 2007). This entails a commitment of the proper resources to support a converged curriculum, such as updating technological hardware and software, as well as infrastructure and proper training and workshops to update both educators and students with the latest media tools. For those educators who do teach the latest media technology, there needs to be a mechanism in place that provides them with the time to continually train. Recognizing that there are limitations—educators are not going to be able to do it all—educators must also critically evaluate the primary media tools necessary to create media products and hone in on these tools, while only exposing students to secondary media tools so that they have a basic understanding of what they are and how they are used to create various media products.

But as Thorson (2005) points out, changing the educational culture is half the battle; what about changing the relationship between educators and the media industry so that we are not merely training their workforce? For this reason, it is necessary to facilitate more interaction between educators and industry professionals so that there are open lines of communication. These changes are already in the industry. Companies like CNN, Bloomberg, and The Tribune Company have created newsrooms that cross all media boundaries. “Reporters gather the news using a variety of media acquisition tools and the news is then produced for distribution via a variety of distribution channels, including print, broadcast and Internet” (Pavlik et al., 2001, p. 19).

Educators also need to be mindful of jumping to incorporate emerging media in the classroom without a real plan. It is one thing to say you teach new media, it is another to understand why you are doing it and how you are going about it. That means planning curriculum so that you are not playing catch-up every 2 to 3 years as newer technologies enter the marketplace. Not all technologies will find their place in the marketplace, which means it is important to have a general understanding of the prevailing technologies so that they fit in the existing curriculum. Curriculum that is designed with flexibility also will allow for the latest trends and techniques to be integrated in the classroom. A curriculum that is too rigid will make students feel that educators are not doing their best to teach. That being said, curriculum still needs the fundamental classes on literacy and technology, as well as room in education for experimentation. According to a survey of photo editors and photo managers (Seelig, 2007), sophisticated tools will only get you so far, so students still need a trained eye and a good idea; therefore, if students are challenged to think creatively and think of different ways to communicate, quite possibly they will stand out.
Clearly, teaching journalism and mass communication in the present media culture is a pedagogical challenge. Educators need to refine and possibly reinvent pedagogical strategies that incorporate the convergence of theory and practice of all matters relating to journalism and mass communication. It is not enough to teach how to use technology. Regardless of everything else mentioned, students must learn to be good communicators (Finucane, 2006). Thus, a successful curriculum will teach writing and editing and how to construct informative content that is both interesting and reliable. It also will encourage students to be willing to adapt to change (Finucane, 2006). Students also must understand that visual literacy is not in competition with verbal language; rather, if executed well, they are complementary (Messaris, 1998).

Sometimes it is difficult to provide a journalism and mass communication curriculum that is all things to all students. Therefore, the more students know and are exposed to in a converged curriculum the better prepared they will be. The biggest challenge is accepting “that the reporting skills and values useful in print are useful in all media and that all the ‘rules’ stay the same whether the story is on paper or on screen” (Finucane, 2006, pp. 60–61). There also is the challenge of incorporating media tools into the curriculum in such a way that students understand how they may be applied to reach a desirable outcome (Deuze, 2004). In the past, technology dominated course structure (Barnhurst, 1991), but what educators need to demonstrate to students is when it is appropriate to use a particular media channel and what the outcome might be depending on the media tool used (Deuze, 2004; Kraeplin & Criado, 2006). When all is said and done, students need to come away with “coherence among their various learning experiences” (Chen, 2003, p. 310).

References


