

EJC Speech on the Future of Journalism Education

As of 6/4/12

First, let me congratulate the European Journalism Centre on its 20th anniversary.

I'm honored and thrilled to have been invited to give the keynote address this afternoon.

Two years ago, at the journalism session at the Amsterdam Picnic Conference, which was hosted by the EJC, I gave a presentation titled the "Future of Journalism." It was a pretty lofty title for a 45-minute session. And because it was the last session, I stood in the way of the participants getting to the bar. I'm thankful I don't have that challenge today.

Instead, I'm challenged to share my thoughts about the "Future of Journalism Education."

Obviously, I believe there is a future.

However, it will be a very different and difficult future, a future that is full of innovation and creative disruption.

And, I believe, we will see an **evolution and uncoupling** between the value of a journalism **education** and a journalism **degree**.

This has both opportunities and challenges for journalism training organizations **AND, MORE IMPORTANT, MEDIA COMPANIES**

— • — The problem with any discussion that starts with a title of "The Future of..." is whose **future** are we talking about?

When we think about the future, there's not a single **future**.

The future for a 20-year-old is clearly very different than my future. So we need to make sure we understand the “lens” each of us brings when looking at what’s next, when trying to find the future.

When thinking about the **future of journalism education** remember *it is a future that is linked* to the **future of journalism** itself.

Let me frame that issue this way:

- The news business model is still, mostly, broken
- Journalism is still **under** valued
- Journalists are still being displaced. Or they have the wrong skills to succeed in the future.

Where does this leave us?

It is my belief, as I said two years ago, that we are ‘de-evolving’ the journalism ecosystem, as the **connection** between the *economic model of journalism* and the *act of journalism* weakens.

As we watch this painful **uncoupling**, we need to ask ourselves some fundamental questions:

- What journalism values will remain at the end of the day, after this period of turmoil?
- What journalism values will matter to your community, to the citizens of the world?

At the end of my 2010 presentation, I talked about how I saw the *future of journalism* was **directly tied** to the *future of journalism education*, and, by extension, journalism training.

More than ever, I believe the **future of journalism** and the **future of journalism education** are bound together. Each is caught within the other’s vortex, both spinning within today’s turmoil of change.

The disruption in the economic models of news organizations, rippling out from the United States to Europe and elsewhere, is well documented.

The media industry missed the inflection point when things started to change more than 20 years ago. Media companies have been disrupted by innovation created by others, by new organizations and technology companies.

The media industry did not respond well to these disruptive technologies that took away the economic foundation upon which journalism depended.

The industry, as a whole, did not create innovations to serve its audiences and non-customers.

The industry missed the opportunity to make changes that would allow them to adapt to the changing world.

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It is important to note that **news is NOT less important** today than it has been in the past.

It is not that news is being consumed less.

In fact, news consumption, driven by new technologies such as tablets and smart phones is increasing, according to the Pew Research Centers.

However, the technology companies, the big five [Google, Facebook, AOL, Microsoft and Yahoo] capture **68%** of all the U.S. digital display advertising dollars. By 2015, Facebook alone is predicted to capture 1 out of every five online ads sold.

You all probably know this. Or know most of it.

I think journalism education is at its own inflection point, its own critical moment.

No matter if you are a educator, school administration, run a training center or are just interested in journalism, this is a critical time for journalism education, as critical as it was for media industry 20 years ago.

EVERYONE has a stake in the quality of journalism education and training.

Just as EVERYONE has a stake in the quality of journalism.

Without a robust future for journalism education, it is harder to see a robust future for journalism.

And that's bad for democracy and for citizens who depend on fair and accurate information.

We have learned that media companies cannot **cut** their way out of the disruption in the economics models.

Journalism education **cannot teach** its way to the future.

Just as media companies needed to innovate, so must journalism education.

We need to innovate inside the classroom with new forms of teaching.

We need to innovate to make getting a journalism education easier.

Frankly, it is unfair to pick on just *journalism* education. The turmoil is underway across **educational** institutions, and that includes non-profit and for-profit schools.

It is widespread.

It is happening at the grade school level, in high school and at colleges and universities.

Education is being disrupted by the same technology innovation that turned the media business upside down and inside out.

Of course, I know that the academy has multiple purposes.

There's research and scholarship.

There's socialization, helping students operate independently.

And then there's the formal education and training of students.

It is this student education and training where I see the potential for the biggest disruptions.

This is a challenge that should matter to everyone in the room today – teachers of journalism and those who work and lead journalism-based training organizations. And those who work in the media.

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Let me talk a little about disruptive innovation. I'm sure that many of you have read or are aware of the work of Clayton Christensen on how companies respond to change and innovation.

I first read his book, *The Innovator's Dilemma*, while a vice president at Central Newspapers in Phoenix, Arizona. I was responsible for bring new technologies into the company – from pagination to online services.

There was one aspect of Christensen's work that I seized upon as I tried to make the case for why the company needed to aggressively make *radical* changes.

Christensen forces you to think about “**what is your business?**” and “**who are your customers?**”

And, more importantly, “who are your **non-customers.**”

It helped me push the idea that we weren't in the newspaper business but rather in the news or information business. That doesn't sound too radical today, but 20 years ago this was wild thinking.

I loved his story in the book about the disk drive makers, the companies who created devices for mainframe and micro computers, the big machines. One of these companies, Winchester, had a very successful business.

They made disk drives. They were in the disk drive business.

Or so they thought.

When the personal computer came along, it needed disk drives – or rather, it needed storage space. Winchester looked at the PC and didn't see a need to serve these non-customers. Rather they were too busy listening to their existing customers – such as Digital Equipment Corporation or Control Data. They didn't see they were really in the “storage” solution business.

Apple and other PC makers had a storage problem.

But the disk drive companies weren't able to see how disruptive the personal computer was going to be to their existing business.

If they had seen that they were in the storage business, companies such as Winchester might be alive today.

This disruption by innovators and other forces is what the “education industry” faces today.

One possible future from all of this disruption is the **unbundling** of a journalism *education from* a journalism *degree*.

Think about the **unbundling** of news and information from the traditional mass media delivery methods, such as a newspaper or television broadcast.

In the past, the economic value these delivery methods provided was the distribution of a scarce product, the news.

It was a terrific business.

In much the same way that there was an economic model based on scarcity in getting the news, there's a societal and economic model based on the scarcity in getting an education and degree.

A college degree, because it is offered to a limited number of individuals, provides a means to differentiate applicants in the hiring process. While there was the assumption that the journalism degree meant a quality journalism education, there was no guarantee.

There was scarcity – not every school had a journalism program and fewer schools had an accredited program. These programs are based on a delivery method rooted in “custodial education,” which is teacher-focused.

If you are a teacher-focused institution, you are less likely to disrupt your core audience, which is the **faculty**.

This is also true for journalism training organizations that are forced to limit the amount of training based on costs or seats in a seminar room.

However, technology, mostly the Internet, is changing the how we learn.

Technology is providing new forms of teaching and new ways of delivering an effective educational experience.

Technology will create a student-focused culture, in much the same way technology has created a more customer-focused media industry.

In much the same way that news became available whenever a reader/viewer/user wanted it via online and mobile devices, so will education. Students can go to school [or go back to school] online without having to really go anywhere.

In recent years there has been lots written about the coming disruption in education. Today, those promises of change are starting to whip around universities and colleges the same way they started battering media companies 20 years ago.

The constraints of today's journalism education system do not reward innovation.

They provide students with *less* opportunity to get the **best** education and instead force students to pick courses based on the available seats in "classrooms" and not from the best teachers in the world.

There are also economic challenges facing the academy: less funding from traditional sources and less public support.

There are academic challenges: the world is changing faster than the people who are supposed to teach students can learn themselves.

And while there's always been a disconnect between the media industry and academic community, the fault lines, I believe, have widened.

To look at the question about the value of a journalism degree I surveyed more than 1,975 professionals and professors.

About 42% of the respondents were from the academic community.

About 34% were from the media organizations and about 11% were independent or freelance workers. The rest were students.

When asked about how vital a journalism **DEGREE** is in understanding the *value of journalism*, **95%** of academics said it was “**very to extremely important.**”

Slightly more than half, 56% of professionals said very to extremely important.

This is a gap of almost 40 points.

When questioned about the value of a DEGREE when it came to equipping students with the **skills** or abilities in news gathering, editing and presenting the news, the gap is just as wide:

- **96%** of academics said that a degree was very to extremely important to learning skills
- **59%** of professional said very to extremely important.

We’ve known for a while there’s been a difference of opinion about the value of a journalism degree. Today, the gap looks more like a canyon.

I do NOT suggest that this survey says that a degree is unimportant. Rather, it reflects an opportunity for the academy to change.

My friend at the Knight Foundation, Eric Newton, refers to the “symphony of slowness” to change at journalism schools that hurts both students and society.

I agree.

And so do our survey respondents.

Half of the professionals said journalism education is not keeping up with industry changes. That isn't shocking, as there has always been a feeling in the professional ranks that the academy isn't aware of what's going on in the 'real world.'

However, about a third of academics who responded also agreed that journalism education isn't keeping up.

At Poynter I hear from scores of teachers who are frustrated with the situation – the lack of support to change what is being taught and their lack of skills to equip students for today's media world.

Still, that leaves me wondering about the remaining two-thirds who believe that the academy is keeping up with the changes in the industry. Frankly, I'm not sure the media industry is keeping up.

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What will it take for educational institutions to deal with the disruptive innovation that is here today and will get more challenging in the future?

What this means is we need to look for new ways to teach the values and skills of journalism so they are relevant to today's media world.

Newton, in his recent speech before a conference of journalism educators, suggested four radical reforms for journalism and communication education:

1. *Innovate. Create both new uses of software and new software itself.*
2. *Teach open, collaborative methods. No longer must students be lone wolf reporters or cogs in a company wheel.*
3. *Connect to the whole university. This can mean team-teaching a science journalism class with actual scientists.*
4. *Expand their role as community content providers. University hospitals save lives. University law clinics take cases to the Supreme Court. University news labs can reveal truths that help us right wrongs.*

Eric has some good ideas. However, perhaps we aren't being bold enough.

Can we imagine even more innovation and new ways of teaching journalism?

What do our 'customers' really want? More important, what do our non-customers want?

There's that word again: **non-customers**. Let me explore that a bit as I bring us back to the future.

Ten years ago I was appointed the presidential scholar of The Poynter Institute. My task was to look at the intersection of technology, journalism and training.

At that time, despite the shocks caused by 9-11, Poynter was in an enviable position as the country's leading journalism training institute. In 2003, we offered 50 seminars at our St. Petersburg, Florida, campus. About 1,800 participants spent three to five days at Poynter studying writing, reporting, visual journalism, leadership, management and online.

We served, at best, one percent of the potential journalists at that time.

One percent! That's it.

Did that mean that the other 99% didn't want training? I doubt it.

It did mean that for many organizations, training was an expense they didn't want to incur. For others it was a matter of finding the time to be away from the office. And then were the folks who couldn't find any seminars that fit their needs.

Even with 50 seminars, there are lots of topics a training center didn't cover.

These folks – the 99% were our non-customers.

And, despite its high-quality training, Poynter was at risk of being disrupted by the very technology that was disrupting the industry it served – the Web.

Our non-customers started finding other ways to learn journalism without having to travel to Poynter.

Fortunately, thanks in part to a grant from the Knight Foundation, Poynter was able to create its own disruptive engine with its e-learning site, News University.

We did not create Poynter Distance Training. We did not replicate the Poynter seminar experience via e-learning. Rather we created something that was different, while upholding the same journalistic standards of Poynter.

We looked at what our non-customers **wanted** and **needed**.

We looked at ways to innovate **what** we taught.

And we looked at how to innovate the **way** we taught.

While this kind of change is not without risk, in the end, we were able to reach more non-customers and make them into customers than if we had tried to recreate seminars online.

This is what journalism education programs need to do. Not just at universities, but all journalism education programs.

It is an opportunity and challenge for journalism training institution to re-imagine the way they reach their audience, the way they teach their customers and the way they measure success.

We need to encourage more ways of teaching, using all of potential delivery means possible – lecture, video, online, self-study and guided learning.

It is an opportunity and challenge for journalism training institution to re-imagine the way they reach their audience, the way they teach their customers and the way they measure success.

One innovative example is the program sponsored by the EJC and taught by Poynter to students in four countries – The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland.

It was a hybrid program that blended online material with onsite training and mentoring.

We saw an 11 to 27 percent increase in the self-reported abilities from these participants, with more than 90% saying that half to all of the content was useful.

This form of training works.

We recently completed a program called an Introduction to Journalism. We taught it via our e-learning methods and platform to

three U.S. schools. Each of the Poynter faculty members shared his or her expertise in this 16-week program.

While most of the program was online, one school, Missouri State University, provided mentoring or face time to the students during the 16-week program. Missouri State also taught the same subjects via the traditional classroom method.

We tested both groups, the online and the classroom students before the term began and after the course work was finished.

The e-learning group, with its hybrid approach, learned as well if not better than MSU classroom groups.

This form of education works.

Don't take our word for it.

A new study by a non-profit think tank, Ithaka S+R, compared two versions of an introductory statistics course, one taught face to face by professors and one mostly taught online. The online module had only an hour a week of face time.

Researchers found these students fared equally well in both formats on every measure of learning.

The only difference: The online group appeared to learn faster.

These new ways of teaching are disrupting the education industry.

New research about the effectiveness of online teaching is disrupting the view that e-learning is somehow less effective and less engaging than classroom education.

The students raised online get it. The students raised on e-learning get it. **More than third of U.S. college students are currently enrolled in an e-learning course.** That number will keep growing.

Less than two weeks ago, a new report by the U.S. Department of Education showed about **53% of public school districts** allowed high school students to enroll in distance learning courses. During this academic year, about 1.3 million of them used distance learning, compared to only 300,000 five years earlier.

Even students who haven't taken a formal online course are using informal e-learning, such as the thousands of video tutorials on hundreds of subjects on YouTube. These folks get it.

There are even new businesses developing around innovative ways of teaching, such as the Khan Academy.

Today's students and even young adults will come to expect education that is innovative.

These students will come to expect education that is **NOT** custodial.

And it doesn't stop with schools.

We also know there's growing interest in learning journalism skills – just look at the growth of Poynter's NewsU with its 218,000 registered users.

Our strongest growing audience is among individuals who want to learn journalism skills for their own benefit or because it will help them do better at their jobs. Jobs that aren't in the media industry.

The world is full of people who want to write better, who want to tell stories better, who want to share their experiences. These are potential journalists, whether they have a degree or not.

These folks are current **“non-customers.”**

That's a lot of people and that's an opportunity for us, for everyone who wants to teach others the craft and values of journalism.

If we teach these individuals not only will they have better skills, but they will have a better understanding of importance of that journalism has within society.

And that's good for everyone.

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When it comes to the future of journalism and journalism education, how important is a journalism **degree when it comes to getting a job?**

Again, looking at our survey, there's a difference between what our professionals say and what the professors say:

- 54% of the academics say a journalism degree is very to extremely important when it comes to getting hired.
- Only 38% of professionals say the same, with only 33% of senior managers agreeing that a degree is very to extremely important when it comes to getting a job.

Maybe a journalism degree isn't the endgame.

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If we **unbundle** the degree from the education, how do employers know whether their new hires have the skills needed to do the job?

I contend there are other ways to measure the skills competency.

First, let's see the work.

Not just traditional clips or tapes. Today, any journalism student looking for work who doesn't have a rich portfolio of stories and other forms of published, public journalism like a blog or a website isn't trying. And if they aren't trying, why would you want to hire them?

Providing an opportunity for students to create this body of work could be part of the 'teaching hospital' method in educating and training journalists that Eric Newton suggests.

However, I see big differences between medical education and journalism education.

There are differences in approach and in the experience of the faculty. Many medical educators have practical experience. Many journalism educators often do not.

If the concept of a 'teaching hospital' is to work for journalism, then we need to upgrade the faculty. And invest in research and development, which is something else university hospitals do. I'm talking about practical research, not just academic exploration.

My **second idea** in verifying a journalism education is with '**digital badges.**' These are badges that represent skills or other competences.

The MacArthur Foundation, a supporter of this educational concept, says a digital badge could be a "*validated indicator of accomplishment, skill or interest.*"

The University of California at Davis sustainable-agriculture program is built upon digital badges that measure **core competencies** rather than the standard three-credit courses.

Digital journalism education badges could not only show formal training but capture the informal learning, such as workshops attended, awards won, special projects completed.

This is about mastery of skills rather than specific classroom work. And it goes beyond a portfolio of work.

This is a radical, disruptive, innovative concept.

The badge movement is based on the idea that people should have a way to gather useful, verifiable evidence of everything they have learned, not just that they sat through a class at a college.

Kevin Carey, an analyst at Education Sector, wrote about digital badges recently in The Chronicle of Higher Education:

Quote "...the standard college transcript looks like a sad and archaic thing. Its considerable value is not based on the information it provides, which is paltry. What does a letter grade in a course often described only by a combination of a generic department label and an arbitrary number [e.g. Econ 302] really mean? Nobody knows, which is why accredited colleges often don't trust that information for the purpose of credit transfer..."
End quote

I believe the digital badge movement needs to be nurtured and promoted.

More important and immediate, journalism training organizations should come together and embrace this new way of rewarding participation in quality education, regardless of how and where it is received.

I hope that all of the world's journalism training organizations can find a way to help participants share their accomplishments, regardless of who provided the training.

PAUSE/CONCLUSION/BIG FINISH

As I said early, the future of journalism matters to the future of our democracies. Without quality journalism, the quality of our society will diminish.

Good journalism supports democracy and builds healthy communities.

What's at risk today is some of the fabric that ties society together.

We need more people 'schooled' in journalism, not fewer.

We need more ways to instill the values of good journalism regardless of the platform or medium.

It shouldn't matter whether you work for a company or for yourself.

Journalism education is at an inflection point. We are at the point at which we need true educational innovation. Some will do this. Others will be left behind.

Some institutions will fail. Some schools will close their journalism programs. Just as some newspapers will go out of business.

This is not the time to say "we have always done it that way."

This is the time to disrupt everything.

We need to seize the future.

Thank you for listening.

I hope I have sparked some ideas for our upcoming panel discussion.