

THE EXPLOSIVE GROWTH of Journalism E-LEARNING

A NewsU and Poynter Institute for Media Studies Report

THE JOURNALISM TRAINING AT NEWS UNIVERSITY WORKS.

OVERVIEW

The growing reach of the Internet has changed the nature of job training and career development. Training no longer is limited to in-person contact, either by trainers coming onsite or by managers and employees traveling to seminars and conferences.

The Internet is increasingly popular as a delivery system for training - through Webinars, online courses that use instructors, Webcasts and readings, as well as interaction among participants in discussion groups. In addition, many companies such as Cold Stone Creamery, Cisco Systems Inc., and Canon Inc., are turning to online training games on corporate Web sites.

Those in the media industry are also embracing this form of training, with thousands of journalists turning to e-learning to supplement conferences, seminars and in-house training programs. One of the fastest-growing sites for journalism e-learning is News University (www.newsu.org), a project of The Poynter Institute funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Since its official launch in April 2005, NewsU has reached a registered user base of more than 14,000 journalists, educators and students. This paper examines the dramatic growth of News University and how it is meeting the training needs of journalists around the world.

ABOUT NEWS UNIVERSITY

14,000
REGISTERED USERS

157
COUNTRIES

86%
LIKELY TO TAKE
ANOTHER COURSE



NEWSU HAS SEVERAL COURSES THAT ADDRESS DIFFERENT ISSUES THAT COME UP IN THE NEWSROOM. I HIGHLY RECOMMEND IT.



KEVIN MASON
Night editor,
Wyoming Tribune-Eagle

The demand for journalism training

Findings from a 2004 study about journalism training, conducted by Urban & Associates, Inc., for The Poynter Institute and News University, demonstrated that the media industry not only needs greater training resources but also demands it.

Industry executives also see the need for training. Approximately nine of 10 executives say staffers would benefit from more training, according to a 2002 study “Newsroom Training: Where’s the Investment?” conducted for the Council of Presidents of National Journalism Organizations, by Princeton Survey Research Associates, funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Interest in e-learning

Results of the 2004 Poynter Institute/News University study also indicated that journalists seek a range of skills and are interested in various forms of learning, including more access to e-learning. Ninety-eight percent said they would be at least somewhat interested in online training. This aligns with almost 50 percent of news executives in the 2002 study who said they would seriously consider using e-learning.

“I was personally – professionally – stunned when I saw the demand,” said Howard Finberg, director of interactive learning at The Poynter Institute and the head of News University. “My initial belief was the ‘early adopters’ would embrace a new form of training. What we learned, and what we acted upon, was that there was a larger group of journalists willing to use e-learning to supplement their training needs.”

The Poynter/NewsU findings reflect the growing trend nationwide about Internet usage and job training. According to “The Strength of Internet Ties,” a Jan. 25, 2006, Pew Internet & American Life Project report, “About 60 million Americans say the Internet has played an important or crucial role in helping them deal with at least one major life decision in the past two years.” Twenty-one million adults said the Internet played a crucial or important role in obtaining career training.

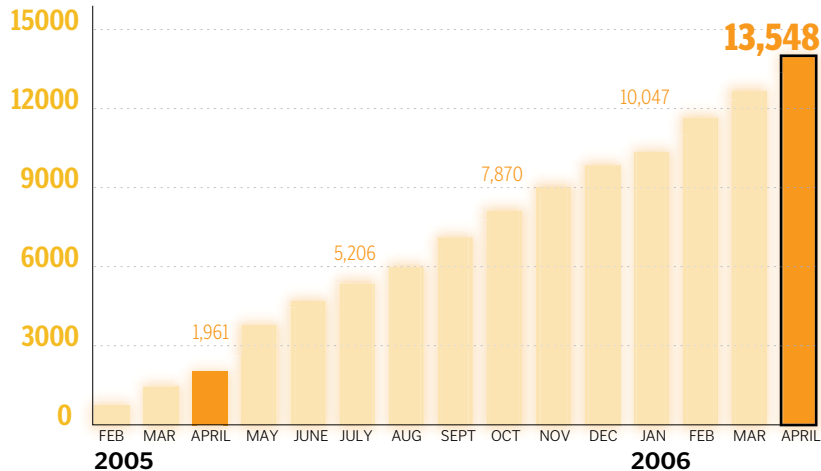
The News University approach

While this isn’t the first attempt at electronic journalism training, News University’s style of e-learning reflects the Internet revolution that is reshaping the industry and news consumers. NewsU offers a different kind of online training. It delivers training for journalists anytime, anywhere.

News University used data from the 2004 survey as the blueprint for its e-learning format. More than half of all respondents in that survey said that the most important motivator stimulating interest in e-learning is “the ability to take the course whenever your schedule allows.” Sixty percent of respondents said they would be most likely to access online training at home – either after work or on the weekends. Fifty-four percent of respondents said they would have less than one hour a day to spend with an online training program, and an additional 42 percent said they would have between 1 to 3 hours a day.

USER REGISTRATIONS

AT START OF EACH MONTH



Respondents gave equal weight to other benefits of e-learning, including: flexibility of access, technical help, one-on-one feedback and low cost.

“The challenge is for any organization to come up with courses that meet that high level of expectation. In theory, everybody thinks e-learning is a great thing. Our challenge is avoiding the disappointment when they take their first course. That isn’t just a challenge for NewsU and Poynter; that’s a challenge for every organization,” Finberg said.

“We need to make sure e-learning participants understand what to expect when training online.”

To meet this broad range of expectations, NewsU courses are developed along several key principles:

- **Tightly focused.** Rather than a 16-week course about writing better stories, NewsU courses focus on a specific craft skill such as interviewing or writing better leads.
- **Short time commitment.** A study by Learning Tree International, a national management and technology professionals training firm in El Segundo, Calif., showed that participants are unlikely to complete e-learning courses that include multiple tracks and take more than a few hours. To encourage participants to complete NewsU courses, most modules take just an hour or two to complete.
- **Engaging activities.** Interactivity is fundamental to NewsU training. Most courses allow participants to assess their skills as they go and specifically target their training needs. Courses use quizzes, games and other interactivity to teach. Participants learn from both “right” and “wrong” answers.

TOP10 NEWSROOM ROLES

REPORTER

WRITER

EDITOR

COLLEGE STUDENT

COPY EDITOR

PHOTOJOURNALIST

DESIGNER

COLLEGE TEACHER

PRODUCER

COLUMNIST

NEWSU PARTNERS

Robert C. Maynard Institute
for Journalism Education

American Society of News-
paper Editors

Society of Environmental
Journalists

Society of Professional
Journalists

Dart Center for Journalism
& Trauma

Criminal Justice Journalists

Online News Association

Asian American Journalists
Association

Freedom Forum's Newseum

American Indian Journalism
Institute

International Reporting
Project, Johns Hopkins
School of Advanced Interna-
tional Studies

Tomorrow's Workforce

National Press Photogra-
phers Association/Western
Kentucky University

Association of Health Care
Journalists

Radio-Television News
Directors Association

- **Visual appeal.** A criticism of corporate e-learning is that participants find the program “too boring.” NewsU uses bright, modern colors, strong visuals, Flash-based animations, simulations and movies that appeal to all age groups.
- **Continual resource.** Courses include links for additional readings, contacts and other resources participants can review anytime, whether to refresh their knowledge of a particular skill or to help them with an assignment on deadline.
- **Accessible with any Internet connection and platform.** No special software is needed to participate in training. NewsU's courses are Web-based and can be used on both PC and Macintosh platforms. Depending on the course, a high-speed or broadband connection might be important for the learning experience. Many of the courses require the Flash player plug-in.
- **Availability.** Most courses are self-directed. Participants can work through them at their own pace, starting and stopping on their schedule.
- **Cost-effective.** Most courses are free. Those with more faculty interaction charge a modest fee. The goal is to keep costs reasonable for both individuals and news organizations with limited resources.

Measuring NewsU's effectiveness

In its first year, News University has grown to 14,000 registered users, demonstrating the appetite for training in the industry.

“NewsU is becoming important as a means of training journalists,” said Finberg. “It changed the way e-learning is delivered; changed the nature of e-learning being delivered; and allowed for rich media presentations including video, audio and animation.”

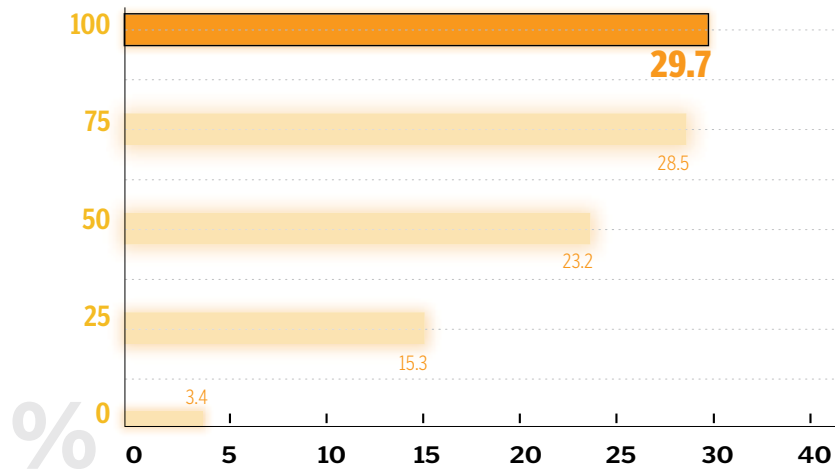
However, overall growth is just one indicator of the site's success. User evaluations show how effectively NewsU is meeting the training needs of journalists. Findings from those surveys show:

- **72%** said their course was useful to extremely useful.
- **86%** said they were likely to participate in another course.
- **81%** said half to all of the course content was helpful in their job; 30% said all of the content was helpful.
- **72%** said they would recommend NewsU to a colleague.

“We have some very happy e-learning participants,” Finberg said. “People like what we do, and there's no certificate of completion; the greater value in taking a course is to learn something.”

Consider the experiences of several registered users. Elisabeth Enloe is a second-year reporter with *The Port Arthur News* in Texas. Her first NewsU course was “The ‘Be a Reporter’ Game.” Pleased with that experience, she moved on to “On the Beat: Covering Cops and Crime.”

COURSE CONTENT THAT HELPS IN CURRENT PROFESSION



“Both were great,” Enloe said. “I took them because I wanted to improve my skills. And it’s not that I don’t want to take courses in person – I would love to. But it’s cost-prohibitive. I’m a new journalist and I’ve worked for small papers that don’t have the budget for professional development. E-learning lets me learn at home without any expense. It’s what’s available to me now.”

Matt Tullis is a reporter at *The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch*. Tullis has taken “Anatomy of a Newspaper: Understanding the Business,” “Beat Basics and Beyond” and “On the Beat: Covering Cops and Crime.”

“I found all three really beneficial,” he said. He said the training budget at his previous small-market papers was small. “You have to get up and running quickly. It’s learn what you can while you’re *doing* the job. I check periodically for new courses or others that might not necessarily fit me but might help others out. I’m not an editor but I like to help other reporters. I also teach college English – I guess I’m always trying to teach here, too.”

Partners give courses breadth of experience

For e-learning to work for journalists, there needs to be a broad base of content. To achieve that goal, NewsU has partnered with several other journalism institutions to enrich the content of its courses. These partners include: the Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education (“Anatomy of a Newspaper: Understanding the Business”); American Society of Newspaper Editors (“Community Service Photojournalism: Lessons from a Contest”); Society of Professional Journalists (“Freedom of Information”); Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma (“Journalism & Trauma”); American Indian Journalism Institute (“Reznet: Advanced Reporting”); and the Online News Association (ONA Training Project: Modules I and II).

TOP10 NEWSU COURSES

- Cleaning Your Copy
- The “Be a Reporter” Game
- The Interview
- The Lead Lab
- The Writer’s Workbench:
50 Tools You Can Use
- Math for Journalists
- Language of the Image
- Lousy Listeners:
How to Avoid Being One
- Beat Basics and Beyond
- Get Me Rewrite:
The Craft of Revision

“

THE NEWSU ONLINE COURSES HELP ME FIT LEARNING INTO MY SCHEDULE, ESPECIALLY AT 2 A.M. WHEN I CAN'T SLEEP!

”

JENNIFER MOXLEY
Bureau reporter,
News 14 Carolina

In the case of Maynard, the Oakland-based journalism management institute provides content and NewsU produces it for the Web.

“I think this is the first project on which we've partnered with anyone,” said Evelyn Hsu, program director at the Maynard Institute and a former Poynter faculty member. “‘Anatomy of a Newspaper: Understanding the Business’ is a course that was required for participants in our resident media academy, which started last year. It's a training program for relatively new managers. Our participants come from all parts of the paper. We wanted to be sure everybody had a 360-degree understanding of newspaper operations. This course runs you through a newspaper, department by department.”

The “Anatomy” course encourages participants to contact people in each department of their paper, in order for them to meet people they otherwise would not have met. It's helpful for participants to build relationships throughout the newspaper. The course filled one of the biggest requests that users had for NewsU: “Do you have a course that teaches about the newspaper in general?”

“This was something we wanted to do,” Hsu said. “We have a good Web site and we wanted to get started in e-learning. But we are a small organization with only five full-time and two part-time employees. To even outsource this to someone else would take a great deal of energy and resources. We used our own funds to commission the content, and the partnership with NewsU gave us tremendous troubleshooting help. If NewsU didn't exist, we would have had to find some other way to disseminate this information.”

The effect of e-learning on in-person training

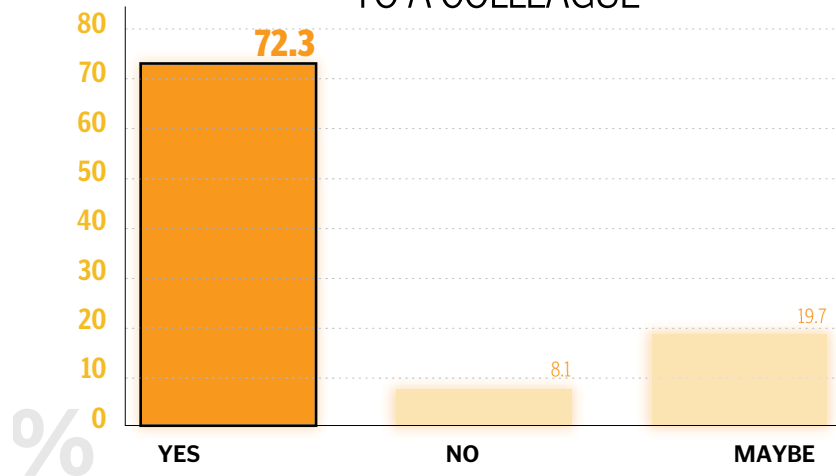
Training organizations may wonder whether e-learning diminishes the exclusivity of their programs.

“I can only speak to our experience with this: it has been very positive. It enabled us to teach and convey a great deal of information,” Hsu said. “This is pretty important information whether you're a journalist or in production or circulation. It's incumbent on everyone to understand the bigger picture. We are happy to see the information shared. Plus, as you go through the list of NewsU course titles, it said what organization is a partner. We have a credit there. There is a link to information about us. That is a benefit to us and our industry profile.”

That view is echoed by Society of Environmental Journalists executive director Beth Parke.

“I'm thinking about the commitment it takes for people to sign up for events like our conference,” Parke said. “We have an audience that would be interested in diverse training offered by experts. Online can't match the training you'd get in person, but online is adding a tremendous option for people who can't afford the time or price of the on-site conference. I'm not seeing a groundswell of people feeling it replaces training. It's not going to replace the things done well in the other mode. It adds dimensions. But

RECOMMEND NEWSU TO A COLLEAGUE



there is a market for it. And from the international market, there is a lot of demand for the kind of training that can be done online.”

Training beyond borders

Melissa G. Baggett will attest to that being true. She is on a fellowship in Macedonia, teaching English to journalists on an advanced, intermediate and basic level. Baggett uses NewsU courses in two ways.

“I have been using the ‘Anatomy of a Newspaper’ lesson in my advanced and intermediate classes to give the students an idea of how newspapers are organized,” Baggett said. “We used, particularly, the diagrams showing the layout of a newspaper along with some of the vocabulary offered in the glossary of this course. I also had the students examine the mission statements of Knight-Ridder and *The New York Times* in a discussion of the role of the media and we crafted our own mission statements for these classes using the newspapers’ missions as models.

“With my other class, we have been using the ‘Cleaning Your Copy’ lesson,” she said. “As you might imagine, for non-native speakers, copy cleaning is a bit more complicated. I have talked a little about how even though some things are fine in standard grammar, journalistically they are undesirable in most contexts. In this lesson, the most useful parts so far have been the punctuation and grammar sections, particularly as two of these students’ weaknesses are run-on sentences and noun/pronoun agreement. We will also be using the ‘Get Me Rewrite: The Craft of Revision’ lesson as I think that’s useful for anyone writing news copy.”

Baggett doesn’t rely solely on NewsU by any means, but she’s particularly drawn by the graphics.

TOP10 COUNTRIES WITH MOST REGISTERED USERS

UNITED STATES

CANADA

INDIA

AUSTRALIA

UNITED KINGDOM

CHINA

SINGAPORE

PHILIPPINES

ITALY

PORTUGAL

NEWSU OFFERS 4 TYPES OF E-LEARNING

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING MODULES.

These are the ultimate in e-learning flexibility. Users can start and stop whenever they like, progressing entirely at their own pace and going back as many times as they want to review the material. The courses make use of interactive technology, so they're more engaging than a mere collection of Web pages and links.

GROUP SEMINARS.

Participants gather in a virtual space, logging in from anywhere, day or night, over the course of several days or several weeks. A faculty member guides the group through material, moderates discussions and provides individual feedback.

E-SEMINARS.

These are live seminars or events broadcast over the Internet. Users can tune in from their computer at work or at home and ask questions in real time. Recordings of these seminars are also available as self-directed learning modules.

SEMINAR SNAPSHOTS.

These are edited highlights of seminar presentations at The Poynter Institute.

"I'm big on diagrams and the like when teaching, and how many of these lessons distill vast amounts of information into teachable bits," she said. "I could have my students do grammar exercises and study the *AP Stylebook*, but ultimately there are a few more important points that I want them to remember. I think NewsU is doing a good job of filtering what's more important from what's less important."

What's next?

NewsU is working on a number of different subjects and with a number of partners.

One of the most exciting projects is with the Association of Health Care Journalists. Using a simulation – similar to the popular "Be a Reporter" game – the "Beat Doctor" will help journalists understand how to cover a hospital from a quality of service and financial health basis.

Studies of how adults learn point to simulations as one of the most effective ways to ensure information is retained. The NewsU simulation engine is being developed so it can be used with other courses.

NewsU and AHCJ are sharing the costs in developing the technology to support this initial effort. NewsU's goal is to design the activities in a way that will allow the reuse of the underlying software code for other simulation exercises. The challenge is funding such development at this point. Discussions are under way to create a "Day in the Life of a Frontline Editor" module in partnership with the Tomorrow's Workforce project.

Among the other courses that NewsU is developing and/or considering:

- Privacy issues for broadcasters
- How to write better captions
- Telling stories with sound
- International reporting for journalists
- On the Beat: Covering Courts
- Video editing ethics
- Best practices in writing about trauma
- Writing serial narratives

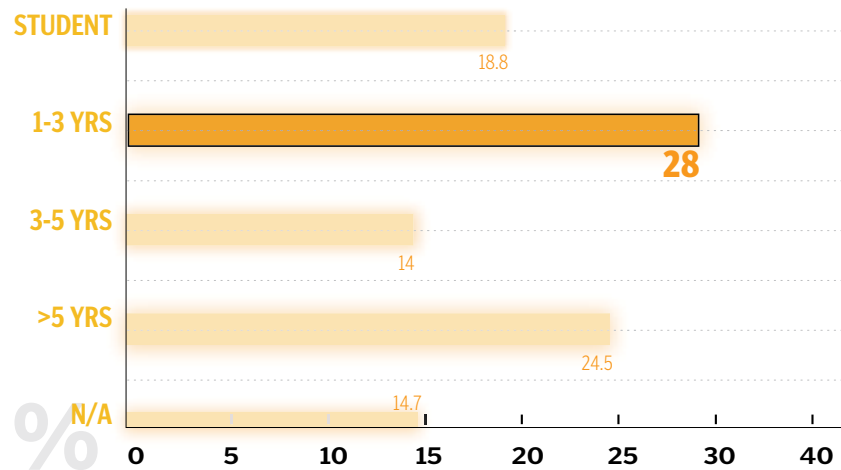
NewsU will also be developing a module (or two) from the 2006 Best of Photojournalism contest, which will come from a partnership among Western Kentucky University, National Press Photographers Association and Poynter.

Additionally, NewsU is starting conversations around two important fronts:

- Developing international alliances so NewsU content could be translated into other languages. This, of course, has certain challenges. However, given the right partners and support, this might be an effective way of further assisting journalists in developing countries or in areas of the world that do not have strong journalism training programs.

YEARS EMPLOYED AS A JOURNALIST

IF APPLICABLE



- Growing the site to the next level and developing programs that could provide sustaining funding for the project.

Beyond the potential for educating journalists around the world, Beth Parke said she believes e-learning programs such as NewsU could help bloggers, podcasters and the general public better understand journalistic standards.

“As we move into the era of who’s a journalist – it’s getting fuzzier as the media changes,” Parke said. “Eric Newton (director of Journalism Initiatives at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation) recently wrote that just because you give a person a first-aid kit doesn’t make them a doctor. Reporting means legwork, research, assistance and talking to sources. Anything that helps train the society in general about what journalism is is a good thing. I think e-learning absolutely meets a need. It’s like homework – the good students want extra homework so they get better.”

Finberg’s point exactly. “The very best journalists never stop learning.”

86%

SAID THEY WOULD PARTICIPATE IN ANOTHER NEWSU COURSE.

nu.

News University

Training for Journalists.
Anytime. Anywhere.

Poynter.  John S. and James L.
Knight Foundation

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