

AN EDITORS' AGENDA FOR JOURNALISM EDUCATION

THE 2004 REPORT OF THE ASNE
EDUCATION FOR JOURNALISM COMMITTEE



**AMERICAN SOCIETY
OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS**

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF NEWSPAPER EDITORS
Education for Journalism Committee
2003-2004

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BACKGROUND & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

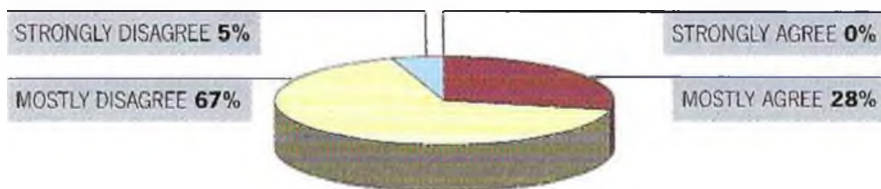
IN EARLY 2004, the ASNE Education for Journalism Committee conducted a survey of ASNE members, inviting them to comment on the state of journalism education in America today.

About one-third of those contacted responded, and following is the summary of their thoughts.

We gratefully acknowledge the work of the committee, as well as initial original inspirations from a speech by former ASNE executive director Lee Stinnett and an idea from Susanne Shaw of the University of Kansas, executive director of the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications.

We also wish to thank Kenney Marlatt and Denis Theriault of the San Jose Mercury News for their design and editing help, as well as Bryan Monroe and Sarah Toomey at Knight Ridder for the writing, editing, funding and production of this book.

QUESTION 1: Today's journalism-school graduates have a better grasp of the English language than did j-school graduates five years ago.



JOURNALISM EDUCATION: AN EDITORS' AGENDA

By Jerry Ceppos, Knight Ridder

Journalism schools can't provide too much practical, skills-based learning, according to ASNE members.

When asked for one suggestion that could help students make the transition from school to profession, ASNE members spoke with almost one voice:

"Require more writing. Cover traditional story assignments, but also request that they reflect, in writing, on ethics, diversity, legal issues and so forth."

— CAESAR ANDREWS, GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

"More required hands-on production of news: publishing articles, photos, page layout, headlines, writing editorials and producing news Web pages."

— GILBERT BAILON, DALLAS MORNING NEWS

"Teach stronger research and newsGATHERING techniques. Present a smarter picture of the 'real world' that awaits them in a newsroom."

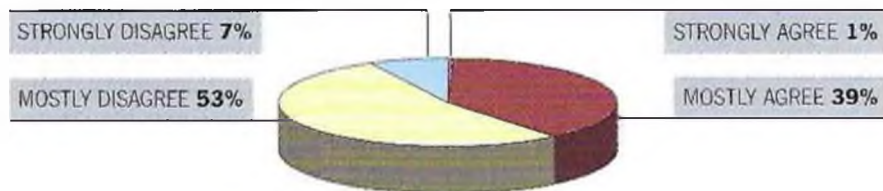
— LARRY BEAUPRE, SCRANTON (PA.) TIMES AND TRIBUNE

"Learn the language. Know the basics of grammar. Stay away from 'journalese' and other gobbledygook. Clear writing and solid reporting are essential for the future of our business."

— CHARLES BROADWELL, FAYETTEVILLE (ARK.) OBSERVER



QUESTION 2: Journalism graduates have a broad-enough range of knowledge on a variety of subjects that journalists generally need to know about.



"Better writing skills, with emphasis on clarity."

— JENNIE BUCKNER, CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

"MAKE EVERYONE WRITE MORE!! I think a journalism major should have to write in every class, every week! I am disheartened when I see how little some journalism students actually write. I would not like to be operated on by a surgeon who'd had as little practice in cutting as some journalism graduates have had in writing."

— BOB HAIMAN, THE FREEDOM FORUM

"A renewed focus on the basic skills of writing and reporting. Many students graduate with good interviewing skills and the ability to ask good questions at news conferences. But they often find it difficult to get the information they gather into their stories."

— ROBERT NAYLOR, ASSOCIATED PRESS

"More hands-on journalism. More writing. More internships. More clips. Tougher training on the basics."

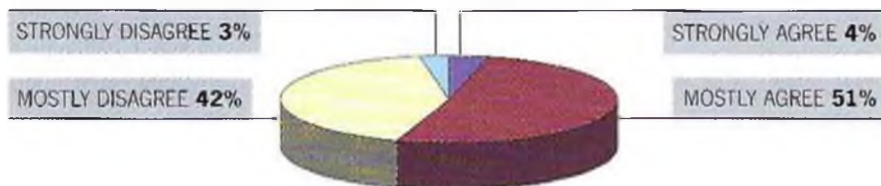
— PAUL CHAFFEE, SAGINAW (MICH.) NEWS

That request for practical knowledge is the key result of a February 2004 survey of ASNE members by the Education for Journalism Committee. The survey, conducted mostly by e-mail, had a response rate of 33 percent; about 180 members responded, though the number differed slightly depending on the question.

The survey was inspired by a suggestion from committee member Susanne Shaw of the University of Kansas and by a somewhat different survey produced last year by Lee Stinnett, former executive director of ASNE. In his research, Stinnett asked a smaller, randomly selected group of ASNE members and educators about journalism education.

Like Saginaw's Chaffee, dozens of members responding to this survey suggested internships, "partnerships with local media" and other devices

QUESTION 3: Today's journalism graduates have a better understanding of journalism and journalistic techniques than graduates had five years ago.



for ensuring practical tests of classroom knowledge.

In addition to asking for such practical knowledge, some members asked that journalism schools teach students about the results of the work of the Readership Institute (Randy Brandt, *Journal Times*, Racine, Wisc.)...about "the realities of newsroom life — editor-reporter relationships, for example" (Frank Barrows, *Charlotte Observer*) — about newsroom management (Bob Giles, Nieman Foundation).

Some suggested that students learn about business, arithmetic, foreign languages. But the overwhelming sentiment was for an understanding of the basics of journalism.

Perhaps not surprising, ASNE members were stunningly tough in grading journalism-school graduates on those basics.

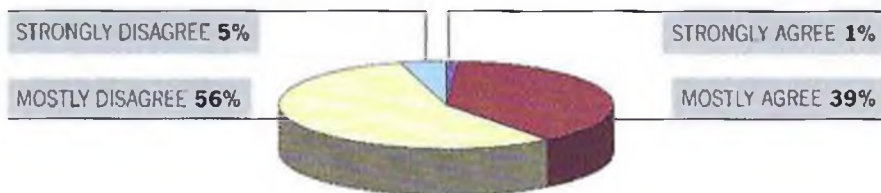
■ **OF 180 EDITORS** commenting on whether today's journalism-school graduates have a better grasp of the English language than did their peers five years ago, few felt that the graduates indeed are better. (In a similar question last year, Stinnett also found that neither educators nor editors thought students had a better grasp of the language today.) One apparent contradiction: Although editors' "one suggestion for journalism schools that could help students make the transition" to the profession overwhelmingly related to teaching the basics... and although many criticized student performance on those basics... editors overwhelmingly said that "journalism schools are best at" teaching the basics.

■ **OF 189 WHO REPLIED** to a question about whether journalism graduates have a broad-enough range of knowledge on a variety of subjects, less than two percent strongly agreed that they do.

■ **ASKED WHETHER TODAY'S GRADUATES** think more analytically than graduates did five years ago, only one percent strongly agreed that they do.

■ **MOST RESPONDENTS BELIEVE** that today's journalism grads have a better understanding "of journalism and journalistic techniques" than graduates had five years ago. (In Stinnett's survey, educators generally

QUESTION 4: Today's journalism graduates think more analytically than graduates did five years ago.



agreed with that sentiment, but editors did not.)

■ **ON THE OTHER HAND**, ASNE members saw some bright spots. More than eight of 10 respondents strongly agreed or mostly agreed that today's graduates understand the importance of diversity more than graduates did five years ago.

■ **AND SIX OF 10** strongly or mostly agreed that today's grads better understand journalism ethics than graduates did five years ago. (Interestingly, again, the editors responding to Stinnett's similar question mostly disagreed that graduates have a better understanding of journalism ethics than their peers had five years before. On the other hand, educators in that study thought today's students did have a better understanding.)

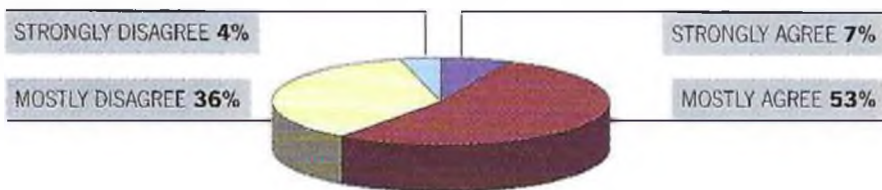
A LESSON IN THE BASICS

Educators interviewed for this report said many schools indeed heed the advice to teach the basics. "We combine required courses in basics with long hours in labs taught by able faculty with significant professional experience," wrote Will Norton, dean at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. "...Assignments for these classes are usually real-world assignments. Only a few assignments in the beginning class are not intended for possible publication."

Tom Kunkel, dean at the University of Maryland, wrote that "we feel like we DO focus on basic journalism skills, albeit within the appropriate liberal arts context. I'm sure many schools feel that way. But keeping that focus is more challenging by the year, as we're expected to stay current with the industry's technological advances and offer more courses on, say, ethics, and yet still not exceed the number of credit hours students can take in the major. Too often and at too many places, I fear, it's the core skills that get shorted."

The question about knowledge of the language triggered the most

QUESTION 5: Today's journalism graduates have a better understanding of journalism ethics than graduates had five years ago.



responses (of the questions that weren't open-ended) and feelings ran strong:

"I have found the language skills of new grads to be steadily worsening. That's really no surprise, given my experience as an adjunct in the mid- to late '90s. We spent a lot of time providing remedial language-skills training, and that was with some of the brightest students in the country."

— MARK BALDWIN, WAUSAU (WISC.) DAILY HERALD

"That's not saying much. The skills demonstrated five years ago were sub-par for many; haven't improved much on the tests we give intern and other job candidates."

— TOM BLOUNT, HIGH POINT (N.C.) ENTERPRISE

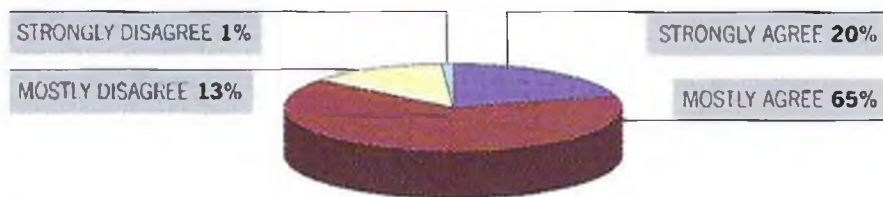
"J-school grads today frequently have more field experience and often have traveled more extensively than we were seeing five years ago. But there appears to be less emphasis in colleges and universities on basic grammar, writing and reporting. The result is that while many recent grads have a broader review of the world, we are having to focus more attention--too much--on improving their mechanical skills."

— ROBERT NAYLOR, ASSOCIATED PRESS

LANGUAGE HELP ALSO NEEDED

Several educators interviewed about the results of the study agree: Students need language help when they enter the university. "What's needed, of course, is more attention to language fundamentals at the K-12 level," said Pam Luecke of Washington and Lee University. "Professors hope that editors are encouraging vigorous reporting on the quality of their communities' schools and are writing editorials demanding more funding for education!"

QUESTION 6: Today's journalism graduates understand the importance of diversity more than graduates did five years ago.



Several pessimists said language problems are nothing new. *"I think the kids today are not much different than those five years ago. I think, however, there is a big difference between kids today and those 15 years ago. Kids today are more verbal and outspoken, but their grasp of grammar is weaker because it has been de-emphasized in K-12 education. And I encounter many students who really think that they don't need to know how to spell because they will always have spellcheck."*

— **LORRAINE BRANHAM**, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

"And it's even worse if the comparison is to 20 years ago."

— **LARRY BEAUPRE**, SCRANTON (PA.) TIMES AND TRIBUNE

With those comments and the request that schools get back to basics, I found it interesting that these quotes typified the open-ended comments in response to the statement that "journalism schools are best at":

"Teaching the fundamentals of reporting and writing."

— **ANDY ALEXANDER**, COX NEWSPAPERS, WASHINGTON

"Basic preparation in reporting and editing, along with ethics and media law."

— **BUTCH ALFORD**, LEWISTON (IDAHO) MORNING TRIBUNE

"Training them in the basics of reporting and writing."

— **MICHAEL BECKER**, (STERLING, COLO.) JOURNAL-ADVOCATE

My interpretation of the apparent conflict: Editors want more teaching of the basics and believe that it's what journalism schools do best--but they still expect students to do even better.

Suzanne Martin, publications assistant and systems manager of ASNE, contributed to this report.



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