

**Progress Report on  
Implementation of Recommendations  
from the Academic Unit Review  
of the School of Journalism**  
February 4, 2021

To: **The Council Committee on Academic Mission**

The School of Journalism would once again like to thank you for your work on our unit review and your diligence in ensuring it is implemented. As stated in our formal response, our unit does not disagree with any of the unit review's 10 suggestions and, since we last met, has made considerable progress implementing them. Below is a recap of our thoughts on each suggestion and an update on where we are with each of them.

**Unit Review Recommendations and progress**

**1. Reimagine the school's mandate and size by a) developing a professional communications program, and b) enhancing Indigenization efforts**

Of the reviewer's 10 suggestions, we believe this one is the most important for moving the School of Journalism forward. As such, we want to get it right. With funding approved by then president Vianne Timmons, the School of Journalism commissioned the Faculty of Business Administration's Hill and Levene School of Business Centre for Management Development (CMD), to prepare a business plan. Completed in September, 2020, the 31-page plan, which I've attached, outlines the steps the School of Journalism needs to take to expand into communications and enhance cultural inclusion. (The CMD business plan also outlines the steps required to achieve three other goals identified in the unit review and our strategic plan: increasing enrolment, improving our curriculum, and stabilizing our staffing.)

**a). Develop a professional communications program.** The CMD plan performed an analysis of Canadian journalism schools and found that they fit into three categories: Traditional, Communications, and Balanced. The report states the "Traditional" category is where the majority of journalism schools in Canada fall. Making up 43 per cent of Canadian programs, these schools take a direct focus on the study of journalism.

As for the "Communications" category, the report states communications focused schools have placed virtually all of their resources into their communication programs. The resources necessary to perform this transformation are extremely significant. Because this territory is so modern and undefined, it is best to approach it with caution. Because of this uncharted territory, it is no surprise that only 24 per cent of Canadian schools offer programs with this focus.

Lastly, the "Balanced" category, which are schools that offer a mix of communications, media, and journalism, are the biggest recruiting threat for the School of Journalism, according to the report. It states: "Making up a modest 33 per cent of Canadian communications and Journalism programs, these schools have attached themselves to a growing trend. Schools like Mount Royal and MacEwan both have comprehensive departments that offer strong programs in the areas of journalism and communication. They have made a point of not separating the two disciplines, but rather using them both as tools to develop well-rounded students for their post-university careers. Not only do these schools target the same demographic that the School of Journalism wants, but they are also within close proximity to Regina as well, reaching into Saskatchewan's vast territory of potential undergraduates. Because these schools offer 4-year

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programs it is also likely that prospective students who know they want to enter the journalism or communications field would choose these programs over the Journalism School. While these programs are the biggest threat to the Journalism School's recruiting efforts, there is much opportunity for the Journalism School to build around what these programs have already done."

As such, this "Balanced" approach is the one the CMD plan suggests we take. Our unit agrees and intends to follow the CMD plan to achieve this. While Covid-19 has impeded our expansion into communications, I am pleased to report we have made some progress. One example is the recent addition of another communications placement (at Benchmark Media, a Regina PR firm) to our internship program. Where before there were none, the jschool now offers communications internships at half a dozen locations.

We are also confident that a new addition to our team, Dr, Aziz Douai, will have a huge impact on our expansion into communications (and several other of the unit reviewer's suggestions). Dr. Douai, the new Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, has chosen the School of Journalism as his home department. As reported in his bio, Dr. Douai holds a PhD in Mass Communications, a Master's of Science in Advertising, and has lectured on global communication issues in North America, Europe, and the Middle East. Dr. Douai also maintains an active research agenda focused on disruptive communication technologies, international communication and conflict, with a special interest in media and politics. Obviously, Dr. Douai's areas of expertise perfectly complement an expansion into communications. We are also confident Dr. Douai will provide some much needed help with our growing graduate program with respect to grad coordination, supervision, recruitment, and course development and delivery.

**b) Expand into Indigenous Journalism.** The School of Journalism has a long tradition of working with Indigenous academics and journalists to teach students how to responsibly and respectfully cover First Nations people, communities and issues. This has resulted in an impressive list of distinguished Indigenous alumni now working in journalism and communications. But we can do better, as the CMD plan suggests, stating: "No other communications or journalism school in Canada has capitalized on the growing Indigenous community. Stats Canada has concluded that the Aboriginal population in Canada is growing 4 times faster than any other demographic in Canada. Being right next to the First Nations University of Canada, and residing in the heart of Western Canada, the Journalism School has an extremely unique opportunity to work with and develop a program that attracts potential Aboriginal students."

We have already begun this work by cross-listing select classes with FNUUniv and signing service contracts allowing our staff to teach FNUUniv journalism courses. The School of Journalism also offers its space, instructors and gear for FNUUniv's INCA summer institute every year it is offered. At a faculty meeting to discuss the CMD plan, everyone in attendance agreed that the School of Journalism and FNUUniv needs to work more closely, cross-list more classes and explore mutually beneficial opportunities to expand into Indigenous journalism.

The School of Journalism has taken several other steps in terms of cultural inclusion and expanding into Indigenous journalism. For the second straight year we have filled our Asper

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Indigenous Chair with Jeanelle Mandes, a member of Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation. Mandes earned both her bachelor of arts in journalism and her master's with us. She also holds a BA in Indigenous Studies from First Nations University of Canada and is the former editor of Eagle Feather news. Now a producer at Global News Regina, Mandes teaches Indigenous Peoples and the Press, Advanced Print and has proven herself invaluable for the journalism skills she brings to the school, as a resource for faculty and students covering Indigenous topics and stories, and as a recruiter of Indigenous students.

Keeping the Asper Indigenous Chair filled with an Indigenous journalist is critical not just for an expansion into Indigenous journalism but for our commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, particularly number 86. Funds for the Asper Indigenous Chair will dry up at the end of the Winter 2021 semester. Working with the University of Regina's Advancement and Communications department, we have already made a strong case to the Asper family to have this fund topped up. We expect to hear back by March, 2021.

## **2. Develop street-ready journalists**

As mentioned in our formal response, we feel this is already one of our core strengths, as evidenced by the fact newsrooms throughout this city and province are filled with our graduates, almost all of whom are working in the field within a year of graduating. This is achieved partly by balancing theory and practice in our classrooms. The fact our graduates are "street-ready" also owes a lot to our internship program, which is the only one in Canada offering paid 13-week internships to every undergraduate student. Despite serious challenges brought on by Covid, in 2020 every student scheduled to work a paid 13-week internship went ahead and completed one—some in person, some remotely. Of course these internships were a much different experience compared to pre-pandemic internships. But because internships went ahead in 2020, our graduating class of 2021 is not just street ready—it's already adapted to the many changes to the way journalism is done.

We also continue to partner to create new internships. We are very pleased to announce that for the first time ever, the School of Journalism has partnered with the Globe and Mail and already selected a student for a paid internship there in Spring 2021. We also partnered to create two new 13-week paid internships at The Rod Pedersen Show, a new media venture in Regina that airs live on Facebook. While developing street ready journalists should always be the objective of the School of Journalism, this suggestion can be considered completed.

## **3. Adapt updated course content/descriptions for the digital era**

While Covid has impeded implementation of some suggestions, it offered the perfect opportunity for our unit to update all of our course descriptions. In spring/summer 2020 we performed a gap analysis of all our courses and updated all of our course descriptions. We believe our courses must continue to focus on the fundamentals of journalism and we should always be careful not to hitch our wagon to trends. But we are confident our updated content and descriptions better align with current industry standards and approaches. This task is now complete on our end and currently sits with APDC.

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Another silver lining of Covid is that it forced us to rethink our classes and offer almost all of them remotely. This has forced all professors and instructors to learn valuable new skills (Zoom, URcourses, etc.) and further rework their courses. It's also proven to boost enrolment by attracting students unable to move to Regina and deepened our sessional pool by allowing us to hire several working journalists not based in Regina.

**4. Establish new collaborations across the University**

Despite the isolating effect of Covid, the School of Journalism has managed to make some inroads to establish new collaborations within the Faculty of Arts and across the University at large. The CMD business plan mentioned above has resulted in new relationships with the Hill Levene School. There are many other connections to be made with the Faculty of Business should as we expand into professional communications and public relations courses. We have yet to explore the many more opportunities for collaboration that exist with the Faculty of MAP. The addition of Dr. Douai to our unit also promises many opportunities for collaboration across multiple disciplines.

**5. Find efficiencies in the MJ curriculum**

As the review states, "the MJ experiment is working but needs to be streamlined to reduce costs and improve the student experience." We are pleased to report enrolment for our MJ program was the highest it's ever been in Fall 2020 with 13 students accepted. Unfortunately, due to study permit backlogs caused by Covid, nine of those students, all international, ended up deferring. We are confident this growth will continue and hope it will be easier for our international students to join us in the years ahead. We are also confident that Dr. Douai Aziz will attract even more international students and hope we will provide some much needed assistance in terms of grad studies coordination, supervision and teaching.

**6. Connect more students with the Jscool**

Developing and delivering a new introductory course, JRN 100, has proven to be an effective recruitment tool and means of connecting the School of Journalism to the broader university community. To date the class has been offered three times. So far, 11 students who have taken JRN 100 have applied and/or been accepted to our program, including three who weren't officially Pre-J students when they took JRN 100. JRN 100 has also been taken by students in Arts (26), MAP (11), Business (8), Science (6), Social Work (4), CCE (4), Education (1), and Kinesiology (1). It is our hope this course can be added to the core curriculum.

We have also had success with opening select jschool classes to outside students. We are also working on ways to attract, or at least accommodate, more part-time students. Our program has traditionally followed the cohort model, which has many benefits. But we have also come to realize the cohort model is a barrier for students with children, jobs, disabilities, or other commitments. The more flexible we can be, the more students we can attract.

Other recent examples of efforts to connect more students with the School of Journalism are our upcoming participation in Nash83, an annual conference for journalism students and student journalists in February 2021. We also believe it's important to connect with high school

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students, which is why in early 2020, right before Covid hit, we met with and agreed to a partnership with Campus Regina Public, a career-centred program available to all Grade 11 and Grade 12 students registered with Regina School Division #4. The campus offers two-credit courses that are occupation specific, such as culinary arts and auto mechanics. The School of Journalism has agreed to offer faculty and staff to develop and deliver a media component, which will create media literacy in the short term and potential School of Journalism students in the long term.

We've also made meaningful connections with potential students and community members by offering up our faculty, space and students to LOOK: A Mental Health/Film Initiative. LOOK is focused on providing those with mental illness an opportunity, with the support of mental health practitioners and members of the film and teaching community, to express themselves creatively by making films in a safe, fun and encouraging environment.

Also critical in connecting more students with the jschool is a more diverse faculty and staff. When this unit review was produced in 2019 our unit was composed almost entirely of white males. In the last two years we've hired more women and BIPOC sessionals and chairs than ever before.

### **7. Re-imagine our space**

Work on this suggestion has obviously been stalled due to the fact that most of our faculty and staff have been working from home since March 2020. However it is worth pointing out that the School of Journalism is one of the few (if not only) departments approved to offer face-to-face labs and classes in Fall 2020 and Winter 2021. This is testament not only to the importance of the hands on training our school provides but also to the dedication of our instructors who have gone above and beyond to re-imagine our space so it is safe for students to learn there. Once it is safe for everyone to return to face-to-face classes we are committed to implementing the unit review's suggestions for making the School of Journalism less isolated within the university and more welcoming to prospective students, staff and visitors.

### **8. Engage University expertise in marketing, recruitment and advancement**

Over the last 18 months the School of Journalism has enhanced its relationship with advancement significantly. We are pleased to report that a proposal we worked on with advancement was successful and that a \$400,000 donation from the Leader-Post Foundation was just finalized. This money will be used to fund a chair position intended to bring yet another working journalist into the school to develop and deliver new classes and further update our curriculum. This exciting news also presents a golden marketing opportunity for the School of Journalism that, in turn, will also increase enrolment and hopefully encourage other similar donations. We are working right now with advancement and its marketing team on rolling out the communication of this exciting news.

We have also strengthened relationships with domestic and URInternational recruitment officers and updated them on all of the changes taking place at our school. We have already benefitted from these efforts, as evidenced by our increased enrolment in for the 2020/2021 academic year.

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Marketing-wise, our most pressing need is still a professional School of Journalism website that all faculty and staff can manage and maintain. Fortunately, the University is currently undergoing a Web Redesign Project, a move the School of Journalism fully supports and will benefit from. We have also benefitted from the arrival of our new Dean, her staff and the Faculty of Arts, all of whom have been great about celebrating our success and promoting our school via social media. We also have good working relationships with the editors of *Degrees* and *Discourse* magazines, both of whom regularly feature our alumni and staff in their pages.

**9. Strengthen sessional recruitment**

As mentioned in our formal response, we have an embarrassment of riches when it comes to our alumni, many of whom are some of the best and brightest working in journalism and communications today. We have continued to call them back to the school to teach with us. As mentioned above, Covid and the move to remote teaching has also allowed us to attract working journalists based outside of Regina to teach as sessionals. This semester we have one instructor teaching our magazine class from Saskatoon and another teaching our photojournalism class from Vancouver. Thanks to all the work mentioned above, the profile of the School of Journalism has risen significantly over the last 18 months and we currently are having no problem attracting qualified professionals to teach our courses.

**Timelines and work plan**

As mentioned throughout this report, Covid has impeded our timelines and work plan. We have also been dealing with ongoing staffing challenges. Shortly after the completion of the unit review, two of our six faculty members were away for Summer 2019 then took leaves for Fall 2019. Those same two members were also away, due to an accommodation and a medical leave, in Fall 2020. Currently, we have one of our four tenured faculty members away on sabbatical until July 2021; our new department head is leaving the university April 30, 2021, and the member slated to serve as acting head will then leave for sabbatical in January 2022.

So although we have accomplished much more than we thought we would by this point, our staffing situation is somewhat precarious and the School of Journalism still has much more work to do. But if it keeps doing what it is doing and adheres to the CDM's plan, I am confident the School of Journalism will return, as the unit review states, as a "jewel in the university's crown."

Sincerely,



*Mark Taylor*  
*Department head, instructor & internship coordinator*  
*School of Journalism*