

University of Regina  
Academic Unit Review  
of the School of Journalism

## Report of the Review Team

Following a Site Visit  
Conducted On  
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Ivor Shapiro

Professor, School of Journalism, and Associate Dean (Undergraduate Education)  
Faculty of Communication and Design  
Ryerson University

Janet Wasko

Philip H. Knight Chair in Communication Research, and Media Studies Area Director  
School of Journalism and Communication  
University of Oregon

Craig Wilson

Producer | Writer  
CBS News  
New York City

Philip Charrier

Associate Professor and Head of the Department of History  
Faculty of Arts  
University of Regina

## Executive Summary

The University of Regina has long been, and continues to be, home to the leading undergraduate journalism program west of the Great Lakes, with a strong and painstakingly earned connection to community news, close learning relationships between students and teachers, deep roots in the region's cultures and peoples, and an exceptional record of graduates' employment. Its high reputation rests above all on students' job-readiness, honed in Canada's only mandatory paid internship program. Its alumni plant and maintain Prairie roots, providing vital, reliable information to western Canada's cities and regions.

The undergraduate BAJ and BJ programs serve their students exceptionally well, as does the new, innovative one-year MJ program (along with its bridging preparatory year), which has made as good a start in initial enrollment as can be expected and which leverages skills-oriented course content to help sustain delivery of both undergraduate and post-graduate curriculum. And the School has punched above its weight in national collaborations amongst

journalism schools and students, including strong contributions to investigative journalism ventures.

These accomplishments notwithstanding, the School is practically invisible not only in the public sphere but to most U of R students. Interdisciplinary collaborations are rare despite especially natural linkages in the study of film, photography, creative technologies, media audiences, public policy and business promotion. Important curriculum changes are needed to create post-graduate cost efficiencies and boost undergraduate enrolments, and to keep abreast with rapid transformation in news-media technologies and practices. And increased focus and modernization are needed in the School's public narrative as expressed in promotional materials and curriculum descriptions.

The School of Journalism now finds itself at a crossroads. To thrive in the coming years it will need to confront significant challenges to its traditional approaches, assumptions, and identity. It must embrace, and be embraced by, the University community, and forge unfamiliar alliances. Our report provides critical observations on the academic goals and social context of the School of Journalism, the quality of teaching and learning, and the manner and extent of its contributions to knowledge. We spell out five challenges it faces with respect to sustainability, identity, Indigenization, academic place and the needs of the changing marketplace.

Finally, we offer ten recommendations starting with the need to reimagine the School's core mandate while broadening its curricular sphere and enhancing its Indigenous presence. This reimagined mandate should proceed from facilitated consultations in which the School's faculty engage with one another, with University leadership, and with the results of market analysis. A cohesive, focused and realistic mandate for the School will include, but not be limited to, curricular change that more evidently responds to changing development needs in an evolving news-media landscape.

This new strategic thrust should include identifying new populations of students who could be attracted to a redefined School that teaches a broader range of knowledge centred on information media. The new students, who should be recruited in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities well beyond southern Saskatchewan, might, for example, be invited to focus their studies either on the production of journalism or on the disciplines and techniques of communications professionals.

An equally clear need is to forge stronger connections with Indigenous media and communities as well as First Nations University's Indian Communication Arts (INCA) program. To achieve this, the current all-white tenure-stream professoriat could be supplemented with an endowed, full-time tenure-stream Chair in Indigenous Journalism and Communication (ideally as a joint appointment with FNU).

None of these opportunities can be realized without an openness by the University to invest in a reimagined future for this academic unit. Forms of outlay include facilitation for agreeing on the new strategic mandate, educational market research (to isolate and estimate targeted new populations of students), and renewed promotional materials and recruitment. Aggressive advancement efforts will be needed to meet the reinvented School's larger faculty needs, to secure much-needed graduate scholarships funded by government, nonprofit, corporate and philanthropic sectors, and to support the School's continuing commitment to collaborative reporting projects both on a national scale and with local communities in and beyond Regina.

Finally, and no less urgently, the School's and University's leadership should begin demolishing the physical and attitudinal walls that combine to isolate the School's tiny population from Regina's wider academic community. It is time for the School of Journalism to embrace, without reservation, the opportunities and obligations attached to a university setting, and be embraced in return as a hitherto-obscured jewel in the university's crown.

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# *Report of The Review Team*

May 7th, 2019

Dr Thomas Chase  
Provost  
University of Regina  
3737 Wascana Parkway  
Regina, SK

Dear Dr Chase,

Thank you for the opportunity to visit the University of Regina and to critically examine the work of a School that for several decades has provided Canada's most highly regarded undergraduate journalism program west of the Great Lakes, with a strong and painstakingly earned connection to community news, an intimate connection between students and teachers, and now a unique and highly promising graduate program.

We were treated with warm hospitality, and had cordial yet frank conversations with the President of the University, with all the School of Journalism's professors, instructors and visiting Chairs, with the Dean and Program Administrator of the Faculty of Arts, with seven undergraduate and three graduate current students, with seven recent alumni now working at leading media outlets and in Communications for the Government of Saskatchewan, with three employers including the managing editors of both CTV and CBC Regina, with the Vice-President for Research and the Dean of the Faculty of Media, Arts and Performance, and, on two occasions, with yourself.

Although members of our team bring diverse experience of academic unit reviews at universities in Canada and elsewhere, this particular visit was unusual in several respects including both the level of candour with which we were entrusted in all these conversations, and the critical juncture at which the School finds itself. We weighed often-conflicting stakeholder perspectives, studied the evidence provided by your office including key data and the School's self-study, and determined to reward your trust and candour with equally honest and unconstrained reflection in this report.

No individual can provide an unvarnished, unbiased view of any complex human reality, but the four of us brought to the task a diversity of perspective and a common commitment to an open-minded and methodical review focused on ascertaining and analyzing empirical evidence. One of us is a prairies-born, New York-based producer for a major US network news operation. Another is a University of Regina historian with a journalism degree from Carleton University and a passionate commitment to seeing quality journalism education continue to thrive in Western Canada. A third is a communications (not journalism) scholar at the University of Oregon with no attachments to journalism education in this country. And the fourth is a full professor and former head of a competitor School of Journalism who is now an associate dean with current responsibility for finding seven-figure curriculum-delivery efficiencies due to a dramatic funding reduction in available funding in the province of Ontario.

Given this diversity of perspective, we hope that readers will recognize in our report a sincere desire to examine what we have seen, heard and read with analytical rigour and to offer our findings and recommendations without self-censorship. Above all, we hope that this report will prove useful to all in thinking through solutions to a nearly perfect storm of challenges that face your School of Journalism.

## **Introduction: A Moment of Opportunity**

A sombre mood permeated many conversations during the site visit. We recognized an awareness that the School's financial tipping point had been reached and that its looming unsustainability reflected a simultaneous crisis in the news industry with respect to delivery streams and business models. These realities are unarguable, but less evident is a recognition that the current moment is one of unique opportunity both for journalism practice and for journalism education.

Public awareness of the need for verifiably accurate and independent information on current events has never been more widely recognized as a requirement of accountability and mutual understanding for local communities, business affairs, and national and international politics. The so-called Trump Bump, a reaction to populist "post-Truth" movements in many developed countries including Canada, resulted in dramatic increases in digital subscriptions to some newspapers, viability for upstart entrepreneurial journalistic outfits, and an unprecedented federal government commitment to funding news organizations in Canada. In some journalism schools, this same "bump" was also observed in slowing or reversal of generally downward application trends.

Your J-School's apparent failure to benefit from these developments so far reflects, in our view, the absence thus far of a joint commitment by the University's administration and the School's tenured professoriate to apply creative minds to developing a coherent strategic plan for the School's future. This absence seems to stem, at least in part, from a gulf of perspective between leadership in the School and in the University. From the perspective of the University's leadership, the School of Journalism is a cost centre with declining enrolment that draws on precious resources to the disadvantage of competitors for diminished funds within and beyond the Faculty of Arts. From the perspective of Journalism professors, theirs is a shoestring operation delivering student success thanks in part to teachers' labours of love and personal donations of cash and equipment, representing a commitment to providing students with experience and job-readiness that already is, or should be, the envy of the national and international journalism academy,

Both of these perspectives seem to us substantially accurate.

Clearly there is a floor to the gross number of academic course-hour enrollments below which post-secondary teaching becomes simply unaffordable; that floor has been reached or even penetrated, and significant change is needed if the School is to be sustained as a distinct academic unit.

On the other hand, there is also a floor of operational cost below which it is impossible to run a quality professional school, and that floor, too, has been reached or penetrated with the School's entire support staff consisting of a 0.5 FTE secretary, no technology support, and a "discretionary" budget of just \$40,000 to fund students' travel, equipment purchases, marketing

materials, participation in local and national collaborations, guest lectureships, recruitment outreach, and other essential costs of doing business.

The materials for bridging this gulf of perspective are, however, at hand.

University leaders at every level expressed to us an appreciation that the J-School enhances the University's mission and reputation, and both the President and the Provost assured us that the School is not, as feared by the School's professoriat, "in the cross-hairs" for elimination. Conversely, the University wants to see the School commit itself to imaginative, collaborative efforts to address its critical sustainability challenges.

At the same time, the School's leaders seem ready to set aside lingering remaining reservations about the critical challenge of enrollment decline, the necessity of a core strategic plan, the value of membership of an academic institution, and the creative role of multilateral cross-disciplinary relationships in a contemporary university setting.

This moment in time therefore represents a rare opportunity for open-minded critical review of the school's academic mission and goals, teaching and learning quality, contributions to knowledge, and key challenges.

## **Academic Mission and Core Goals**

The University of Regina is nationally renowned for its focus on, and aggressive support of, job-readiness. As one would expect, therefore, the School of Journalism measures its own success primarily in terms of graduates' careers, and despite its tiny size, enjoys a reputation as among Canada's top J-schools. An astonishing proportion of its recent graduates are full-time employed at news organizations in the prairie provinces. The School has long boasted, and continues to deliver, Canada's only journalism internship program with mandatory paid placements, which uniquely last at least one full semester and which often lead directly to continuing full-time employment. Media outlets throughout this region of Canada expect most of their entry-level hires to be U of R graduates, rooted in the Prairies' earth and ready to work in rapidly evolving newsrooms. These industry leaders value the historic quality of the program but worry about the quality impacts of progressively smaller numbers of BJ and BAJ graduates -- concerns that are most saliently addressed under the next heading, "Quality of Teaching and Learning."

At a graduate level, the School now offers a unique one-year Master's program centred on the production of a long-form "passion project" work of journalism. This program has made an impressive start in recruiting applicants thanks in large measure to the School's proven ability to teach documentary forms at a high level. Like almost any new graduate program, it may reasonably be expected to require a few years of aggressive and highly focused marketing and recruitment to achieve maturity in its competitive identity and a financially viable headcount.

The undergraduate program, while challenged by the School's exceptionally small faculty and staff complement, has earned a reputation for job-readiness honed by intimate class sizes and an exemplary internship program. Its graduates plant strong and maintain Prairie roots, providing vital, reliable information to Prairie cities and regions. Student projects are known to punch above their weight, and have recently distinguished themselves especially in two national

investigative journalism projects. The curriculum similarly includes strong experiential training in community news and reporting on Prairies cultures and peoples.

Despite its focus on job-readiness, the School is justifiably proud of a curricular approach that is embedded in the liberal arts and the training of critical thinkers. In recent years, integration between the two lower (“pre-J”) years of liberal study and the two upper years of professional education has been enhanced through introduction of JRN100 Journalism and Democracy, and further humanities electives at the 200 level classes are being considered.

A particular area of academic focus is the Indigenous content and context of Canadian journalism. The School has graduated several Indigenous journalists of note and its approach to Indigenization includes a range of approaches (see Self-Study, p. 19-20) covering curriculum delivery, guest teachers, scholarships, a part-time lectureship, targeted internship placements, and workshops for active journalists.

## Quality of Teaching and Learning

The School’s professors, lecturers and lab instructors are all appropriately qualified, and all three professors have doctoral degrees (which is unusual among Canadian journalism schools, where a Master’s is more usually the terminal qualification). Notably, the Master’s degrees of four faculty members are from the University of Regina itself. Sessional instructors show deep commitment to teaching, with mostly up-to-date experience and a readiness to engage with innovative approaches to practice.

All instructors, regardless of academic status, are clearly qualified to teach their courses, whether these are theoretical or professional in basis; specifically, professional practice is taught by people with significant and appropriate professional experience. This professional training of future journalists was the area of strength consistently emphasized in our discussions with faculty members, students, graduates and employers alike.

To say our conversations with students and recent graduates impressed us would be an understatement. These young people are confident in their job-readiness even within the disrupted news-media landscape they face. They are uniquely aware of this country’s Indigenous history and culture and the challenge of reporting in that context. They have engaged in investigative reporting on both local and national levels, and a strong interest in community reporting. They feel connected to and supported by their teachers, practical experience is honed in classes geared to publication in titles such as *Crow and Ink*, and they achieve bylined work in established outlets including, preeminently, the *Regina Leader-Post*. They speak of themselves as Prairies citizens, and they largely want to pursue careers in this part of Canada.

A school this thinly resourced cannot, and does not, boast a broad spectrum of excellence across all needed teaching areas. Areas of obvious strength include news reporting for both print and TV, as well as documentary journalism, but graduates are significantly less ready to work in news-production using nimble and fast-evolving mobile technologies. These mobile technologies are, ironically, much cheaper than the traditional equipment with which the School is well supplied partly through a unique arrangement of using the personally owned equipment of a permanent lab instructor with a specialization in documentary film -- the latter field being a cornerstone of the School’s MJ program.

## Contributions to Knowledge

For a university-based professional (a.k.a. “applied”) academic unit, contributions to knowledge come in two distinct forms: research products for scholarly audiences, and the fruits of professional discovery for the benefit of communities and partners.

While one professor seems regularly engaged in peer-reviewed publication of traditional communications research, the unit’s record of scholarly contribution overall is on the thin side. External funding is low, and it would be hard to make a case that the unit’s scholarly output measures up to the promise of having doctoral graduates and near-graduates among the faculty complement.

Much stronger is the School’s contribution to public knowledge both through the production of journalism itself and in the advancement of journalism and journalism education. These efforts include participation in national investigative projects, and publication in both local and national media on all platforms. Regina professors have long been counted as leaders in knowledge mobilization initiatives such as the Canadian Communication Association’s Journalism Interest Group, J-Source, and the newly born (conceived in Regina) J-Schools Canada collective.

Perhaps more concerning, in an age of interdisciplinary emphasis and disrupted epistemological siloes, is the limited evidence of interdisciplinary collaboration in both teaching and research. To some extent, this may be the flip side of a strong focus on teaching in a professional program that demands intensive faculty-student engagement. But low interest in interdisciplinarity is strikingly symbolized by the frosted glass and locked door that physically separates the School from the high-traffic main floor of the Faculty of Arts’ location in the Ad-Hum Building. So invisible is the School of Journalism on its own campus that its new head became aware of its existence only on the day of his own graduation -- from the film program in the Faculty of Media Arts and Production!

It is clear to us that for the School of Journalism to thrive, these physical and experiential barriers need to be replaced by urgent, serious, incentivized and well-supported efforts to establish two-way, mutually beneficial partnerships in teaching one another’s students and in research and creative activities.

## Key Challenges

### 1. Falling Enrollments and Rising Costs

The sustainability of the School is related to many issues, but a key one is student enrollment. While the program has been historically small, applications have been declining in recent years amid growing public awareness of the uncertain financial futures of the news industry (whether justified or not).

Low enrollment undoubtedly limits the range of elective choices, depresses the student body’s diversity, and, inevitably, raises net costs, which makes it hard for academic managers to justify continued investment in the program. That said, the School’s budget is by far from excessive by comparison to similar programs, and every major university houses programs with highly diverse cost-benefit ratios. It’s simply part of a comprehensive commitment to a generation’s

education and to wider public benefit, rather than mere survival in an increasingly lean and mean education economy.

## 2. Identity and Profile

The Review Team identified serious issues pertaining to the School's identity and public profile. Journalism educators may know the School's strong reputation, but people in Saskatchewan and the rest of Canada may not even know that Regina has a journalism school.

The School does not tell a cohesive story about itself. This is made glaringly apparent by the number of different priority directions described and proposed in the self-study, in the separate input statements submitted by two faculty members, and in the various proposed tactics that were described to us verbally by different faculty members. Everyone seems aware that the School is facing pivotal strategic choices, but these choices are understood differently. Accordingly, the proposed solutions are highly diverse, including, in addition to various new initiatives for recruitment and marketing, the following:

1. Expand instruction to encompass public relations.
2. Refocus undergraduate curriculum away from the broad gamut of waning news formats toward forms that both are gaining traction and reflect the School's current areas of excellence, such as long-form story-telling and collaborative journalism (in which students partner with established outfits to do work for broader public audiences).
3. Position the School as "a centre for excellence in critical, investigative, creative, in-depth storytelling."
4. Rebrand the School as "a creative, collaborative hub" centred upon a "modern-day maker space," something beyond the traditional images of press conferences and notepads.
5. Recruit more international students and improve their retention.
6. Build an "English as a Second Language Pre-Entrance Track."
7. Increase efforts for diversity, including unconscious-bias training and a concrete working plan with written goals for improving diversity and inclusion among staff and students.
8. Raise levels of engagement with non-profit community media partnerships.
9. Create a more effective balance of critical thinking, practical experiences as journalists, and embracing and integrating technology.
10. Revitalize research productivity through targeted support and/or lightened course loads.
11. Establish a Centre of Excellence for International Indigenous Journalism.
12. Gear graduates up to go into the world of independent production and entrepreneurial journalism.
13. Seek expanded international opportunities for students.
14. Develop a partnership with an established subscription streaming service.
15. Develop a more targeted process for student external award nominations.

None of these ideas is inappropriate and some represent the kind of brave, imaginative thinking that is undoubtedly needed now. But the sheer range and number of proposals emanating from so small a faculty complement suggests that the School has far to go before arriving at a common approach to its continuing evolution — or even a common sense of its current core identity.

This lack of a coherent narrative is underlined both in the content of curriculum and its public description. While digital content and skills may be included in classes, the program and course

descriptions are embarrassingly out of date. Print and broadcast is emphasized; digital is not. Reaching beyond journalism to success in related communication fields may be possible for graduates, but this is nowhere evident in program descriptions.

Consequently, recruitment and promotion are unfocused and generic, and opportunities for targeted appeal to diverse potential applicants are missed. Moreover, administrators may be forgiven for thinking the School has an “identity crisis” (in the words of one academic leader), and the confusing narrative undoubtedly inhibits interaction and potential collaboration with other departments and programs, aggravating a separate concern to which we now turn.

### **3. Isolation**

We were struck by the School’s physical, epistemological, economic and experiential separation from the rest of the University.

We learned of little collaboration and interaction with other academic units, such as in joint programs and cross-disciplinary curriculum development. Rather, the School seems blind to the opportunities of dynamic involvement with other disciplines — and vice versa. By contrast, and despite their own traditions of stubborn independence, many other journalism schools have benefited much, and lost nothing, by embracing interdisciplinary collaboration both in undergraduate teaching and in knowledge creation. In our direct experience, computer scientists, geographers, historians, sociologists, social workers, discourse scholars, public policy and marketing specialists and health professionals and, yes, journalists can join forces conduct research and build curriculum, thus broadening both students’ and their own minds. This is most likely to happen if all concerned are persuaded this type of boundary-breaking will not lessen, but foster, all programs’ competitive edge. On the other hand, a sense of being winners and losers in a zero-sum game disincentivizes collaboration.

In terms of physical space, the School’s facilities are not welcoming and inhibit interaction with the university community as a whole. In the absence of a full-time receptionist/administrative assistant, the doors to the School are locked and the space hidden in seeming denial of the inherently outward-looking nature of journalism itself.

### **4. Marketplace Needs**

The School has developed good relationships with regional media outlets through an outstanding internship program and what appear to be excellent graduate employment rates. However, the media representatives who spoke with us also identified some concern about the students’ preparation for a changing workplace, especially due to rapidly changing technologies.

What most visibly distinguishes Regina’s J-School from its Canadian comparators is its paid internships for students with both local and provincial media partners. Over the years, these internships have led to jobs for many graduates. This relationship is important both for the program and for the citizens of Saskatchewan who get the benefit of homegrown journalists covering the issues important to them and their province. But in our conversations with these industry partners (most of them Regina journalism graduates), we were told the paid internships are threatened by a lack of qualified students. One partner went so far as to leave a recent internship posting unfilled.

Beyond exposure to new journalistic forms, expansion of the School's curriculum may also serve to enhance students' preparation and flexibility in the job marketplace beyond positions in journalism itself.

## **5. Indigenization**

The School has made significant progress regarding opportunities for Indigenous students and more inclusive course content. Nevertheless, both students and graduates voiced a need for more attention to this area, and specifically called for the addition of at least one Indigenous member to the tenure-stream professoriate. We wish to emphasize that *all* of the Indigenous students and alumni to whom we talked identified this as a problem.

We were also struck by the weak connection to the First Nations University's Indian Communication Arts (INCA) program, and the lack of evidence in the school's physical space, promotional materials, or curriculum descriptions of the School's connections with Indigenous communities. We did not have the opportunity to meet with anyone in FNU generally or INCA specifically, but we cannot help but wonder if the existence of two exceptionally small journalism education programs within a few hundred meters of each other does not represent an opportunity at least for sharing teaching and physical resources, and at most for finding strategic linkages.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Reimagine the School's Mandate and Size**

The School of Journalism is clearly too small to be viable as a separate unit, and yet its core discipline is not closely-enough related to that of another University of Regina unit to suggest an intuitive merger, at least not in the short term. Instead, a broadened but coherent strategic direction is needed to resolve the School's crisis both of academic identity and financial viability.

Given the School's existing limitations in expertise, resources and interdisciplinary connections, a trusted external facilitator will need to be engaged to lead the School and its key University partners in identifying options for new strategic directions. Marketplace demands will need to be scrutinized neutrally, along with the diverse tactics both underway and proposed in the Self-Study documents. From this diverse menu, a coherent strategy must be shaped and implementation steps outlined—steps that will, in our opinion include a unified approach to faculty appointments, recruitment priorities, and realistic timeframes.

Among the elements that have been recommended for consideration as part of this reimagined strategy, two seem especially promising to us.

#### **(a) Professional Communication**

The University should seriously consider expanding the School into professional communication, a discipline that has long been closely associated with the teaching of journalism. These two disciplines are supported by a common academic field—mass communication studies—which is not currently “owned” by any other unit in the University but enjoys common roots and theoretical connections with many, including sociology, languages

and literature, and media arts. The two fields naturally share common scholarly interest in news media, mass-audience behaviours and public information networks. Brought together in an enlarged School of Journalism and Communication, they could together enrich the understanding of western Canadian community information contexts.

We were not surprised to learn that a significant number, perhaps as many as half, of the School's graduates go straight into "comms" careers. This is largely true of almost any journalism school, whether or not "comms" is an explicit part of its curriculum. But most universities also boast communication programs, whether attached to the J-school or not. Beyond the business school's teaching of "public relations" (a small aspect of professional communication work), Regina has no communications program. This gap seems a natural complement to the J-school's demonstrated and marketable success in producing "comms"-bound graduates. But an accidental readiness for communications work is neither easy to market nor a satisfactory academic strategy. Beyond knowing how news is made and commanding a theoretical understanding of public information pathways, a job-ready "comms" professional will also have demonstrated competency in strategic communications, crisis management, social-media marketing, and responsibility in promotion, to name just a few vital subjects.

We therefore recommend that as part of the work of formulating a strategic plan, the School should explore widening its current mandate to incorporate both the teaching of professional communications practice and the related study of mass communications theory into its central mandate and its core course -- and possibly degree -- offerings. Students in an expanded School of Journalism and Communication could be invited to focus their studies either on the production of journalism or on the disciplines and techniques of communications professionals.

Creating this expanded school would, of course, require investment in new tenure-stream strength in communications and key areas of scholarship development including public communication and public relations, technology and society, critical advertising studies, and alternative media. This expansion would also require collaboration with the Faculty of Business Administration and the Center for Continuing Education (in relation to the existing Certificate in Public Relations) and with the Faculty of Media Arts and Performance (in relation to mass-communication media arts).

### **(b) Indigenous Journalism.**

Regardless of how else the School's strategic direction were expanded, the strategy should also make explicit the School's existing special interest in Indigenous journalism. Journalism and media programs across Canada were challenged by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to require education on the history of Indigenous peoples, and while many are taking steps to respond, the University of Regina is uniquely placed to make the most of its linkages with First Nations University, First Nations and Métis media outlets, and Indigenous alumni, to train tomorrow's journalists to report sensitively and accurately on Indigenous communities and the issues that affect them. Mandatory instruction in Indigenous history, media representation, and newsroom diversity, already included in classroom instruction, should also become more explicit in the School's narrative.

However, we agree with the students and alumni who stated that nothing short of an Indigenous full-time professor would be sufficient to properly Indigenize the School. The time may even be ripe for the appointment of Canada's first (as far as we know) dedicated tenured position in

Indigenous Journalism and Communication to match and, frankly, overshadow recent and pending Indigenous-reserved, but less pointedly focused, externally funded permanent faculty appointments at larger Canadian universities. It would seem appropriate for U of R to consult FNU on a possible joint initiative in this area and, perhaps, an endowed chair.

## **2. Develop Street-Ready Digital Journalists**

The foundation of every journalist's work has not changed in a century: ask the right questions of the right people, add context to the answers, and then report to the audience in a compelling, coherent fashion. But the digital revolution has disrupted not only how we consume and share news, but also decimated jobs in journalism.

The years of J-schools educating students in specialized work— say, someone who sits in front of the camera, while others shoot, write the script and edit the finished product — are long gone. The education and training of so-called “street-ready” journalists, prepared to deploy a broad range of skills across multiple media platforms, must be a top priority for any journalism program seeking to adapt to changing times.

We spoke with several students who say they are being taught digital skills in the classroom and using them in their projects. But with enrollment in crisis and industry partners reporting that not all of today's students are qualified to meet the expectations for internships, the need for change can only be described as urgent.

Developing street-ready journalists will go a long way toward meeting the demands of the modern newsroom and potential employers. One way to accomplish this goal is a new emphasis on enterprise reporting. There are likely as many students enrolled in the J-School as paid reporters in the province. Students could be challenged to find, report and showcase stories on a new news-based, J-school multi-media outlet. Enterprise reporting would not only raise students' profiles, but equally importantly, that of the J-School across Saskatchewan — and maybe even beyond.

Is such a scenario really possible? The J-School students we spoke to gave examples of their reporting for assignments being used by local reporters—usually without credit. These students are, in fact, already journalists; they are competing with the pros to expertly gather facts, verify information, write, shoot, video and edit. And they no longer have to wait to publish. They can post and share in real time.

Focusing on street-ready journalism will not only give U or R J-School graduates an edge in a fast changing media environment — it will put them in high demand.

## **3. Adapt Course Content and Descriptions to New Digital Realities**

A perception that the J-School has failed to adapt to changing times is reinforced by its own course descriptions. Six foundational courses offered in the third and fourth years offer instruction in “print” and “broadcast.” The word “magazine” appears twice in two other course descriptions. Programs that focus excessively on print and broadcast news are not preparing their students for jobs now, and definitely not in the near future.

The professors and sessional instructors at the University of Regina J-School are aware of the problem but blame university procedures that field “a gauntlet of committees” (in the words of one) to slow down the process of updating course titles and descriptions.

Beyond course names, however, the J-School needs to move more quickly to adapt curriculum for current and future workplaces. Today, all journalism is digital. This represents a vast shift in the way we communicate, requiring educators to understand new products and platforms. It is more than learning how to edit video or shoot photos. It is a vast change that requires an innovation and creativity mindset. Accordingly, curriculum should nimbly reflect rapid change and today’s convergent, multimedia vernacular through focusing on enhanced storytelling, visual concepts, as well as social, mobile and web development.

#### **4. Establish New Collaborations across the University**

The School’s current isolation from other disciplines within the Faculty of Arts and across the broader University is described in detail above. A concerted effort must be made to establish and nurture substantial and meaningful connections and synergies with:

- Other units in the Faculty of Arts;
- The First Nations University of Canada’s Department of Indian Communication Arts, and more specifically its Indian Communication Arts (INCA) certificate program;
- The Faculty of Media, Art, and Performance, in particular its undergraduate Film and Creative Technologies programs, its MA in Media Studies, and its MFA in Media Production; and
- The Faculty of Business Administration, most notably the aforementioned Certificate in Public Relations.

#### **5. Find Efficiencies in MJ Curriculum**

The MJ experiment is working but needs to be streamlined to reduce costs and improve the student experience. In consultation with the Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research and Associate Dean Research and Graduate (Arts), options should be explored to “piggyback” the program on appropriate graduate level courses offered elsewhere in the Arts Faculty/University. In particular, alternatives should be sought for JRN 810 (310) A Critical History of the Media, Journalism and Social Regulation and JRN 880 Critical Approaches to Media and Journalism Studies. This would have the additional benefit of exposing MJ students to other graduate students with similar interests and thereby improve the overall graduate experience. Thought might also be given to seeking out a graduate course with an Indigenous focus to replace JRN 810 or 880. Guidance with this should be sought from the university’s Indigenization office.

#### **6. Connect more students to the J-School**

The undergraduate BJ program is and will continue to be the cornerstone of the School’s reputation and contribution to journalism education in Canada. Creating JRN 100 (Introduction to Journalism and Democracy) as a recruitment tool and means of connecting the School to the broader university community (not to mention its own Pre-Journalism students) was a vital step toward widening the pool and enhancing the quality of applicants. This should be built upon by expanding open course offerings at the 100- and 200- levels. These courses should be formulated to be culturally relevant and accessible across academic disciplines. The case

should be made to the Dean of Arts that additional sessional stipends are needed for a three-to-five-year period to properly implement this recommendation.

Students who succeed in these courses should be actively recruited for journalism program information events, such as a showcase of the work of current J-School students, as well of distinguished alumni. Where possible, collaboration with other units—possibly through joint-listed courses—should be explored to support this expansion of journalism’s engagement with students across the University. But special efforts are needed to foster Pre-Journalism students’ existing interest in the field. A key first step would be to have them to occasionally gather in the department. This could be as simple as providing them with a mailbox with their name on it in a designated area, or scheduling monthly gatherings to socialize.

Consideration should also be given to making one or more of the liberal courses about journalism prerequisites for the upper year journalism courses.

## **7. Re-Imagine Spaces**

The atmosphere of any workspace influences the way its users feel, think, act, create and collaborate. The same is true about how that space is perceived by outsiders.

Presently the J-School appears shut-off and closed to the wider university community. The large lock mounted on the department’s front door, frosted lobby glass, and part-time front desk reinforces a perception that the space is private and visits from outsiders not welcome. The Academic Review Team believes that correcting this perception problem should be a priority, and the space re-imagined.

Security is always important. But upgrading the front door lock, clearing the glass, and occupying the lobby with a full-time staff member and/or students could only improve the conversation about the J-School and, ultimately, collaboration with it.

## **8. Engage University Expertise in Marketing, Recruitment, and Advancement**

The professional resources of the university (Student Affairs, External Relations, UR International) should be committed to design and implement an effective marketing campaign. This should immediately follow the completion of the Strategic Direction process indicated above. As it stands, the School’s public profile is divergent with its actual degree content, relationships with local and regional media, and the contributions of its graduates to the broader Canadian and international media landscape.

Admissions recruitment efforts seem unduly focused on southern Saskatchewan, whereas the opportunities to engage in community and investigative journalism with paid internships and a high chance of employment should be attracting students from across Canada and indeed the US northwest, at least.

Similarly, Advancement expertise will be needed to capitalize on unrealized funding opportunities, including the above-mentioned potential for a tenure-stream professor of professional communication, the potential for an endowed chair in Indigenous Journalism and Communication, and the costs attached to high-profile national collaborative reporting projects,

as well as reporting engagement with local communities beyond the reach of Regina's public transit system.

## **9. Strengthen Sessional Recruitment**

Competing journalism schools have faculty with years of real world experience in the mainstream media. Those individuals also have a brand and name recognition. With this in mind, the School of Journalism might consider the strategic use of sessional lecturers to enhance its level of experience and name recognition. The focus on developing street-ready digital journalists will need to be supported by adaptive and forward-thinking educators with practical experience in digital-first newsrooms and enterprises. The School has many successful graduates on which it could lean in recruiting more "current" sessional lecturers.

## **Conclusion**

The University of Regina's School of Journalism remains strongly committed to its core academic mandate of training tomorrow's journalists, and plays an important part in feeding news media on the Prairies with well-prepared young reporters, producers and editors. Overall, the quality of teaching is excellent, particularly considering the unit's size relative to national and international competitors. The School now faces serious challenges to its financial sustainability due to reduced undergraduate enrollment and increased financial pressures on post-secondary education. Meeting these will require a new strategic direction that includes changing traditional assumptions, making continued progress with Indigenization, embracing interdisciplinary collaborations within the University, and evolving its curriculum for a changing marketplace. This new direction should also embrace a broader academic mandate that includes the teaching of professional communication practices beyond journalism.

*Respectfully submitted by:*

*Ivor Shapiro, MA*

*Professor of Journalism, and Associate Dean (Undergraduate Education), Faculty of Communication and Design, Ryerson University*

*Janet Wasko, PhD*

*Philip H. Knight Chair in Communication Research, and Media Studies Area Director, School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon*

*Craig Wilson, BA*

*Producer – Writer, CBS News, New York City*

*Philip Charrier, PhD*

*Associate Professor and Head of the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Regina*