Assessment Report
Journalism Department
San Francisco State University
July 2011

Background
The Journalism Department is a program accredited through the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. It is one of 9 schools in California accredited through this body. We continue to enjoy a reputation for training young journalists who are prepared to work in news organizations with little to no help from seasoned professionals. However, we have changed our curriculum to more accurately reflect changes in the industry, one that demands more entrepreneurial and self-directed work. Our students compete nationally with other collegiate publications, and we generally win several high placed awards. Three years ago we implemented an assessment plan that includes both direct measures and indirect measures. We hope that these measures shed light on the success of the department's new curriculum and its ability to meet the needs of a new media landscape. Our program goals consist of 12 competencies that reflect the qualities and characteristics that we'd like all graduates of the program to have. They are:

Learning Outcomes
News Judgment: That graduates have news judgment that allows them to identify and develop story ideas through observation, reading and paying attention to their environment
Critical and Independent Thinking: That graduates know how to synthesize information and think independently as they work through problems using inference and logic.
Cultural Competence: That graduates understand a variety of cultures and how those cultures influence perspectives, attitudes and personal interaction with the world.
Writing: That graduates write concisely, clearly and accurately, while still engaging the audience with compelling storytelling.
Analytical Competence: That graduates can discern and weigh the quality of information they gather, as well as know how to analyze and interpret it.
Research and Reporting: That graduates know how to methodically find information through the Internet, public documents and personal interviews.
Media Literacy: That graduates know how to competently navigate through a rapidly changing media world, understanding media's influence on society, community and the democratic process, and that students also understand the power of image in shaping society's understanding of the world.
Ethics, Integrity and the Law: That graduates know the ethical standards and constitutional laws that guide journalism excellence.
Critical Evaluation: That graduates know how to critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
Data and Numbers: That graduates know how to apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
Technology: That graduates know how to apply technology in their professional work.
Visual Competence: Work demonstrates an ability to research, find and capture in a technically competent, concise, well composed and visually compelling manner the gamut of human experience in a variety of formats.

Direct measures of assessment are Entrance and Exit exams for two of our core writing classes: Jour 221, Newswriting, and Jour 300, Reporting. In both of these classes, students take an entrance exam, which is uniform across the sections and is used solely as an assessment of where each student is with five of the 12 competencies. The competencies addressed in these two courses are, News Judgment, Critical Thinking,

Analytical Competence, Research and Reporting, and Writing. In Jour 300, we also address the competency of Critical Evaluation. The results from this initial assessment are instructive for both the teacher and the student. The student immediately understands what is expected and what areas they may need to focus on, while the teacher gets the birds-eye view of skills that need the most attention in the course.

The exit exams, which are administered at the end of the course and are uniform for each section of the course, test student achievement for the aforementioned competencies. The results from exit exams account for 15 percent of the final grade for the course. In addition, the department uses the results from the entrance and exams to examine overall academic growth in the cohort.

The second direct measure is a review of electronic portfolios, which require a cohort of students to submit work from several courses at various levels of the curriculum. This process was designed to give us more information about the development of students as they work through the curriculum. Students were to post work from one core course, Jour 300; two digital journalism courses, Jour 226 and Jour 395; advanced photography and writing courses; and any one of the three capstone electives.

We required a cohort of students to initiate electronic portfolios. Students taking Jour 226, Digital Newsgathering in Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 were designated as the cohort and were instructed how to set up the ePortfolio. Faculty have elected to review the portfolios every two years. In this cohort we started with 69 portfolios. Fourteen of those portfolios were dropped from the cohort because students either left the program, were in study abroad programs, or had graduated a year earlier. Of the remaining 55 portfolios, several were incomplete, an indication that faculty did not monitor posting as was agreed, an issue we will address in the coming year. (We are reviewing this process and plan to refine it for fuller student participation.) In the review, there were 30 relatively complete portfolios, and we reviewed all of those. The 7-member review committee consisted of both faculty and journalism professionals.

The third measure we used in our assessment was an annual survey of graduating seniors. This is an indirect measure of student achievement in the competencies and it provides us with quantitative and qualitative data that helps round out the results from the direct measures.

Entrance and Exit Exams (Direct Measure)
Entrance exams were administered during the first week of instruction. Students were allotted 45 minutes to complete the test. In Jour 221, Newswriting, the exam consisted of three sections: grammar, punctuation, civics and current events, and news judgment. In Jour 300, Reporting, the test consisted of six sections: AP Style, grammar, civics and current events, journalism terms, news judgment, and writing a brief. Faculty members created both exams.

Exit exams were administered during the last week of instruction or in some cases during finals week. Students in Jour 221, Newswriting, were allotted 105 minutes to complete

the exit exam. The exit exam had much more material on it than the entrance exam, which is why we allotted more time than for the entrance exam. The Newswriting exit exam consisted of six sections: Grammar and AP Style usage, punctuation, civics and people in the news, accuracy and media law, court terms, and writing a full news story.

Students in Jour 300, Reporting, were allotted 100 minutes to complete the exit exam, which had much more material on it than the entrance exam and consisted of six parts: AP Style, grammar, civics and current events, journalism terms, news judgment, and writing a story from a video press conference.

The exams were graded by the instructors of their respective courses and each instructor used a rubric to grade the written portions of the exam.

This is the third year we've tracked these scores and the overall results have remained the same for students in Jour 221, Newswriting. Students showed significant improvement, moving from 62 percent to 80 percent. However, in Jour 300, Reporting, course scores tended to start at lower midlevel and finish in the same range or slightly lower. Yet the average of all the courses showed small improvement from the start of the semester to the end of the semester. In Fall average score for the entry level assessment was 70, while the average exit exam score was 73. In the Spring, the average entry level score was 78 and the exit score was 81.

Faculty have long viewed Jour. 300 as a course that weeds out the serious from the not so serious journalists. We have dubbed it the journalism bootcamp of the department, set standards and goals as high as those required in the profession. Students must learn where to go to gather credible information, how to cultivate sources, how to synthesize and analyze information, and how to develop news stories from the information they gather. They must also learn how to write compelling articles, with accuracy and on deadline. It is true that not all students are cut out to become reporters, however, faculty must decide if these numbers are acceptable. In the meantime, I will introduce to faculty some of the high-impact practices that I became acquainted with this summer at the AAC&U conference in Vermont. Some of these may bring different results, though I know some faculty have already incorporated a few of these practices.

ePortfolio Review (Direct Measure)
In this review we focused on 10 of the 12 competencies: News Judgment, Critical Thinking, Reporting and Research, Writing, Ethics and Law, Analytical Competence, Cultural Competence, Critical Evaluation, Data and Numbers, and Technology. The review committee consisted of three journalism professionals and four faculty members. Each member was assigned to review, with the aid of a rubric, one to two competencies, assessing them on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the highest. They marked their assessments on a chart and the data were combined and analyzed.

The average ranking of the portfolios was 3.44 about a C+. This is the same as the overall ranking of portfolios two years ago. Students scored high in News Judgment, Critical

Thinking, and Ethics, Integrity and Law – in the B range. Yet many of the same problems persist.

While the writing is competent, it was sometimes dull and often lacked storytelling. There were, however, some outstanding works as a third of the portfolios received a 4 and one portfolio received a 5. I will venture a guess that part of the issue with writing is that our students still are not reading enough. The department used to require all students in the reporting class to read a long-form, non-fiction book that required extensive reporting. We must get back to this practice and perhaps expand it to more than the Reporting course.

Additionally, students scored low in analytical competence (2.34 equivalent to a D+) and on research and reporting, with the average at 2.72 (about a C-).

Finally, the average score for technology was very disappointing, (2.86, in the C range) since two years ago we introduced two digital journalism courses that students are now required to take. We must re-evaluate what we're teaching in those two classes.

This is far from perfect data because the portfolios were likely missing representative work. For example, we know that the 2.86 average for technology was not an accurate portrayal of student performance. It was later pointed out to me that many of the portfolios did not have technology artifacts from Jour 395, Intro to Online Journalism, though students had significant work to post from the class. Rather, students posted this work on their blogs. To help clarify where we stood, we decided on a second round of evaluation, using posts from the blogs of all students in the cohort who had completed Jour 395 in the 2010-11 academic year. A dozen students fell in this category. The same reviewer, a multimedia journalist from the East Coast, reviewed the work from the blogs and gave us new scores. When we factored in work from the blogs, the score rose to 3.4, a C+. In fact, the reviewer was very impressed. "Some of these blogs are really good," he said. "I was surprised." Again, the department will have to improve its data gathering operation and we believe the blogs are going to be the best way to go because students are already using that format to promote their work.

Graduating Senior Survey (Indirect Measure)
Although this is an indirect measure of program success, I really appreciate the feedback of students about the program. I find it insightful, not just about the program, but also about where students feel they are in their career goals and in the development of journalism skills.

The graduating class (N=78) continues to be diverse: 36 percent identified as white, 17 percent Latino, 8 percent African American, 5 percent Asian American, and 21 percent as other. Sixty-one percent of our seniors were female, 36 percent male, and 3 percent identified as transgender.

The breakdown of concentrations among seniors reflected the transition the department is still undergoing. We have been phasing in a new curriculum, and the range of

concentrations reflected that transition. Sixty-seven percent of respondents were following the pre-2008 curriculum, 19 percent were following the 2008 curriculum, and 14 percent were following the new 2009 curriculum. This final group of students was required to take two digital/online journalism courses, preparing them for the transformation in the field.

Half of respondents transferred from a community college, while the other half started their academic career at San Francisco State. Time to graduation also improved from previous years. Seventeen percent of students graduated within four years, 32 percent graduated within five, and 26 percent graduated within six. Nearly 25 percent graduated in more than six years. The reasons for the delayed graduations varied, but the common response was that work, the expense of going to school, and indecisiveness at the start of college got in the way of ideal plans. A few became mothers while in the department, and about five cited the lack of needed courses.

One of the most troubling findings was that 86 percent of our students had not yet found a job or internship after graduation. The survey was taken in January and February. It's difficult to say how those numbers would have changed as we approached the summer. But the job market is clearly bleak and may be even bleaker in journalism. The department has developed both workshops and coursework to help students develop possible business plans as freelancers and for journalism start-ups. However, these courses and workshops were poorly attended, which means we have to do a better job of explaining what happens in these curricular and co-curricular activities. Of the 11 student who had a job or internship lined up, 40 percent had a part-time journalism job, and 30 percent had a journalism internship. Others had non-journalism jobs or internships. It was encouraging, however, to see that half of respondents completed at least one internship during their college career. We can still improve upon this number. Oddly enough, the majority of internships happened in newspapers, so they are still providing foundational experiences for our students. Of those who completed an internship, 57 percent of them received course credit. It is unclear why this number is not higher since students have two opportunities to receive course credit, and this opportunity is widely known. Overall students requested more guidance with career development.

Students seemed to be clear on their career goals and it was encouraging that a majority of students wanted to stick with journalism. Fifty-eight percent of students wanted to work for a news organization, be it online, newspaper, magazine or broadcast. About 26 percent said they were unsure of their career goals, while 7 percent said they didn't want to work in the media at all. Nine percent said they wanted to work in the entertainment media industry.

In terms of student's confidence in the program, 80 percent of respondents said they believed the department successfully prepared them for a career in journalism. When looking at specific learning outcomes, students gave the department high marks for helping them develop critical thinking skills, reporting and research, and understanding the role of media in society. The lowest mark (average rating of 3.77) went to learning how to navigate technology and technological changes. Again, as was indicated in the

portfolio review, this is an area faculty should investigate more. Most students marked each outcome with a good or higher rating, but the majority of ranks fell into the good category. We have room for improvement as was also indicated in the ePortfolio review.

Students cited faculty and the emphasis on real-world experience as the main strengths of the department. On the other hand, they cited overcrowding and inadequate offerings as the main weakness of the program. I am perplexed by the overcrowding issue, as in the last two years we've had to cancel classes because of under enrollment. This could be left over sentiment from semesters previous to the 2009 academic year. It may also be true that students tend to stick with popular classes and are hesitant to try some of our new offerings, which are designed to advance student knowledge about the changes in the industry. We might be able to do better outreach on such classes during our mandatory student orientation for new students.