

REMARKS TO FUDAN JOURNALISM SCHOOL

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Journalism and communications schools around the world are at an important crossroads in their existence. Some, like the Fudan School of Journalism, have existed for many decades; others are very new. Some combine journalism and communications, others have only one or the other. Some offer only graduate or undergraduate degrees, and they may be large research oriented institutions or small teaching schools.

But whatever their organization, all confront unprecedented environments that are chaotic and highly uncertain and posing unprecedented challenges of relevance and respect.

Unfortunately for the leadership of these schools, the changes in the environment are not only deep but they are also rapid. New platforms are born and transform the media landscape in 18 months (think

Google), as others drop in viability and visibility (think *Business Week* or the evening news). The media companies trying to survive in this fast-paced environment of change, whether the *New York Times*, NBC Universal or the Shanghai Media Group, are discovering they must adapt quickly, or they die. Yet schools and universities have little experience in adapting quickly. Nor do they have much experience in designing and implementing targeted, comprehensive strategies that genuinely align hiring, budgets, public relations and everything else to match their stated unique strategic goals.

Yet fast-paced strategies and their implementation are precisely the actions that the leadership of journalism and communications schools must pursue if they hope to remain relevant and respected in their professional communities. Urgency is everything.

Successful schools will be able to explain to their students, faculty and staff, and to their external stakeholders, what they stand for and what they are trying to achieve, in ways that demonstrate convincingly that they are unique. They need to convince an

increasingly interested but skeptical population that they can provide value and essential skills to students at a time when none of these achievements can be taken for granted as either achievable or even desirable, in light of the birth of the digital and the deathwatch in many communities of core legacy media like newspapers.

In conferences and meetings around the world, thoughtful school administrators gather and discuss these issues, and their agreement on the fundamental issues is remarkable. They all are worried about how to combine traditional journalism values with the new technological and social demands. They are seeking to maintain academic integrity as well as seek out new relationships with stakeholders in the public and private sector they might have kept at arm's length in the past.

Given these conditions, my first observation is that beyond agreement on some basics of adaptation, the leaders of communications and journalism schools need to adopt a greater *sense of urgency*. We haven't the luxury to study our new conditions endlessly, to debate them endlessly, and then to decide to do more of the same. Otherwise our teaching, our research and our

service to the public will decline in respect and relevance. We don't possess endless measures of time.

Self-reflection is essential, but one wants to avoid the dangers of paralysis through analysis. As I will suggest below, one needs to analyze continually and with dispatch, but also to experiment with new approaches at the same time. Of course, different schools will do this in different ways. And they will also be driven by somewhat different environments.

Regional, Cultural and National Differences

The U.S. and other developed nations confront the scissor cuts of adjusting to serious declines in demand for traditional, legacy media, while simultaneously delighting in the rise in demand for new digital platforms like blogs and social media. What are educators supposed to teach under these conditions, and how are they supposed to deliver their academic wisdom?

But the conditions of change are not the same elsewhere around the world. My recent travels to talk to media editors and owners, online bloggers and old line journalists, professors and researchers and activists in

China and India, and observations based on my experiences in Africa and Latin America, I see explosive growth across all the platforms, print media included. The quantity of the media is growing rapidly; but what I was told in Asia, and what I read and saw for myself, is that the quality of the content and the journalistic performance is not keeping pace. This is a universal complaint wherever I travel. Therefore, solutions to these challenges cannot all be universal; there are particularities that vary by culture, region and country.

Institutional Differences

Solutions will also vary by type of institution. My own school is a case in point. We are a school which has tried to be comprehensive for many years, offering B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. Under one roof we have a school of communication together with a distinct school of journalism which has a full-fledged public relations program. We house 15 research and training institutions that provide various combinations of mid-career professional training, communications services to stakeholders and detailed scholarly research on a wide range of topics. With an enrollment of more than 2,200

students and 200 faculty and adjunct professors, we confront the breadth, depth and speed of change with some excitement because we possess the organizational wherewithal to address all of the new factors seriously (including hiring 4 new faculty in the area of digital media, including *Convergence Culture* author Henry Jenkins, formerly of MIT). At the same time, we struggle with the imperatives of speed and agility since reforming a big institution is more difficult than reforming a smaller one that is already focused by topic or population (e.g. just master's students). In some ways Berkeley or Columbia are lucky because they can be more focused, since they only do journalism.

But whether we are Chinese or Indian or English, large or small, I believe there are three steps we can all take to improve our chances of remaining relevant and respected as we try to navigate this uncertain environment.

Teach our students to combine traditional values, with new attitudes and skills.

New skills like cross-platform storytelling, and online journalism.

Essential values include fact-based journalism, and most especially the commitment to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, and thus contribute to openness, honesty and the social good.

Become the laboratory and testing ground for new experiments with old media, new media, and how to combine them.

Our classrooms should become safe spaces to try new outrageous ideas. We must simultaneously teach our students to experiment and to be entrepreneurial, to take risks and even learn to accept failure and keep going to prepare them for the new media world.

Thirdly, journalism and communications schools must create new partnerships with other media and journalism stakeholders to learn *from* them, and to

share *with* them what we have learned through our research and teaching.

We need to work so that all in society can become more effective communicators.

These three actions are essential. But beyond action there is an additional attitude that we must adopt if our schools are to be truly respected and relevant for our societies. Internal actions and outreach to immediate stakeholders are important, but inadequate. The leadership must take an additional step, a step that should be easy for communications and journalism schools to take on naturally. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons they historically have not done so.

In the past, the leadership of our teaching institutions has been reluctant to reach out to the broader public on the essential contributions their schools can make.

But faced with new threats and new opportunities, they must. Deans must be willing to go before the wider public to articulate the value their schools bring not only

to their students and immediate stakeholders, but to society more broadly. The leadership must learn to make its case. In other words, the leadership of communications, journalism and media schools must communicate better through the media and journalism.

One will recognize immediately that this is a curious paradox. The leadership of law, business and medicine has been more effective communicators of their message than their communications counterparts. And those most familiar with the profession of journalism may recognize in this reticence the ingrained training of journalists not to push themselves into a story, but to remain far in the background as they tell the story of others. Self-promotion is seen as unseemly. For their part, experts in the communications field might suspect their leadership's relative invisibility might reflect both the newness of this field relative to others, and its own internal ambivalence about what it really is – social science or humanities? Rhetoric or political economy? Mass communication or organizational communication?

Journalism and communications deans should take a lesson from other professional schools like law, medicine

and business. They not only argue why they are valuable to the students who will go through their schools on the way to their professional lives, but they are willing to take up the arguments of why they and the professions which they serve most directly are essential to the health of society.

In closing, let me return to the beginning. To communicate one must first have something to say. Deans must identify what business leaders call the unique 'value proposition' of their school. Standing at this crossroads, each dean must speak to her or his particular institution, each with a unique culture, country and competencies. The time to speak out is now, and redefine the meaning and value of the profession at this unique moment of time. Otherwise, we risk slipping all too easily into irrelevance as institutions whose time has come and gone.