

Eight-Year Program Review IBHE Report Summary: see attached Resources page

PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT SUMMARY

1. **Reporting Institution:** Eastern Illinois University
2. **Program Reviewed:** B.A. in Journalism
3. **Date:** January 25, 2024
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5. **OVERVIEW**

The Journalism Division in the School of Communication and Journalism is one of 119 programs nationwide accredited by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC). The program strictly adheres to the council's rules and guidelines in areas such as curriculum, instruction and learning outcomes, diversity and inclusion, professional and public services, and student services to maintain the strength of the program.

The EIU Journalism program was first accredited in 1982 and was re-accredited in 1988, 1994, 2000, 2006, 2012, and 2018. The program was in compliance with all nine standards in the most recent 2017 ACEJMC on-site evaluation conducted by a three-person team. In its written report, the accreditation team noted several strengths: (1) a solid assessment plan that includes improvements over the last accreditation; (2) A curriculum that requires multiplatform education to reflect the current state of media; (3) A diverse student body; (4) A strong leadership; (5) Loyal and engaged alumni; (6) Strong student media outlets; (7) A long tradition of intensive scholastic and community college outreach and service.

The strength of the EIU journalism program is that it provides students with both rigorous coursework and opportunities to practice the craft. Journalism students at Eastern Illinois supplement their coursework with extensive hands-on experience through student media opportunities. One of the accreditation reports stated, "Virtually all students in the unit report serving in some capacity with one or more of the student media." Student media include a weekly student newspaper (Daily Eastern News) and online supplement; a daily, 30-minute, live television newscast (WEIU News Watch); a podcast studio; a radio station (Hit-Mix 88.9 WEIU); and a yearbook (Warbler).

All of the curricular and extra-curricular offerings of the Journalism Division are designed to meet 10 core values and competencies as mandated by ACEJMC accreditation. The division's assessment plan is based upon these 10 core values and competencies abbreviated here: (1) freedom of speech and press; (2) the history and role of journalism; (3) gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and other forms of diversity in relation to mass communication in the domestic and global contexts; (4) visual images and information; (5) writing; (6) ethics; (7) critical thinking and research; (8) numerical and statistical concepts; (9) copy editing; (10) tools and technologies.

Currently, along with University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Southern Illinois

University, Edwardsville, the EIU journalism program makes only three programs in Illinois accredited by ACEJMC (there were five in 2018 when our latest program report was submitted). With its rigorous course work, expansive student media opportunities, and faculty contribution to professional and public services, the Eastern Illinois journalism program provides a comprehensive education rarely achieved by similar-sized universities.

6. MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.a. Description and assessment of any major changes in the program

The most significant events we've witnessed since the last IBHE self-study report in 2018 include the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2020 U.S. presidential election, and the insurrection on the U.S. congress on January 6, 2021. How Americans experienced those events and how they used news and information during those times are closely related to the changes we've seen in the field of journalism and the directions we should take as educators. Through times of crisis and a contentious election and transition, Americans relied on the news media and journalists to get the news and information necessary to make sense of the world, but they were also divided in terms of where they got their information. For example, about half of Americans relied on local news outlets to get news about Covid-19 during the height of the pandemic (Shearer, 2020) while roughly half of Americans received at least some news about Covid-19 vaccines on social media (Mitchell & Liedke, 2021). This latter trend resulted in findings such as those Americans who get news mainly from social media are less knowledgeable and less engaged (Infield, 2020) and that January 6 rioters claimed that they were misled by election misinformation and conspiracy theories (the Associated Press, 2021).

While misinformation, disinformation, and fake news have always been a part of the media ecosystem in modern times, the implications of them for the field of journalism have never been so profound. Especially in recent years, the prevalence of social media use has amplified the dissemination and circulation of information to an unprecedented degree. Studies report that social media outpaced print newspapers in the U.S. as a news source by 2018 (Shearer, 2018) and that by 2023, 86% of U.S. adults reported that they received news from the digital media often or sometimes, and half of Americans were found to get news from social media at least sometimes (Pew Research Center, 2023). These findings mean two things. First, journalists are now only one major provider of information – individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions all have information to disseminate, and journalistic values such as accuracy, fairness, or balance may or may not matter to them. In this environment, journalists have the additional role of information curators helping people make sense of news in a world of information cacophony (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2020). Many would agree that the role of journalism and journalists is more important today than ever. Second, journalists should continue to provide news on the platforms audiences use. In the past 10-15 years, news media outlets have made an extensive transition to digital media, making news accessible from a variety of digital platforms including websites, mobile apps, search, social media, and podcasts (Pew Research Center, 2023). In addition, news outlets have adopted digital outreach and engagement methods – offering newsletters, having a presence on social media, releasing podcasts, and allowing comments on their articles (Pew Research Center, 2023). News media outlets, especially the ones considered industry leaders, are doing a good job in this regard as a recent 2023 PEW study found: nine-in-ten news outlets examined in the study had a presence on Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok.

Journalism's academic discipline is guided by ACEJMC, who observes the changes in the field and challenges university journalism departments to focus their attention on fostering news professionals and news consumers. EIU's Journalism program meets that challenge by adhering to ACEJMC standards in its curriculum, instruction, assessment and scholarship to create a strong educational program for future journalism professionals and news consumers. We ensure that students majoring and minoring journalism at EIU acquire two things: an ability to think

critically about how journalism, information and democracy interact with one another and the ability to master the skills needed to practice journalism with legal, ethical, and technological proficiency.

6.b. Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program improvement

The division's assessment plan is based upon the 10 professional values and competencies mandated by the ACEJMC. Since 2004, the division has adopted and implemented assessment plans to achieve three goals: (1) to comply with the Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning adopted by Eastern Illinois University; (2) to comply with the standards of the ACEJMC; and (3) to evaluate student competencies. The assessment plan was adopted in April 2004 and was revised in August 2004, 2007, 2008, 2012, and 2017.

Assessment of student learning is an integral part of curriculum development and vision. The major findings of the 10 learning objectives come from data collected each semester through a series of standardized assignments, pre- and post-tests, and senior and alumni surveys that were developed by faculty members and tested and approved by the Assessment Committee and its chairperson, Dr. Ensung Kim. They indicate the curriculum's strengths and weaknesses, help faculty members refine the way concepts are introduced and practiced, and lead to course revision. The findings are available upon request.

The ACEJMC site-team for re-accreditation in 2018 commended the Journalism Division's assessment plan and curriculum and concluded that the division is in full compliance in all standards including the standard of assessment of learning outcomes and in the standard of curriculum and instruction. In particular, the site-team stated the following regarding the division's assessment of learning outcomes: "The unit's assessment plan is clear and effective in its use of direct and indirect measures to assess student learning. The unit defines goals for learning, including the "Professional Values and Competencies." There is evidence of the unit's use of assessment data to improve classroom effectiveness with the help of faculty, alumni and professionals." Regarding the curriculum and instruction, the site-team commended the elimination of concentrations and the addition of classes to ensure instruction in both theory and skills courses.

However, the site team pointed out the instruction on multimedia journalism as an area of weakness: "A core multimedia course that has been flagged by assessment as inadequate and continues to be; a lack of data journalism and audience analytics in the curriculum."

Recent assessment results also revealed that students need to improve their understanding of culturally proficient communication in the context of global diversity. In the pre-test given in Journalism & Democracy (JOU 2001), students scored low (average 1.38 out of 5 in spring 2019). As the score in this category improved in later years (e.g., 2021), it is difficult to assume that students' understanding of global diversity is lacking. The division's assessment committee will continue observing learning outcomes in this area.

6.c. Description of actions taken since the last review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes

The division made several changes to the curriculum in response to the site-team's evaluation.

First, two journalism faculty members have worked on Introduction to Multimedia Journalism (JOU 3002), to make it a course where students get a solid understanding of how to tell journalistic stories using diverse forms of media. The faculty members agree that the goal of this course is to help students understand the characteristics of the digital media environment including how people access, consume, and use news and information, identify the best way to tell stories in the digital media environment, and build competencies to use texts, images, graphs, maps, audios, and videos to tell journalistic stories the best way they can. The division feels confident with the direction for the course and is looking forward to seeing the improved outcome in coming semesters.

Second, the journalism faculty who taught Advanced Reporting (JOU 3000) made significant efforts to expand the opportunities for students to get engaged in data journalism, teaching how to look for and acquire publicly available data, how to interpret the data, and how to extract information, patterns, or trends from data. Student then use these skills to write stories that use or compile public data, such as comparisons in budgets or evaluating the property taxes across neighborhoods. The division made this course a required course for all journalism students, so that they would have experience in data journalism before graduation. The division also made Investigative Reporting (JOU 4000) a core course for the Broadcast Journalism and Public Affairs Reporting Options. In this course, students get more intensive experience in data journalism. For example, in spring 2023, students developed a database for every felony in Coles County during 2021. Afterward, they reported on trends in crimes, speaking with judges, police officers and state attorneys. The stories written by students earned first place for Enterprise Writing from both the Illinois College Press Association and from the Society of Collegiate Journalists. In addition, students involved with the *Daily Eastern News* had additional experiences with data journalism. Since the *Daily Eastern News* made the transition from daily to weekly, the coverage found in the weekly edition has emphasized the in-depth analysis of issues and has become a chance for students to practice data-driven journalism.

Third, the division made Social Media Engagement (JOU 3750) a required course for all journalism majors in its revision of the journalism program in 2022. Fall 2023 was the first time it was offered as a required course and students receive a focused instruction on the tools journalists need to function successfully on social media including audience analytics.

The Journalism Division also made changes in response to student needs as well as industry and discipline changes. In 2019, the division created the social media engagement minor to address the increasing number of Americans who get their information from social media platforms. The ability to reach, interact, and analyze audiences on social media is essential to people who intend to work in the field of communication. By minoring in social media engagement, students who don't major in journalism can still acquire knowledge and skills transferrable to a variety of professions in the field. In this minor, students are required to take Journalism & Democracy (JOU 2001), News Writing (JOU 2101), Multimedia Journalism (JOU 3002), Social Media Engagement (JOU 3750), and Practicum (JOU 3401). In addition, students take one course from Digital Media Strategy (DGT 4814), Strategic Social Media Communication (CMN 3980), Online Journalism (JOU 3703), or Special Topics (JOU 3950).

In 2022, the Division proposed to the university revisions to the journalism major. For a long time the ACEJMC had enforced what's called the '72-hour rule' which required journalism majors to take at least 72 credit hours of courses in liberal arts areas outside of journalism. In the context of Eastern Illinois University, journalism majors were required to take no more than 39-to-41 credit hours of journalism courses. In 2020, the ACEJMC relaxed this rule and changed it to flexible hours as long as programs were committed to cultivating a journalism education rooted in the liberal arts. In addition to this change, and in order to manage enrollment numbers more effectively, the division embarked on several changes to the existing curriculum. Our primary goal was to expand the opportunities for students to acquire audio, video, and multimedia knowledge and skills regardless of their journalism option choice. Previously, these opportunities were more readily available to the journalism majors within the broadcast journalism option, and students with other options were not

necessarily required to take courses emphasizing audio and video storytelling on the multiplatform environment. We remedied this issue in our 2022 curriculum revision by requiring all journalism majors to take Broadcast News (JOU 3610) and Social Media Engagement (JOU 3750). In addition, we created a new course, Copy Editing and Design (JOU 2902), by combining Copy Editing (JOU 2901) and Publication Design (JOU 3300). All journalism majors are now required to take this course, so they can acquire abilities not only to produce content but also to display the created content.

The curriculum revision in 2022 was also intended to streamline course offerings. The university experienced a decline in enrollment for several years, and this was also true for the division. Combining some of our courses (Copy Editing: JOU 2901, Publication Design: JOU 3300, Journalism Ethics: JOU 4102, and Communication Law: JOU 4771) to create new courses (Copy Editing & Design: JOU 2902 and Communication Law & Ethics: JOU 4420) and requiring students to take more courses in journalism fundamentals were logical steps for us to take to make course offerings as efficient as we could.

Creating a senior seminar tailored to journalism students was another change we made since the last report. Previously, all EIU students were required to take a senior seminar course outside of their major discipline area in order to expand their understanding of the world. However, the university made a change in its requirement, and students can now take a major capstone course to fulfill the senior seminar requirement if it has been approved to do so. In fall 2021, the division proposed the course, Journalism Capstone Seminar (JOU 4730), to meet this purpose and we offered it for the first time in spring 2023.

6.d. Description of actions to be taken as a result of this review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes

The Journalism division makes ongoing efforts to strengthen program rigor and student learning outcomes through curricular and/or instructional changes. The current review emphasizes the learning outcomes both the division and the ACEJMC pursue: producing future journalists who possess knowledge and skills appropriate for today's media environment.

Journalism's curriculum committee is currently working on developing a new course in which news judgment, news values, storytelling, reporting, and research are taught. Instructors teaching News Reporting & Writing (JOU 2101) and the advisors working with student journalists at the *Daily Eastern News* have observed that many students resort to a chronological recording of an event, speech, interview, game, etc. when they write a news story. Instructors and student media advisors believe the reason for this phenomenon is either students' lack of understanding of what news is or what makes a good story. While news values and judgment are taught in various writing classes, such as JOU 2101 (News Reporting & Writing) or JOU 3000 (Advanced Reporting), instructors feel that students will greatly benefit if they are completely immersed in learning news judgment and storytelling concepts while developing these skills.

In addition, the committee is reviewing courses related to multimedia and social media journalism, specifically JOU 3002 (Introduction to Multimedia Journalism) and JOU 3750 (Social Media Engagement). As media technologies and American's news consumption habits change rapidly, today's journalists must stay nimble so they can function successfully in this environment. Students learn how to produce, disseminate, analyze, and evaluate their stories on a variety of platforms, how to engage and interact with audiences, and how to strategize their story dissemination in these two required courses. Periodic reviews and revisions are necessary to best achieve student learning goals.

Comments from the College Dean:

The ACEJMC-accredited Journalism BA has enjoyed a long and storied history at Eastern, producing students who have made positive impacts on the field both near and far. While challenges to the field are aplenty— notably the ever-increasing realm of digital media— the value of a strong Journalism curriculum is, as the Department notes, more important than ever. The accreditor has noted approvingly the program’s commitment to reflect in the curriculum the current state of the craft; it also praises the program’s highly engaged and caring faculty. Curricular concerns articulated by ACEJMC have been actively addressed and positive outcomes are beginning to be seen as a result. It is also worth observing that the program’s enrollment largely remained stable (mid-50s number of majors) through the COVID pandemic into the present day.

We recommend a decision of **Program in good standing**.

- Program in good standing
- Program flagged for priority review
- Program enrollment suspended

VCAA Explanation:

09.0401 B.A. in Journalism

The summary above describes the careful and multiple efforts to improve the curricular offerings available to and overall educational experience of students in the B.A. in Journalism. While many of these efforts stem from the need to respond to accrediting body (ACEJMC) observations, they nevertheless work towards clarifying the overarching purpose of news producers to be rigorous and objective in their presentation of information to public audiences in a variety of media. The program continues to evince a strong desire to see measurable progress in students’ understanding of global diversity, data-driven journalism, and audience analytics. In what looks to be a top-to-bottom reform of the curriculum (which has moved away from narrow concentrations), the program works to strengthen students’ command of multimedia journalism platforms, the ability to tell stories digitally, and in-depth investigative reporting.