

Technology and editing education in the United States: Preparing students for an uncertain future

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Abstract: This paper, based on a 2013 survey sent to nearly 400 college and university instructors, examines how editing is being taught in U.S. journalism and communication departments. Preliminary results indicate that professors are nudging editing courses away from their traditional newspaper-centrism and would like to do even more with digital media and technology. Many respondents reported, however, that the time needed to address students' lack of knowledge about basic English grammar, a foundation for editing courses of any type, kept them from fully integrating digital media into editing courses.

Keywords: editing, technology, journalism, education, design

Introduction

This paper, which examines what is being taught in courses on journalistic editing in the United States, had its genesis in comments about editing instruction made by an intern for a small daily newspaper. The intern, a recent graduate of a renowned U.S. university journalism school, had been invited to share, during a workshop on the future of editing at the 2009 meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication,² how her coursework had prepared her for internship as a “copy editor,” the term generally used in the United States for “sub editor.”

She told the assembled journalism professors that she felt mostly well prepared, though she had been asked in editing coursework to learn some things that seemed outdated. Pressed for detail, she said she had been taught “headline counting,” a technique once used to determine whether a proposed newspaper headline would fit in the horizontal space allotted to it. The technique assigns a value to each letter: a half count for thin lowercase letters, such as “l”; a count for most lowercase letters; a count and a half for most uppercase letters; and two counts for wide upper-case letters, such as “W” and “M.”

¹ The author wishes to thank the following people for assistance with the survey from which this paper draws data: Leslie-Jean Thornton, an associate professor in the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University; John Oudens, a professional copy editor; Aaron Trammell, a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University; and Deborah Gump, a visiting professor at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of South Carolina.

² The Future of Editing, workshop sponsored by the Newspaper Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Aug. 4, 2009, Boston.

That means that the intern had learned, as the author of one editing handbook put it, “the same kind of job as the copy editor who wrote the Titanic headline.”³ Headline counting was a vital skill when the headings copy editors composed were actually produced by Linotype operators setting “hot type” or, later, by composing room employees using photomechanical typesetting systems to produce words in long paper strips that were pasted above stories on a paper “flat.” The skill has had little practical application, however, since the 1980s to 1990s, when most U.S. daily newspapers moved to computer-based page-makeup systems.⁴

The use of instructional time for such an arguably outdated editing skill at one of the United States' most respected journalism programs in 2009—a year when 61 percent of Americans were going online for news daily⁵ and daily newspaper circulation declined 10.7 percent⁶—raises questions about what is being taught four years later in editing courses. This paper attempts to offer a preliminary answer, drawing on results of an ongoing survey sent to nearly 400 U.S. editing-course instructors at more than 260 colleges and universities.

Theoretical framework

How U.S. academics teach journalistic editing is particularly important to study now because editing is undergoing changes—at least at newspapers, whose practices U.S. editing courses have traditionally emphasized—that are different from the changes of the past. From the 1950s to the 1990s, U.S. newspaper copy editing was transformed by a series of technological innovations. Although not all newsrooms embraced all changes, some U.S. copy desks went from preparing stories on paper to be set into lead type by Linotype operators, to using teletypesetting (TTS) equipment that allowed hole-punched paper tape to drive linecasting machines,⁷ to employing optical-character recognition readers,⁸ to using “dumb” video display terminals,⁹ and, finally, to having networked computers connected to the Internet.

³ Barbara G. Ellis, *The Copy-Editing and Headline Handbook* (New York: Perseus Publishing, 2001).

⁴ John T. Russial, “Pagination and the Newsroom: A Question of Time,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 15, no. 31 (Winter 1994) 91-101; John T. Russial, “Mixed Messages on Pagination and Other New Skills,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1995) 60-70; Keith Stamm and Doug Underwood, “How Pagination Affects Job Satisfaction of Editors,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (Winter 1995) 851-862; Doug Underwood, Anthony C. Giffard, and Keith Stamm, “Computers and Editing: Pagination’s Impact on the Newsroom,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1994) 116-127.

⁵ Project For Excellence In Journalism and the Pew Internet & American Life Project, “Online: Audience Behavior,” *The State of the News Media 2010*. Available at <http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2010/online-summary-essay/audience-behavior/>.

⁶ Project For Excellence In Journalism and the Pew Internet & American Life Project, “Newspapers: Audiences,” *The State of the News Media 2010*. Available at <http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2010/newspapers-summary-essay/audience/>

⁷ Clifton E. Wilson, “Impact of Teletypewriter on Publishing Media,” *Journalism Quarterly* 30 (Summer 1953) 372-373.

⁸ Benjamin M. Compaine, *The Newspaper Industry in the 1980s: An Assessment of Economics and Technology* (White Plains, NY: Knowledge Industry Publications, 1980); Starr D. Randall, “Effect of Electronic Editing on Error Rate of Newspaper,” *Journalism Quarterly* 56 (spring 1979): 161-65; Starr D. Randall, “How Editing and Typesetting Technology Affects Typographical Error Rate,” *Journalism Quarterly* 63 (Winter 1986) 763-70.

Simultaneously, U.S. copy desks' responsibilities for page design changed. Since just the 1980s-1990s, copy desks have gone from having a few "makeup editors," who drew models on paper "dummies" to guide composing room workers in physically creating pages to having copy editors design pages themselves using proprietary pagination systems or desktop publishing software.¹⁰ This shifted the burden of physically creating pages from non-journalist composing room workers (most of whose jobs were eventually eliminated)¹¹ to copy editors, who had less time left for editing.¹² This contributed, Russial has argued, to a "deskilling" of copy editing, shifting the position away from a primary concern with pre-publication advocacy for readers and toward a greater concern with mastering ever-changing technology.¹³

In many newsrooms, design responsibility moved again in the mid- to late 1990s, to newly created design desks.¹⁴ This left U.S. copy desks again focused on their central role of editing, though sometimes with a reduced staff as copy desk members who were deemed more visually oriented were moved to the new design positions. The shift also moved the news judgment decisions inherent in how the news was displayed away from the copy desk, deepening a gradual shift away from copy editing as a managerial function that Solomon saw as starting as early as the late 1800s.¹⁵

Contemporary economic conditions and technological innovations have changed newspaper editing even more. The number of editing jobs available on U.S. daily newspapers has shrunk, though just how much is hard to determine because of changes in the way data about those jobs are gathered by the American Society of News Editors.¹⁶ These declines have several causes. First, some U.S. newspaper companies have experimented—though not always successfully¹⁷—with regional or chain-wide consolidation of copy and/or design desks¹⁸ into what are known in Europe, the United

⁹ Bruce Garrison, "Electronic Editing Systems and Their Impact on News Decision Making," *Newspaper Research Journal* 3 (January 1982): 43-52.

¹⁰ Underwood, Giffard, and Stamm, "Computers and Editing: Pagination's Impact on the Newsroom."

¹¹ John Howells and Marion Dearman, *Tramp Printers* (Pacific Grove, Calif.: Discovery Press, 2003).

¹² John T. Russial, "Pagination and the Newsroom: A Question of Time," *Newspaper Research Journal* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1994) 91-101.

¹³ John T. Russial, *Pagination and the Newsroom: Great Expectations*, Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1989.

¹⁴ Ann Auman, "Design Desks: Why are More and More Newspapers Adopting Them?" *Newspaper Research Journal* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1994) 128-142.

¹⁵ William S. Solomon, "Newsroom Managers and Workers: The Specialization of Editing Work," *American Journalism* 10, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1993) 24-37.

¹⁶ Fred Vultee, "A Look at the Numbers: Editing Job Losses in the Newsroom," www.copydesk.org, February 20, 2013. Available at <http://www.copydesk.org/3576/editing-job-losses>.

¹⁷ Charles Apple, "GateHouse to Close its Two New Production Hubs and Open an Even Newer One," [Copydesk.org](http://apple.copydesk.org), May 14, 2013. Available at <http://apple.copydesk.org/2013/05/14/gatehouse-to-close-its-two-new-production-hubs-and-open-an-even-newer-one/>

¹⁸ Robert Channick, "Media Giants Centralize Editing, Design Operations in Effort to Cut Costs Amid Ongoing Revenue Decline," *The Chicago Tribune*, July 31, 2011. Available at http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-07-31/business/ct-biz-0731-media-streamline-20110731_1_editing-daily-circulation-media-general; Scott Lambert, "GateHouse Cuts Copy Editors, Adds Centralized Production Hub," *Gateway Journalism Review*, February 17, 2012. Available at <http://gatewayjr.org/2012/02/17/gatehouse-cuts-copy-editors-adds-centralized-production-hub/>;

Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand as “sub hubs.”¹⁹ Second, U.S. newspapers have responded to sharp advertising and circulation losses by laying off (making redundant) and buying out employees, including copy editors²⁰—in a few cases even completely eliminating copy desks and their functions.²¹ The job losses have not been offset by the growth of online journalism, partly because the perceived imperative of being first with information online has led to the belief that review of online stories by copy editors is not always necessary.²²

Such vital changes in the work of U.S. copy editors would seem to call for corresponding changes in the way editing is taught in colleges and universities. One possibility would be to broaden editing courses—which have tended to be newspaper-centric because many editing instructors have been former newspaper journalists and it has been the United States’ 1,400 or so daily newspapers that provided the bulk of editing jobs to journalism graduates. Editing courses could begin to embrace other types of print media, including magazines, newsletters, and the products of public relations, a growing major for many journalism and mass communication programs.²³ Another approach would be to retool editing courses to focus more heavily on digital media.

It is not outlandish to think that such a transformation could occur, even given the slow pace of change in the academy. In the first decade of the 21st century, a notable number of U.S. journalism departments and schools changed their curricula rapidly and significantly in response to cross-platform media convergence, an industry movement in which newspapers and TV news operations tried to make up for declines in their audiences by entering content-sharing arrangements that attempted to attract each others’ users. Schools rushed to create courses and sequences that promised to produce graduates who could report for print, broadcast, or online,²⁴ though some later regretted the speed with

¹⁹ Kenton Bird, “A Visit to New Zealand’s Biggest Sub Hub,” *Bird’s Words*, June 20, 2010. Available at <http://birds-words.blogspot.com/2010/06/visit-to-new-zealands-biggest-sub-hub.html>; Susan Keith, “Sinking Subs and Collapsing Copy Desks: The Evolution of Editing and Newspapers and Their Web Sites,” paper presented to the Future of Journalism conference, University of Cardiff, September 2009. Available at <http://www0.caerdydd.ac.uk/jomec/resources/foj2009/foj2009-Keith.pdf>.

²⁰ Natascia Lypny, “Copy Editors Laid Off More than Other Newsroom Staffers,” *Kings Journalism Review*, XVII, no. 2 (January 2013). Available at <http://kjr.kingsjournalism.com/?p=12131>.

²¹ Steve Myers, “Denver Post to lay off copy editors, shift copy-editing to ‘content-generating level,’” *Poynter.org*, April 26, 2012. Available at <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/mediawire/171814/denver-post-to-lay-off-copy-editors-shift-copy-editing-to-content-generating-level/>

²² John Russial, “Copy Editing not Great Priority for Online Stories,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2009) 6-15.

²³ Commission on Public Relations Education, “Public Relations Education for the 21st Century” (2006). Available at <http://www.commpred.org/theprofessionalbond/introduction.php>

²⁴ Ann Auman and Jonathan Lillie, “An Evaluation of Team-Teaching Models in Media Convergence Curriculum,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 62, no. 4 (2007) 360-375; Scott C. Hammond, Daniel Petersen, and Thomsen, “Print, Broadcast, and Online Convergence in the Newsroom,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 55, no. 2 (2000) 16-26; Barbara Hipsman, “Indiana Hops on Convergence Curriculum,” *Poynter.org*. Available at <http://www.poynter.org/archived/the-chaser/24544/indiana-hops-on-convergence-curriculum>; Edgar Huang, Karen Davison, Stephanie Shreve, Twila Davis, Elizabeth Bettendorf, and Anita Nair, “Bridging Newsrooms and Classrooms: Preparing the Next Generation of Journalists for Converged Media,” *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 2006) 221-262; Max Utsler, “The Convergence Curriculum—We Got it. Now What Are We Going to Do with It?” *Feedback* 42, no. 3 (Summer 2001) 1-5.

which they moved²⁵ toward an ill-defined concept that continued to evolve in the industry²⁶ and has often been seen as failing to live up to its hype.²⁷

Change theory from organizational communication would predict, however, that it would be impossible to craft lasting change in editing courses absent a clear imperative for doing so. Sociologist Kurt Lewin maintained that successful change could not take place in an organization until it experienced a drastic impetus for “unfreezing” the existing condition, went through a transition, and experienced a “refreezing” process that made the new condition permanent.²⁸ Lewin’s work, which has links to the gatekeeping literature of mass communication²⁹ and recently has been used to explain changes in news organization practice,³⁰ also has potential to illuminate what happens in academic organizations.

If the status quo in editing courses “works” to at least some extent—students take the courses; show evidence, in whatever assessments are administered, of learning something; and evaluate the courses at least as well as others in the department—there may not be enough impetus for an individual instructor to “unfreeze” the course. It would also seem unlikely that a curriculum committee or an administrator would strongly encourage change in a course—risking at least the perception of abridging academic freedom—especially if at least a few students are finding editing jobs.

Fortunately, the literature on editing instruction in U.S. colleges and universities offers some points for comparison for a study like this one. Although some of the literature merely recounts or recommends specific teaching techniques³¹ or surveys professionals

²⁵ Larry Pryor, “Convergence: One School’s Hard-Won Lessons,” *Online Journalism Review*, February 24, 2005. Available at <http://www.ojr.org/a-converged-curriculum-one-schools-hard-won-lessons/>

²⁶ B. William Silcock and Susan Keith, “Translating the Tower of Babel? Issues of Definition, Language and Culture in Converged Newsrooms,” *Journalism Studies* 5, (1), 610-627; Leslie-Jean Thornton and Susan M. Keith, “From Convergence to Webvergence: Tracking the Evolution of Broadcast-Print Partnerships Through the Lens of Change Theory,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 86 (2), 257-276.

²⁷ Larry Dailey, Lori Demo, and Mary Spillman, “Most TV/Newspaper Partners at Cross Promotion Stage,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 26, no. 4 (Fall 2005) 36-49; Michel Dupagne and Bruce Garrison, “The Meaning and Influence of Convergence,” *Journalism Studies* 7, no. 2 (2006) 237-255.

²⁸ Kurt Lewin, *Field Theory in the Social Sciences*. (New York: Harper, 1951).

²⁹ David Manning White, who was a research assistant for Lewin, took Lewin’s metaphor of food passing through “gates” on its way from farm to table and moved it into mass communication, conducting the first of several studies of newswriters who were referred to as “Mr. Gates” on which the mass communication notion of gatekeeping is based. See David Manning White, “The ‘Gate Keeper’: A Case Study in the Selection of News,” in Daniel A. Berkowitz (Ed.) *Social Meanings of the News* (Sage: Thousand Oaks, Calif., 1997) 63-71 and Stephen D. Reese and Jane Ballinger, “The Roots of a Sociology of News: Remembering Mr. Gates and Social Control in the Newsroom,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78 (4), 641-658.

³⁰ Thornton and Keith, “From Convergence to Webvergence”; Susan Keith and Leslie-Jean Thornton, “Webvergence in Practice: Comparing U.S. TV Stations’ and Newspapers’ Online Strategies at a Crucial Moment,” *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies* (July 2013, forthcoming).

³¹ William McKeen and Glen L. Bleske, “Coaching Editors to Coach Writers with a Team Teaching Approach,” *Journalism Educator* (Summer 1992) 81-84; Michael J. Bugeja, “Scavenger Hunt Hones Persistence, Editing Objectivity,” *Journalism Educator* (Winter 1985) 15-17; Jock Lauterer and Andy Bechtel, “A Most Uncommon ‘Commons’: Transforming Two Classrooms into Community Newspaper Newsrooms,” *Grassroots Editor* 48, no. 4 (Winter 2007) 1-5; Louis W. Liebovich, “Students Need Paper and Pencil Editing Exposure,” *Journalism Educator* (Autumn 1987) 29-30; George M. Winford, “Slower Starts Lead to Better Grades in Editing Class,” *Journalism Educator* (Autumn 1982) 13-14; George M. Winford, “Threat of Subpoena Improves Perception of Editing Students,” *Journalism Educator* (April 1977) 20-21; Gale Workman, “Wordplay Enlivens Editing Class, Helps Teach Editing Skills,” *Journalism Educator* (Spring 1986) 50.

about what skills they think new editors need to have mastered,³² two studies have asked professors what they taught in editing courses.

In a study conducted in 1993-1994, Auman and Alderman³³ reported that 160 educators reporting that they spend the most time on “working with words (structure/grammar)” (26.3% of course time); about equal amounts on “story organization/content,” “headline and outline writing,” and “layout and design” (13.3% to 13.6% of course time); somewhat less time on “news judgment/story selection” and “accuracy, objectivity, legal and ethical issues”; and much less time on “photo sizing and cropping/visual editing,” “learning to use the computer,” and “other areas.”³⁴ Even more interesting, the study revealed that professors did not always devote the most time to teaching the skills they deemed most important. Instructors ranked “accuracy, objectivity, legal and ethical issues” as the second-most important editing skill, after “working with words (structure/grammar)” but spent less time on it than on four other types of skills.³⁵ This raises two possibilities: first, that editing instructors found that teaching “accuracy, objectivity, legal and ethical issues” took less time than teaching other skills—which seems unlikely, given that entire courses are devoted to communication law and media ethics—or, second, that editing instructors felt constrained in some way around the time they devoted to “accuracy, objectivity, legal and ethical issues.”

In a study conducted in 2000,³⁶ Fee, Russial, and Auman reported that the respondents said they were spending slightly less than a third of the time in basic editing classes on three groups of skills: grammar, spelling, and punctuation; headline writing and design; and other editing skills. In advanced editing courses, which fewer than half the respondents’ programs offered, professors spent 37% of course time on all types of text editing (including those listed as “other editing skills” in reference to basic courses), 33.8% of time on design, about 16.5% on headline writing and the rest on other types of work. In another article developed from the same dataset,³⁷ Auman, Fee and Russial reported that at most of the schools represented—all of which were accredited by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication—the percentages were a result of changes to the content of an editing course or curriculum in the previous four years. Of the 67 respondents to a question about changes within a course, 29.9% reported that their course had been changed significantly, and 52.2% reported that courses had been somewhat changed. The types of changes to course and curriculum most often reported were integration new media (43.5% of respondents) (what types of new media were not

³² Ann Auman, “A Lesson for Instructors: Top 10 Copy Editing Skills,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 50 (September 1995) 12-22.

³³ Ann Auman and Betsy B. Alderman, “How Editors and Educators See Skills Needed for Editing,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 17, nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 1996) 2-13.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁶ Frank Fee, John Russial, and Ann Auman, “Profs, Professionals Agree About Students’ Editing Skill,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 24, no. 3 (Summer 2003) 23-36.

³⁷ Ann Auman, Frank Fee, and John T. Russial, “Noble Work but Undervalued: The Status and Value of Copy Editing in Journalism Schools,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* 57, no. 2 (Summer 2002), 139-151.

specified), an editing course collaborating with other courses (20.6%), and the addition of a separate design course to the curriculum (12.9%).³⁸

Based on the literature and theory outlined above, a series of research questions were formed:

RQ1: What percentages of course time are editing instructors devoting to different types of skills?

RQ2: As newspapers' circulations, advertising revenues, and staff sizes continue to decline, are editing instructors broadening their courses to consider other types of media?

RQ3: Are editing instructors including digital skills in their instruction?

RQ4: If editing instructors are not including digital skills in their instruction, why?

Research methodology

Data for the paper were gathered via an online survey sent in May 2013 to 393 faculty members, adjunct professors, and other instructors at 267 colleges and universities in the 50 U.S. states. The author hoped to capture a picture of editing instruction at a broad range of schools. So, unlike the most recent previous research on U.S. editing instruction,³⁹ this survey targeted not only instructors teaching editing in undergraduate programs accredited by ACEJMC (107 units in the 50 U.S. states, as well as some units in Puerto Rico and abroad)⁴⁰ but also instructors teaching in programs not accredited by ACEJMC.

Although a number of U.S. editing professors belong to the American Copy Editors Society (ACES), a professional group for editors,⁴¹ no comprehensive list of editing professors and adjuncts existed. The first step, then, was building a database of editing instructors. To do this, the author had a graduate student research assistant make a list of all the U.S. programs listed in the AEJMC Directory as teaching journalism. Next, the research assistant or author combed through the online course schedules of colleges and universities on the list to find whether courses with "editing" in the title were being offered and to learn who taught them.

An initial list of editing instructors was generated in 2010, and names were updated in spring 2013 after the author and two volunteers combed through course schedules for fall 2012, spring 2013, and fall 2013—or as many terms from that list as could be viewed online—to see whether editing instructors had changed. If an editing course was not been offered in fall 2012 or spring 2013 and was not scheduled for fall 2013, the author consulted online course catalogs to see if such a course was among the unit's occasional offerings. If so, the author went through faculty biographies on department websites to see if any mentioned teaching editing and probed any older course schedules available online.

³⁸ Ibid., 146.

³⁹ Auman, Fee, and Russial, "Noble Work but Undervalued"; Fee, Russial, and Auman, "Profs, Professionals Agree About Students' Editing Skill."

⁴⁰ "ACEJMC Accreditation Status 2012-2013," n.d. Available at <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/STUDENT/PROGLIST.SHTML>

⁴¹ See www.copydesk.org.

Instructors were included if they were teaching courses with titles or online course descriptions that indicated that they taught a course primarily about journalistic print or online editing. Because this research was focused editing, professors who taught courses devoted solely to design were not invited to participate—unless they also taught editing. Neither were instructors of lower-level courses labeled "writing and editing" (which rarely are able to devote significant time to editing); courses in non-linear video editing; or courses in English departments that appeared to focus on editing for book publishing or other non-journalistic endeavors.⁴²

In many cases, multiple people were found to be teaching editing at a single college or university. This was not surprising at larger, research-oriented universities with standalone journalism schools, which sometimes often offered three or more sections of editing each term—more than a single professor with a "2-2 teaching load"⁴³ could teach. It was surprising, however, to see that even at some smaller schools, where only one section of editing was offered each semester, there sometimes were two or three people who had taught editing over several semesters. A number of schools appeared not to offer editing but offered print design, traditionally a component of editing courses or a course taken after an editing course.

Where multiple editing professors were found at a single university all were invited to take part in the survey, for two reasons. First, it seemed likely that doing so would increase the chance that a college or university would be represented in the results, following a method employed in a study of newsroom practices by Russial and Santana that used contacts with multiple workers at each newspaper.⁴⁴ Second, although curricular uniformity often is stressed as an ideal across sections of the same course in colleges and universities, it seemed possible that there might be differences in what different instructors taught.

The survey was launched, online, using Qualtrics software available through the author's university, after a pretest by two longtime editing professors, who were not included in the final sample, and by a professional copy editor.

Results

This section of the paper reports preliminary results of the survey, which was ongoing when this paper was submitted. (Updated results will be reported during the World Journalism Congress in Mechelen, Belgium.) At that point, after one email invitation, the survey had a response rate of 17.2 percent, far below what is ideal, though with the

⁴² Instructors of editing courses in English departments were invited to participate if the title or catalog descriptions of their courses indicated the courses were oriented toward journalism. At most schools, journalism was taught in departments of journalism, communication, mass communication, media studies, or media arts. At some schools, however—typically smaller institutions—journalism was housed in English.

⁴³ "2-2" refers to the practice of having a professor with research obligations teach two courses in fall and two courses in spring at schools on a semester calendar.

⁴⁴ John Russial and Arthur Santana, "Specialization Still Favored in Most Newspaper Jobs," *Newspaper Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (Summer 2011) 6-23.

same number of useable responses—from 64 instructors who had taught an editing course in the past five years—as on some questions in the Auman, Fee, and Russial research.⁴⁵

Demographic information

Most respondents (62%) were male and age 55 or older (61%). A plurality of the respondents were tenured associate professors (33%), though significant proportions of responses came from full-time, non-tenure-track instructors (25%) and adjuncts (22%). All had worked or continued to work in journalism, and 91% had worked as editors. Nearly all of the 58 respondents who had worked as editors said they had worked at newspapers (97%), though some reported working for websites (26%), magazines (24%), newsletters, and book publishers (16% each). Of the 62 respondents who said they had worked as writers or reporters, most had worked for newspapers (98%), though notable percentages had written for magazines (24%), in public relations (21%), and for websites (19%).

Most respondents taught in a department or school with “journalism” in the name (64%) that was on a semester system (98%). The size of programs varied widely, with 28% of respondents reporting that their department had more than 20 fulltime faculty members, and other answers, in order of popularity ranking, this way: 11 to 15 (19%), six to 10 (17%), five or fewer (14%), 16 to 20 (13%), and unsure (9%). The average number of majors in the department reported by those who understood that the question referred to “students who are majors,” rather than “subjects students can major in” was 388, but answers ranged from 24 to 1,000.

Most respondents reported that their programs offered only a single editing course (67%) and required that course of at least some majors in the program (81%), most often journalism majors, news-editorial/print majors, and public relations majors. Most respondents said their programs had maintained about the same number of editing courses (83%) and sections (69%) for the past five years, though 17% of respondents said their programs had decreased the number of sections offered. Most respondents reported that their programs did not require students to take an introductory course focused on grammar (81%) or pass a grammar exam before begin admitted to the major (66%).

Respondents had taught an average of 2.8 sections of editing over the past five years, though 38% had taught six to 10 sections. When asked to think about the editing course they had most recently finished teaching, most respondents reported that it was an introductory course (92%) that met twice a week (70%). The average number of students per class reported was 15.7.

Time devoted to different types of skills

⁴⁵ Auman, Fee, and Russial, “Noble Work but Undervalued”; Fee, Russial, and Auman, “Profes, Professionals Agree About Students’ Editing Skill.”

Like earlier surveys of editing instruction, this research found that most instructors reported they spent most of the course time that was devoted to skills instruction on basic editing skills. In a question related to RQ1, respondents were asked, "Thinking back over the editing course you most recently taught, about what percentage of the class time devoted to hands-on journalistic skills did you spend on each of the types of skills of below?" They were offered seven choices as well as an "other" category with space to indicate what else they taught.

Respondents reported spending an average of 51% of course time on "word or story editing," compared with 14% of course time on "writing headlines, titles, blurbs, summaries and cutlines"; 9.6% on print design; 5.2% on "digital media editing, curation, or production"; 4.7% on "photo or graphics editing" and 7.8% on other skills. There were, however, large standard deviations (for example, $SD = 26.40$ for "word or story editing"; $SD = 10.15$ for "print design"; $SD = 7.91$ for "digital media editing, curation, or production"; and $SD = 6.14$ for Web design), indicating a wide variance in amount of time spent on different types of hands-on editing skills, including respondents who spent no time at all on some skill types.

The 27 open-ended responses that shared what "other" types of skills respondents had taught in their most recent editing course referred some skills arguably not embraced by the defined categories, including "math" and three variations on "coaching writers." Other skills mentioned might have been view as embraced by the "word or story editing" or "writing headlines, titles, blurbs, summaries and cutlines" categories, such as "grammar," "AP style," "cutting stories," "headlines," and "grammar, punctuation, etc." Respondents also referred to instruction that might be seen as topic or conceptual in nature, rather than skills-oriented, such as "ethics, law and editing," "life of editor in newsroom," "ethics, judgment issues," "concepts about understanding media operations and environments." Only three of the 27 responses referred to skills that might have been seen as having a specific digital component: "interactivity," "cross platform promotion, linking," and PowerPoint, Prezi and SlideShare."

Broadening courses to print media beyond newspapers?

To see whether editing courses were embracing other types of print media as newspaper readerships declines, recipients were asked a series of questions related to the last editing course they had finished teaching. Answers did not indicate broad movement toward expanding the print media considered in editing courses. No more than one-fifth of respondents indicated in that they had taught the following skills in the last editing course they finished teaching:

- Editing public relations materials: 20%
- Editing advertisements: 3%
- Writing magazine story titles and cover lines: 17%
- Magazine design: 19%
- Newsletter design: 9%

There was, however, some evidence in open-ended responses to some questions that some editing instructors were thinking about print media others than newspapers.

The 63 instructors who had taught more than one section of editing were asked whether they had changed their course content during the time they had been teaching editing, and the 42 who indicated they had were asked to list the “three most important changes” they had made. Among the answers were the following: “worked directly with our new magazine, broadened the scope of editing” and “Adding different types of design, e.g., magazine and tablet PC in addition to newspaper layout.” Another respondent reported an overt shift away from newspapers: “less emphasis on mechanics of newspaper copy desks.”

Some interest in connecting with print beyond newspapers also was evident in the types of guest speakers who were invited to editing courses by the 48 percent of respondents who used guest speakers in their most recently completed editing course. Although most recipients invited guest speakers from newspapers (81%), guest speakers also came from magazines (26%), public relations (16%), television (10%), radio and newsletters (6% each). In addition, more than a third of respondents said they had guest speakers from other areas. Those mentioned by respondents who provided examples included book editors, a textbook author, and an academic journal editor.

Digital skills instruction in the editing classroom

The answers to several questions related to RQ3 indicated that editing professors were making a stronger push into digital technologies than they were into non-newspaper print media—and wished they could go further. Although 20 percent of respondents indicated that the editing course they most recently taught did not cover any of a group of 17 digital media skills the survey asked about (see Table 1), half or more of the respondents reported they had taught Web headline writing (70%), and using social media as a journalistic tool (50%).

In addition, 42% indicated they had taught, as a skill, “choosing or inserting search terms, keywords or other descriptive terms to help search engines find stories.” Elsewhere in the survey, an even larger percentage (58%) said they had discussed search engine optimization as a topic or conceptual area.

Interestingly, the digital skills that were taught by the highest percentage of respondents were those with the closest connections to editing’s traditional material: writing Web headlines, writing Web blurbs or online story summaries, editing or formatting blog posts, writing cutlines for online slideshows.

Writing Web headlines	70%
Writing Web blurbs or online story summaries	44%
Writing cutlines for online slideshows or photo galleries	25%
Designing websites using HTML	5%
Designing websites using Web design software, such as Dreamweaver	8%
Using social media as a journalistic tool	50%
Editing audio	5%
Editing video	5%
Designing online slide shows with still images and cutlines	11%
Designing online slide shows with images and audio	6%
Writing blog posts	22%
Editing and/or formatting blog posts	27%
Creating online maps	9%
Creating online timelines	6%
Choosing or inserting search terms, keywords or other descriptive terms to help search engines find stories	42%
The course did not cover any of these skills.	20%

The digital areas editing instructors were least likely to embrace—editing audio and video (each taught by 5% of instructors), designing websites using HTML or Web design software such as Dreamweaver (taught by 5% and 8% of instructors, respectively), creating online maps and timelines (taught by 9% and 6% respectively), designing online slideshows of still images with cutlines or with audio (taught by 11% and 6%, respectively)—were those that would likely be taught in another area of a journalism program, especially at larger schools. Editing audio and video, for example, are skills typically taught in broadcast courses. Designing websites is the *raison d’etre* of the web design course and is often taught in broader multimedia production courses. News graphics courses taught at very large journalism schools often teach creation of maps or timelines, which, also sometimes are taught in multimedia or digital media courses. Designing online slideshows might well be taught in photography or in multimedia or digital media courses.

Responses to specific questions about teaching journalistic uses of social media were more difficult to understand. Around a third of respondents reported teaching use of the micro-blogging platform Twitter, either to convey or update breaking news (35%) or as a tool for publicizing stories (27%). And just over 20 percent of respondents reported teaching similar uses of Facebook and/or Google+.

Oddly, however, when asked “Which, if any, of the following social and mobile media skills did you specifically teach in the editing course that you most recently completed teaching?” 60 percent of the respondents chose “The course did not cover any of these skills”—even though half the same respondents had indicated, in answer to a previous question that they had taught journalistic uses of social media in their most recent editing course. That would seem to suggest that some respondents were teaching uses of social media not accounted for in a list of items in Table 2.

Table 2: Social/mobile media instruction in editing courses

Percentages of respondents who said they taught these skills in the editing course they most recently finished teaching

Using Twitter to convey or update breaking news	35%
Using Twitter to publicize specific stories	27%
Using Facebook or Google+ to convey or update breaking news	22%
Using Facebook or Google+ to publicize specific stories	21%
Curating or assembling Storify projects	11%
Writing mobile text alerts	6%
Sharing journalistic photos and cutlines through Instagram, Twitpic or other photo services	5%
Sharing journalistic video through services such as YouTube or Vimeo	14%
Using social bookmarking services, such as Reddit or Delicious, to curate, link to journalism	11%
The course did not cover any of these skills.	60%

Digital media did, however, play a large role in the changes that instructors reported making to the content of their courses. Of the 42 respondents who indicated that they had changed the content of their courses in some way, 34 said they had added one or more digital media components. Among the changes respondents reported: “SEO, social media, blogging”; “More online components”; “online editing and SEO”; “More emphasis on editing

information for online delivery. More emphasis on the roles of social media in the way news is consumed. Less emphasis on print design”; “More online components, Stronger focus on ethics;” “SEO headlines; building of slideshows and caption-writing for slideshows;” “More online editing, more video, perforce more grammar”; “Online editing (including social media, websites), updating industry trends, other style in addition to AP”; “made course components interactive, introduced social media, refined use of design software.”

An affinity for adding digital-media components to editing courses also was visible in the guest speakers chosen by the 48 percent of respondents who used guest speakers in their most recent editing course. Of those, 58 percent reported having a guest speaker representing a website visiting class.

Furthermore, 80 percent of the 48 comments in response to an open-ended question about what instructors wished they had been able to include in their most recent editing course focused on some aspect of digital media. Of those who wished they could have included digital media skills or more digital media skills, nearly 39% mentioned social media, nearly 31% mentioned editing for online applications, and 18% mentioned audio and video editing. Other digital skills mentioned included “blogging,” “multimedia skills,” “presenting data interactively,” “editing for convergence,” “slideshows,” “web page design,” “HTML, CSS⁴⁶ and Wordpress,” “deadline web updating.”

Constraints on change

If notable numbers of editing instructors want to add digital media to the courses, what is stopping them? In open-ended responses to a question asking instructors to share what constrained them from teaching topics or skills they viewed as important—many of which were related to digital media—two reasons emerged:

- Lack of time, both because students lacked a foundation for editing basics and also because departments offered only a single editing course that needed to cover many topics and skills
- Awareness that some of the skills instructors would have liked to have taught were already taught in other courses.

Almost all the instructors who specifically identified a reason for not being able to teach some material they thought was important blamed a lack of time. Two very different causes, however, lay behind that lack of time: one involving students and one involving scheduling.

Several instructors noted that it took so long to bring students up to any sort of proficiency in grammar—considered basic knowledge for editors—that there was little, if any, time left for exploring less-foundational material, including digital media. One respondent wrote, “The students’ lack of preparedness in terms of basic English prevented me from spending sufficient time on headline writing and alternative story forms. It caused me to have to skip most of what I wanted to cover regarding online and social media topics.” Another wrote: “We spent so much time nailing down their editing skills we never

⁴⁶ Cascading Style Sheets.

got to as much of the online work as I wanted.” Yet another identified “online editing” as the area he or she would have liked to have spent more time on but wrote that “students are so poorly trained in style, grammar, usage and syntax that there is no time for much of the online stuff.” Yet another wrote, “I would have liked to have covered more editing for online media, but given the amount of time that must be devoted to basic grammar, there isn’t time.”

Part of the problem for some instructors, was that their course was the only editing course in the curriculum and so it had to not only teach remedial grammar but also touch on everything else an editor might need to know. As one instructor put it, “Since mine is the only editing class offered, I am forced to blaze through the materials in order to cover everything in a short time.” Another respondent, who taught editing in a liberal arts program rather than a school of journalism, had this to share: “This course teaches copyediting, basic design principles and a critical look at the future of some area of communication (journalism, PR, advertising, photography social media, etc.). There is not enough time to do all three in depth, so a great deal is omitted.” A professor who had the luxury of teaching both an introductory and advanced editing course wrote, “I never feel like I have time for everything that should be done in the Beginning course. I only skim the surface of many of the Web skills that might be useful including curation skills.”

There was also an indication in some responses that editing instructors were interested in adding to the course skills that would be relevant for digital media but were aware that doing so might duplicate the efforts of other courses in the curriculum. As one respondent noted, “The social media skills are covered in a different class but I wish I could expand on them in my editing class.” Another instructor, who said he or she would have liked to have added more audio and video editing to a course, acknowledged that “students interested in more specifics and depth would take the broadcast workshops.”

Interestingly, however, even though most of the respondents were age 55 or older, unfamiliarity with digital media was rarely cited as a reason for not teaching digital skills. Only a single respondent cited a lack of experience as a reason for not teaching multimedia skills in editing.

Conclusion/Discussion

These preliminary results of a survey of U.S. editing instructors suggest that most are stressing the basics of word and story editing in the classroom, as editing instructors reported they were doing in earlier survey-based research. There was some evidence, however, of attempts to broaden the editing course beyond its historical affiliation with newspapers to teach students to work with both a broader range of print media, such as magazines, newsletters, and public relations materials.

The survey revealed more evidence of work by editing professors to move editing courses into the digital age, though that movement was far from complete, with 20% of professors saying their courses did not include a series of digital media tasks and 60% of professors saying a series of social media tasks was beyond their scope of their courses. Interestingly, however, when professors who indicated they wished they could have added something to the last editing course they taught were asked to explain what that was, most named some sort of digital skill or topic. Responses to an open-ended question about why instructors didn’t the skills and topics they wished they could indicated that they perceived

they were constrained by time required to reinforce students' weak grammar skills and, to a lesser degree, by the fact that some of the digital skills they wanted to teach were covered in other courses.

These findings suggest two possible remedies, one more likely than the other. First, departments that do not already have a two-course editing sequence could add a second course, reinforcing grammar skills in the first and allowing students who take the second to delve more deeply into using digital media. In another option—more difficult for the individual professor but more likely to come to fruition given the difficulties of creating new courses at some financially strapped state universities—would be to meld troublesome grammar instruction and instruction in digital or non-newspaper print media. In such a model, students might be exposed to the idea of online and social media curation in Storify while editing a Storify project created by the professor for grammar errors planted in it. Students learning to write cutlines might, by default, be asked to write them in the context of online slide shows. Studies learning to write headlines might tackle Web headlines, which sometimes offer fewer constraints, first and, if time allows, learn to write newspaper headlines.

This study, like all academic research, has limitations. First, it relies on recipients' recollections, which might not be perfect. Second, although respondents were asked to think about what they did during the most recent editing course they completed teaching, rather than one they might teach in the future—and thus anticipate teaching differently—it is possible that some chose socially acceptable answers when less-acceptable answers would have been more accurate. Finally, this report is based on only the first week of responses to a four-week survey. It is possible that those who will take the survey later are different from early responders in some crucial way that could affect the results.

Nevertheless, this ongoing research offers some basis for the cautious suggestion that U.S. editing courses, while perhaps not on the cutting edge of 21st century journalism instruction, are moving away from a newspaper-centric model. It also suggests that editing professors are willing to move editing courses further into the digital age but are challenged by underprepared students.

The results may indicate that editing courses may be only beginning to experience the unfreezing Lewin believed was necessary before successful organizational change could take place. For such courses to shift into something complete different than they have been historically, it would seem that a larger impetus—from within the industry or within academia—would be necessary.