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### Expert reports

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#### *What Does it Mean to Teach Journalism Online?*

Susan Keith, Rutgers University, U.S.  
Raluca Cozma, Kansas State University, U.S.

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**Abstract:** The World Health Organization’s March 2020 declaration that the COVID-19 virus was a pandemic led to an estimated 1.6 billion learners, including university journalism students, leaving classrooms. However, many were able to continue learning since instructors shifted classes to remote or online delivery. For instructors with experience teaching online, the adjustment has been minimal. For others, teaching online for the first time during a constantly changing situation has been challenging. This stream, led by editors of a UNESCO handbook on teaching journalism online, will examine what the transition has taught us and what tension points remain surrounding the online delivery of journalism education.

For some journalism professors, using technology to teach students located beyond a bricks-and-mortar classroom has been a familiar practice for years, because their programs have long delivered at least some courses online. For other instructors, who taught online for the first time when they had to move courses to remote delivery as the COVID-19 virus swept the globe, teaching outside the classroom was completely new, daunting and stressful (Burke, 2020).

Journalism instructors faced the challenges of moving to online course delivery during a pandemic at a time when there had been “less research on pedagogical approaches for online courses within trade or professional disciplines, like journalism, which required high levels of authentic or experiential learning” (Delaney and Betts, 2020) than there had been in other more purely academic subjects. In addition, although there was an extensive literature in the field on teaching the practice of creating online journalism -- reporting and presenting news in digital media (e.g., Adornato, 2021; Briggs, 2019; Bucknell, 2020; Froust, 2017; Song, 2018) – there were relatively few resources for the very different task of teaching journalism, especially journalism skills courses, in a fully online mode. More than two years into the pandemic, academics have begun to publish reflections on teaching in hybrid, remote, and online modes (e.g. Byrd, 2021; Filak, 2020; Filloux, 2020; Fowler-Watt et al., 2020; Sweeney, 2020; Wake et al., 2020), but we could not find a comprehensive, book-length guide, in English, to teaching journalism through online delivery. As such, this volume was designed to help journalism instructors navigate online, remote, and hybrid teaching with whatever resources they have at hand.

The handbook – containing chapters written by invited contributors from around the globe who have taught fully online courses – aims to give journalism instructors who are new to teaching online the resources they need either to create a new online course or module or to transform an existing course or module from face-to-face to online delivery. The handbook’s chapters have also been conceptualized to appeal to more-experienced online instructors looking to improve their teaching in digital spaces or overcome common problems related to teaching journalism online.

### **Online learning as distance education**

The online instruction that this book describes is a type of distance education, defined as “a method of teaching where the student and teacher are physically separated” (Kentor, 2015, p. 22). Sleator (2010) traces the earliest forms of this type of teaching, at least in the United States, to a 1728 advertisement placed in the *Boston Gazette* by a shorthand teacher who sought students from the countryside, whom he aimed to teach by letter. Mail correspondence courses became common in the 19th century, after the development of modern postal services, dating to the 1850s in England and continental Europe. In the United States, these courses were often targeted to vocational training, religious education, or preparation for university education, but the University of Chicago began offering courses for credit by mail beginning in 1892, and a number of other U.S. universities copied that initiative (Berg, 2005). In the 20th century, first radio and then television became delivery modes for university distance learning around the world (Barrera, 2005; Chunjie and Yuxia, 1994), with radio gaining particular popularity in regions with poor postal service and traditions of group listening (Kentor, 2015). The establishment of “open universities” – educational institutions such as the University of South Africa (1946), Britain’s Open University (1969), and India’s Indira Gandhi National Open University (1985), which attempted to counter academic elitism by admitting students with minimal or no qualifications – further promoted distance learning.

Education moved into computer-based spaces as early as 1959, when University of Illinois professors Dan Alpert and Don Bitzer created the first computer-based educational network, PLATO. Just seven years later, the University of Alberta’s medical school created rudimentary online courses, which Britain’s Open University launched in 1976 (Cook and Sonnenberg, 2014). It was not until the late 1990s, however – after the launch (in 1993) of the first graphical Web browser and the growing adoption of home computing by people with disposable income – that the number of online courses at universities began to grow markedly. By 2002, 1.6 million U.S. post-secondary students were enrolled in some type of online learning, a number that tripled by 2008, when more than 25 per cent of all college and university students were taking at least one online course (Perry and Pilati, 2011). By late 2019, 37.2 per cent of U.S. post-secondary students were taking at least one online course (Distance education, n.d.)

Some of those students – and others like them around the world – were, of course, enrolling in journalism courses, though it took time, in some regions, for momentum toward online education to build. Arant (1996) found in a survey conducted in 1996 that only 17 per cent of 133 programs that were members of the U.S.-based Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication offered distance education courses and only 4 per cent of those largely residential post-secondary schools had used “online computer linkages” to deliver that distance learning. In other areas, however, online journalism courses were viewed, around the turn of the century, as efficient ways to reach dispersed students. Central Queensland University developed online journalism courses to reach students at its multiple Australian campuses, as well as

students studying beyond the nation's borders (Knight, 2003), while Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines developed grant-supported online courses to train working journalists and journalism teachers (Valdez et al., 2004).

At the end of the first decade and into the second decade of the 21st century, there was a more noticeable move toward online courses and programs in journalism and related fields. Castañeda (2011), for example, found in a 2009 survey that 62 per cent of 81 responding schools accredited by the U.S.-based Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication had courses that “deliver 80% or more of their content online” (p. 367) and 17 per cent had or planned to launch fully online programs. Sometimes transitions to online learning or creation of new online courses was because online delivery suited instructors' preferences or student desires to time-shift learning (Thornton and Keith, 2017). Other times a move online seemed likely to solve an issue, such as increased enrollment or the flow of students through a gateway course (Poniatowski, 2012) or reach potential students not likely to come to campus (Castañeda, 2011).

### **How teaching *journalism* online differs from other disciplines**

These transitions were rarely easy, however, even when they were planned. Arizona State University professor Dawn Gilpin recalled, for example, that when she was first asked to move a social media course online, she was armed with the experience of having taken a variety of online courses – and excited about being able to teach in pajamas if she wanted to. Then, she writes, “I sat down to plan. That's when the panic set in. How could I possibly digitize my teaching style and turn my multilayered class into a series of ones and zeroes?” (Gilpin, 2017, p. 96).

One reason for the difficulty: Unlike other disciplines, journalism education focuses heavily on experiential learning. It is true that some journalism instruction comes in the form of conceptual courses that teach students “about” journalism as an institution (Lowrey, 2018) or a global community of practice (Witschge and Harbers, 2018) and can be translated fairly easily to a remote or online environment. Media law, journalism ethics, and media history courses would fit into this category. However, other journalism courses or modules – some of the most distinctive in the academic field – focus on skills (Bright, 2020; Deuze, 2006), though practical work is not universal in journalism education around the globe (Demchenko, 2018). These hands-on courses often give students the chance to practice work – in videography, video editing, news graphic production, newscast production, print design, and web design – that traditionally has required equipment or software that many students may not have at home. Other journalism instruction typically has students producing work in a collaborative setting, either as interns or student workers within media organizations or in a classroom that attempts to mimic features of the newsroom (Valencia-Forrester, 2020; Young and Gitlow, 2015). Finally, some journalism courses are clinical in nature, requiring students to interact with the public while gathering news (Jones, 2017; Littlefield, 2017). This volume attempts to address issues in all those areas.

In Chapter 1, Susan Keith (Rutgers University, United States) dissects the process of planning a new online course from scratch, weighing the advantages and challenges of synchronous, asynchronous, and blended online delivery. From backward design to course organization to technology access considerations, the chapter covers designing and teaching new journalism courses online.

In Chapter 2, Ingrid Bachmann (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) walks us through the process of transitioning an existing face-to-face course to online delivery. Highlighting adaptability as the key to success, the chapter argues that being proactive about understanding student needs, focusing on learning outcomes, and being extremely organized are some ways to ensure a smooth transition.

In Chapter 3, Manuel Alejandro Guerrero, Sandra Vera-Zambrano and Constanza García Gentil (Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico) examine several ways in which assessment of student learning could look different in online courses. The chapter proposes examples of assignments in online courses that leverage free available resources from universities or nonprofit organizations to expand students' horizons and enhance their practical journalistic skills.

In Chapter 4, T. J. Thomson and Jason Sternberg (Queensland University of Technology, Australia) outline best practices related to the design and use of course management software and videoconferencing to support student learning. After providing guidance on identifying and mitigating logistical challenges inherent in using videoconferencing with students in far-flung time zones and with different connectivity issues, the chapter showcases how to use digital spaces and tools to augment higher-order learning and the perspectives instructors bring to their synchronous courses.

In Chapter 5, Zakaria Tanko Musah (Ghana Institute of Journalism) uses the case study of the Republic of Ghana to provide guidance on teaching journalism online in scarce-resource settings. The chapter shows how, with some creative thinking and flexible teaching methods, educational institutions in areas with deficient network infrastructure, computer access, and internet connectivity can adopt online learning during times of disruption to higher education, such as a pandemic.

In Chapter 6, Dave Bostwick (University of Arkansas, United States) recommends building active learning experiences into online courses to foster community and student engagement. A strategy that the chapter proposes as particularly effective in online courses is the R2D2 model, which stands for Read, Reflect, Display and Do. By matching highly interactive tasks in each of the four categories with authentic, individualized feedback, instructors can increase student engagement and learning.

In Chapter 7, Karen Turner (Temple University, United States) reminds us to consider how students taking online courses differ not only in digital literacy but also in learning abilities and interests. One strategy that the chapter proposes to create a student-centered learning environment that accommodates individual learning differences is Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

In Chapter 8, George Daniels (University of Alabama, United States) covers ways to support diversity in the virtual classroom. From strategies to make students of a variety of identities comfortable in online courses to methods for discussing, delivering and documenting diversity, the chapter reminds instructors how to be intentional in their efforts of promoting diversity and inclusion in online journalism courses.

In Chapter 9, Ruhan Zhao (Communication University of China) highlights the importance of teamwork and collaborative projects in journalism courses. The chapter argues that with judicious organization, thoughtful grouping strategies and division of labor, and careful instructor guidance and feedback, collaborative learning can be successfully implemented in online spaces.

In Chapter 10, Kelly Fincham (National University of Ireland Galway) explores ways to overcome challenges of teaching reporting- and writing- intensive courses online. From course design, to assignments, to feedback and grading, the chapter provides advice to help instructors plan for, and succeed in, teaching synchronous and asynchronous online journalism courses with heavy writing expectations.

In Chapter 11, Kim Fox (American University in Cairo, Egypt) provides strategies for designing project-based audio production and podcasting courses for online delivery. Highlighting scaffolding techniques that give students feedback on each phase of their projects, from ideation to execution to promotion, the chapter emphasizes ways to take advantage of online resources to help students produce projects that set them apart from competitors.

In Chapter 12, Andrew M. Clark and Julian Rodriguez (University of Texas at Arlington, United States) offer suggestions for teaching television news in synchronous and asynchronous online courses. Although strategies such as backward design, assessment of student digital skills at the beginning of the semester, and constant feedback could benefit instructors in a variety of online courses, the chapter also zooms in on challenges unique to teaching TV production successfully online, in ways that parallel challenges that actual TV stations had to navigate during the pandemic.

In Chapter 13, Claudia Kozman (Lebanese American University, Lebanon) outlines strategies for teaching research methods courses online. By focusing on the most taxing aspects of courses meant to enhance scientific research skills, namely teaching statistics and software usage, the chapter emphasizes the importance of advance organization, of leveraging online tools, and of blending online modalities.

In Chapter 14, Leslie-Jean Thornton (Arizona State University, United States) explores how time, place and presence are important considerations when teaching very large courses online. A large number of students means increased issues and tasks for instructors to take care of, and the chapter proposes several solutions, from technical to organizational, to address these unique challenges.

In Chapter 15, Raluca Cozma (Kansas State University, United States) recommends some strategies to curb academic dishonesty in online courses, where it is harder to authenticate students' identities and deploy proctored exams. From reducing stress on students, which has been documented to correlate with a temptation to cheat, to leveraging affordances of online learning management systems, the chapter shows how classic assignments, like exams, as well as journalism-specific projects and portfolios can be structured and scaffolded strategically to assess students' actual learning.

Finally, in Chapter 16, Susan Keith (Rutgers University, United States) looks ahead to the future of online journalism education, drawing on what the pandemic period has taught instructors to suggest innovations that might be possible now that large numbers of journalism instructors have gained experience teaching online. The chapter suggests that journalism programs leverage online capabilities for cross-institution collaborations and greater involvement from journalism professionals but need to take into account what recent graduates missed in the pandemic and the burdens shouldered by individual instructors.

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