Professional Orientation Equals Second-class Status in Academe

Edward C. Pease

Communications professionals—newspaper reporters and editors, PR and advertising executives, broadcasters and others—are cherished commodities on college campuses. Wooed to the classroom, they give journalism and mass communication programs credibility in the media industries, establish important personal and institutional links between classroom and newsroom, and yield concrete benefits for students, and faculty and—sometimes—generate scholarship funds.

Many journalism educators, including these professionals-turned-educators, argue strongly for the benefit of maintaining both front-line professional skills and industry contacts. "Professionals should do more than talk," contends one former PR practitioner, now a journalism professor in Indiana. "They should be able to do the work they talk about."

But although professionals-turned-teachers agree that real-world experience increases their classroom effectiveness and informs their research activities, many responding to a 1990 survey said the commodities that made them attractive to journalism schools in the first place—their professional experience and industry contacts—sometimes work against them once on campus. This is consistent with Schweitzer's 1988 finding that professional consulting work ranked lowest among 12 factors considered in promotion and tenure decisions, particularly at institutions offering graduate programs.

A survey of 1,423 members of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the nation's primary journalism educators group, found that the classic, divisive tension between the "chi-squares" and the "green eyeshades" is far from dead. In addition to detailing the extent and kind of their ongoing professional media activities, respondents discussed how those involvements play in the classroom and with promotion and tenure committees, department heads and college administrators. Even though journalism education in general acknowledges the value of maintaining balance in classrooms and conferences between professionals and scholars, many who actively pursue media industry connections off campus say they are made to feel like second-class citizens on campus.

Most of these survey respondents had worked in media industries before joining faculty ranks. For them, faculty internships, consulting and part-time work offer a way to stay sharp in the classroom and to feel more connected to their former occupations; many of them miss the immediacy and bustle of the newsroom.

Pease is associate director for publications and editor of Media Studies Journal, The Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, Columbia University, New York.
For these professionals-turned-educators, consulting and part-time work in the media help them stay attuned to constantly changing industry practices and aware of how to integrate these marketplace realities into their classroom work and, in many cases, their research activities. But many also said such professional activities not only weren’t encouraged by their colleges and departments, but that outside work either didn’t count in promotion and tenure decisions or worked against them in academic advancement.

For years, uneasiness between newsrooms and classrooms—and between professionals and professors—have been bemoaned by professionals and educators alike, who wonder why academics can’t work more closely with those in the media industries they study and for which they train prospective employees. If lawyers can work with law schools and physicians with medical schools, many ask, why can’t journalists work more closely with journalism schools?

It should be easy. More than 89 percent of the 652 journalism educators responding to this national study have professional media experience in print, broadcasting, advertising or public relations, and many maintain relationships with their former colleagues. But many also seem convinced that their continued professional development works against them when it comes to promotion and tenure. “They say it’s ‘nice,’ but they don’t reward it,” one respondent commented. At most colleges and universities, continuing professional experience doesn’t count as much as conference papers and publications in juried research journals at promotion and tenure time. “Outside consultant work and professional expertise is not reflected in the academy in general,” said a New York professor. A California respondent added that such work is “low-weight compared to scholarly pubs.”

Such standards work against students and widen the gulf between the academy and the media industries, some educators said. “I believe a J-prof MUST work in media both before and while a prof,” a Pennsylvania respondent argued. “Otherwise, the prof might as well just be a ‘researcher’ who does useless studies that get into JQ and J of C.”

The survey

The research results reported here come from a 1990 study conducted for an AEJMC convention program on how educators and media businesses might serve one another better. The session, “Educating the Newsroom,” sought input from news industry professionals on the needs and opportunities they perceived in the newspaper industry for greater involvement by educators in training and development initiatives for working journalists. The academy, they said, may be missing an opportunity not only to improve relations with media industries, but to position journalism educators and their schools and departments as valued resources for continuing education, remedial instruction and feedback for media professionals.

In June 1990, questionnaires and postage-paid return envelopes were mailed to 1,423 randomly selected AEJMC members. The survey expanded on Pease’s 1985 pilot study of AEJMC Newspaper Division members’ professional activities, with the addition of a series of questions designed to permit respondents to evaluate and discuss the climate for professional involvement by faculty on their campuses. The instrument consisted of a series of questions aimed at determining the extent of respondents’ previous and ongoing experience in six media industries—newspapers, magazines, radio, television, public relations and advertising—and questions concerning the kinds of activities (e.g., professional skills such as reporting, copy editing or writing; cooperative research such as market or readership studies; or professional development activities such as seminars, coaching or workshops) they
would be interested in pursuing. Finally, the survey also included questions concerning respondent perceptions of how professional activities are valued at their institutions.

**Findings**

Of the 652 journalism and mass communication educators responding (45.8%), nearly 90 percent reported previous or continuing professional experience in their areas of media expertise: 385 (59.1%) in newspapers and magazines, 287 (44.0%) in public relations, 164 (25.2%) in radio or television broadcasting, and 146 (22.6%) in advertising. The experience categories were broken down into practical/practitioner, coaching, consulting, research and other.\(^8\)

The second section of the questionnaire addressed questions of how respondents thought such professional experience was received on their college campuses—by their schools or units, by university promotion and tenure committees, by their students—and how such experience benefited their own research. The questions were constructed either dichotomously or on a 3-point Likert-type scale, seeking to limit latitude of responses. Respondents also were offered the opportunity to comment more broadly.

Taken together, responses regarding the acceptance and benefit of professional activity in the academic setting seem to confirm the existence of professional-academic prejudices, and offer new evidence of the attitudinal gulf between media workplaces and college campuses. Many universities are not perceived by their own faculty as supportive of outside professional activities, in contradiction to what journalism school administrators told Coulson in his 1990 survey.\(^9\) Two-thirds of those administrators said they encouraged outside professional consulting by their faculty, and more than half of administrators responding to Coulson’s study said media consulting positively affected promotion and tenure decisions. In the present study, 49 percent of educator respondents said outside professional activities were “considered” in promotion and tenure deliberations, although another 42.6 percent said professional media work does not count at promotion and tenure time. (See Table 1.)

At the same time, 61.7 percent of respondents said their work off-campus improved their classroom performance “a lot” or aided their students directly; 28.1 percent said it helped “some.” Only 11 percent of respondents said outside professional activity did not help their students or teaching performance. Further, 77.5 percent said they thought off-campus professional activities helped focus their scholarly research; 35.6 percent said such work helped “a lot” and 41.9 percent said it helped “some”; 10.6 percent said outside

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
<th>RESPONSES OF EDUCATORS ON OFF-CAMPUS PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY IN THE ACADEMIC CONTEXT (N = 652)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your school/university encourage outside professional activity?</td>
<td>% Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67.8 (442)</td>
<td>24.4 (159)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is such outside professional activity considered in promotion/tenure?</td>
<td>% Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.0 (320)</td>
<td>42.6 (278)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your outside professional work help your teaching/students?</td>
<td>% A lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.7 (402)</td>
<td>29.3 (191)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your outside professional work help your own research?</td>
<td>% A lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.6 (232)</td>
<td>41.9 (273)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
activities did not help research.

The administrators surveyed in Coulson’s study “seemed to agree that faculty consultants were more productive researchers than nonconsultants. However, about as many respondents were neutral.” Coulson speculated that administrators’ ambivalence might be attributable to the fact that many educators who consult do not generate publishable juried research from their outside activities. He also suggested that journalism administrators may have different attitudes toward consulting from those higher on universities’ administrative ladder.¹⁰

Journalism deans and directors who responded to the present study said they viewed outside activities as important for individual professional and personal development, teaching and maintaining links with the professions. “Every teacher should return to the trenches with some frequency,” one Ohio journalism school director wrote. A California dean agreed: “Continuing professional work has great value in keeping faculty current and aware. It helps establish credibility both on and off campus.” Perhaps these deans are atypical or such sentiments from administrators are not clearly expressed to faculty; there is no way of knowing, however, if such support extends beyond the doors of journalism and mass communication departments.

Although two-thirds of these journalism educators (67.8%) reported that their schools encouraged their outside professional activity, 24.4 percent said their schools did not. The implication seems painfully evident: Concerns over promotion and tenure obviously must govern educators’ decisions in allocating their time and energies, even though near unanimity exists among classroom teachers concerning the positive effects of their extracurricular professional work on their students and teaching. For journalism and mass communication educators who see professional links and activities as making them better teachers and researchers, the fact that they also see such activities as discounted by colleagues or even working against them in career considerations must lead to dissonance, frustration and confusion.

Discussion

Illuminating the empirical data are respondents’ comments scrawled in margins, amplifying their answers; a sampling of these marginalia provide color and flavor, qualitative flesh to dress the data’s quantitative bones. These open-ended comments broke down into four general categories: the relationship of professional media activities to university support and acceptance, to promotion and tenure decisions, to teaching and students, and to research.

University support. Although more than two-thirds of the 652 respondents said their schools were generally supportive of outside professional activity, many characterized that support as “marginal” at best. “They don’t protest,” one Michigan respondent commented in response to the question, “Does your school/university support/encourage outside professional activity?” “Half-heartedly and by default,” a Texas news-editorial professor agreed.

“My university is very ambiguous about supporting professional activity or letting me know whether it will count toward tenure,” a Wisconsin advertising professor wrote.

Others said their institutions made it clear where consulting and professional work ranks in the hierarchy of faculty activities: “The reward system of a research university rates consulting below research, teaching and other scholarly activities in the priority for promotion,” wrote an Oregon Ph.D., who said her university actively discourages outside work. But another respondent said that’s appropriate: “It is of secondary importance, compared to research.”

A Texas tenured professor with 25 years’ experience in public relations said
her university's priorities were clear: "Our university doesn't like paid professional activities. What the university wants is professors to write grants and get research money for the university—60 percent goes to the school and only 40 percent to the research project."

Others said outside work was accepted, "As long as it doesn’t conflict with assigned duties," if it is "limited so as not to negatively impact classroom values," and "as long as it does not interfere with primary teaching responsibilities." On the other hand, some respondents wrote, "it depends on who’s doing it"; outside professional activities are encouraged "after tenure/promotion!" A California advertising professor observed.

But still others suggested that a more equitable balance between theory and practice is needed if the field is to flourish. "Journalism education was once too trade-schoolish. Now it's too academic," one respondent commented. "Drawing the proper balance between the two, in my opinion, requires faculty who are 'at home' in both arenas. Outside work is a must as a companion to theory."

"We are a research-only school because of university emphasis," agreed a magazine professor from Texas. "We should establish a more realistic balance."

**Credit toward promotion and tenure.** Perhaps not surprisingly, some of the most pointed and occasionally heated comments concerned the question of whether professional activities count in promotion and tenure decisions. "Are you kidding?" a Missouri assistant professor wrote. Another said that although professional activity was taken into account in the P&T process at his school, "mostly it's considered negatively as a diversion from research."

This was a common theme; the impact of media consulting work was "minimal," "considered 'service'" and "not of primary consideration," respondents said. One Wisconsin professor said outside activity is considered, "if only as a sign of life." Others were unsure how their interest in maintaining professional contacts and skills might affect their academic careers: "Is it considered in promotion? Don't know, but I certainly hope so," one new assistant professor wrote. "I'm not entirely sure," a Tennessee tenured associate professor wrote. "I think it would be viewed as taking time away from research activity, which is definitely valued more." Still another commented, "In theory, it is supposed to have weight in promotion, tenure and salary decisions. Unfortunately, this weight is small."

But others argued that this priority is appropriate: "No," one dean wrote, profes-
sional activity is not considered in promotion and tenure; "it should not be either!"
A colleague from Florida agreed: "Must have good research record. That's primary."
Others respondents were equally realistic about the role professional activity would play in promotion and tenure on their campuses, even if not all were happy about it. Some comments:

- "You get the usual lip service about such work counting here, but the fact is that nothing counts except refereed research articles," wrote a former media lawyer who was going up for tenure as associate professor in 1991.
- Several commented that professional activities counted only if they resulted in publications. "Big Ten universities want their profs to produce scholarly publications," one said. "Freelancing is nice, but it won't get me tenure. They have made that pretty clear."
- "The dean tells me, 'You're paid for [professional activity]. If it isn't research, I don't care about it,'" another wrote.
- "I think outside professional work is very important for those teaching skills courses and ought to count toward promotion and pay increase, as should professional writing," another reflected, "But I'm aware that this also creates dual status tracks."

**Impact on the classroom.** Along those lines, many respondents wrote eloquently about the benefits their professional experiences had for classroom performance and credibility with students. More than 90 percent of respondents said professional work directly benefits students. "It is invaluable," one wrote. "Terribly important," said another. "Students do not respect faculty who are not producing as much as those who do," a North Carolina respondent wrote.

"Does my real-world work help in the classroom? Just ask my students," a former TV reporter wrote. Besides credibility, respondents pointed to benefits for students in terms of their preparation for real-world situations and professional contacts leading to internships and jobs. Others said they include their students in negotiating contracts for consulting and research projects for media companies, thus providing students with both instruction based on practical experience and situations as well as offering them hands-on experience of their own.

In one model, Ottaway Newspapers provided small grants to colleges and universities, inviting journalism faculties and students to design or participate in programs to assess and evaluate newsroom performance and provide suggestions for improvement. The result, according to Ottaway executives, is a formal link with schools of journalism and mass communication as well as a more systematic approach to media criticism that engages both academics and professionals. It is unclear how journalism school deans and college promotion and tenure committees would view such arrangements, however; respondents in this study might well hesitate to embark on such continuing relationships if they thought this kind of work would hurt them in salary negotiations.

**Impact on research.** Finally, more than three-quarters of respondents said their professional work helps them focus themes and questions for research. Even if consulting activities do not count in promotion and tenure decisions, many respondents said their outside work is helpful in developing research, which clearly does count. "The outside work is considered [for promotion and tenure], but not weighed heavily in any respect," an Ohio associate professor commented. "But my research is based almost entirely on this kind of work."

A Missouri assistant professor agreed: "I have a JQ article as a result of one summer position."

"Essentially," a former AP broadcast editor wrote, "professional work is my research."

Other respondents, however, feared
that keeping up with their professions, though personally rewarding and refresh-
ing and of obvious benefit to their stu-
dents, might work against them even while opening avenues for practical research. The professional mindset might be a detri-
ment in the larger academy, some self-described “green eye-shades” commented. Wrote one: “I sometimes think my research is hurt by [professional activities] because such work causes me to have a pragmatic view of things that isn’t always appreci-
ated by JQ reviewers.”

Conclusions

In one sense, the results of this study serve simply to confirm and document what many in the academy long have be-
lieved—that the two-tier system of profes-
sionally oriented faculty and scholarly re-
searchers creates tensions that translate into a sense of second-class citizenship among some faculty. The pressure to publish or perish—another piece of con-
ventional wisdom that assumes mythic proportions for many educators, especially junior faculty and professionals-turned-
educators—is clear from these responses and has been documented in other stud-
ies.12

What these results demonstrate more graphically than some previous research, however, is the depth of resentment among some faculty, for whom consulting and extracurricular work in their areas of me-
dia expertise is central to their view of the mission of journalism education. For some, keeping professional skills sharp and main-
taining contacts and relationships with practitioners translate directly into class-
room benefits of credibility, improved in-
struction, internships and job opportuni-
ties for their students. For these educators, the teaching function is of primary impor-
tance, but they feel frustration and resent-
ment at structural systems that make them view themselves as second-class citizens.

Junior faculty in particular, perhaps more likely to have had more recent pro-
essional experience, may be made to feel penalized because of that same, fresh real-
world perspective for which they are praised and respected by students and pro-
fessionals. Older faculty members advise junior colleagues to eschew professional activities in favor of traditional research for juried publications, at least until they are tenured. But by that time, professional contacts may have disappeared along with much of the energy generated by perform-
ing real-world tasks that such profes-
sionally oriented educators found so invigorating. “Consulting doesn’t pay for younger faculty members who need to do research to get tenure,” one respondent advised. “It’s more appropriate for tenured faculty members seeking additional in-
come.”

In some management circles, “crea-
tive tension” among co-workers is seen as an effective means of goading the troops into higher, greater and better performance. But in the academy, systems in which everyone is measured by the same yard-
stick, regardless of individual talents, per-
spectives, experience and preferences, may be shortsighted, if not counterproductive. The tension on many campuses where journ-
alism programs are viewed as voke-tech schools and thus somehow of lesser status and intellectual rigor than traditional lib-
eral arts departments may result in cli-
mates in which doctorates are required for new faculty and juried research is expected for promotion and tenure. Indeed, there is a vast anecdotal evidence that this trend has been ongoing for some years, with rela-
tively few schools of journalism strong enough to resist administrative pressure in this direction. One result of this trend may be to widen the gap between academics and media professionals who already view so much of scholarly media research as indecipherable or so far removed from the real world as to be useless to the practitio-
nier.

A more enlightened system, in which the relative length of the legs of the tradi-
tional three-legged stool of research, teaching and service may be adapted to individual strengths, might prove a more effective use of faculty talent and as a means of improving internal relations between "green eye-shades" and "chi squares," as well as between communications industries and schools of journalism and mass communication that serve them. One implication of these results should be that further consideration is warranted for new structural mechanisms within schools and departments of journalism to take better advantage of faculty members' initiatives in bridgebuilding between the academy and the media industries. New criteria could be devised in promotion and tenure deliberations at the university level to reward professional work and ongoing real-world experience as well as juried research and scholarly output. Indeed, in the perennial era of painful budget belt-tightening, both on campuses and in media companies, faculty members who can attract positive industry attention through applied research, consulting or other hands-on involvement may pay multiple dividends—tangible and intangible—that can only benefit their schools and departments, their students, their institutions and media industries alike. 


3. The Newspaper Research Journal-sponsored session, "Educating the Newsroom," at the 1990 AEJMC convention in Minneapolis in August, drew together four news professionals for their perspectives on how the news industry and journalism and mass communication educators might work together more closely.

4. The panelists were Jack Hart, director of development and writing coach at the Oregonian in Portland; Doug Ramsey, senior vice president/education programs, Foundation for American Communications; Walterene Swanson, American Newspaper Publishers Association; and John Ullmann, a newspaper consultant and former assistant managing editor/special projects, the Minneapolis Star Tribune. Ted Pease, associate editor of Newspaper Research Journal, moderated.


7. See questions in Table 1.


10. Ibid., p. 58.


12. See, for instance, Coulson, op. cit.; David C. Coulson, "Educators bring expertise to media consulting," Journalism Educator 43:1 41-43 (Spring 1988); Schweitzer, op. cit.; Fred Fedler and Ron Smith, "Administrators feel traditional research has highest value," Journalism Educator 40:3 51-52 (Autumn 1985); Gerald Stone and Will Norton Jr., "How administrators define the term 'faculty research,'" Journalism Educator 35:3 40-42.