

Journalism and Mass Communication Education in the Trend Toward Convergence: A Content Analysis of 2010-2011 Faculty Hiring Announcements with a New Media Emphasis

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Abstract

Recent years have witnessed the increasing need for new media faculty in the journalism and mass communication (JMC) field. This study content analyzed job advertisements in the U.S.-based *AEJMC News* for the 2010-2011 recruiting season in search of new media faculty, and compares the results with those of a similar study for the 2005-2006 recruiting season. It reports an overview of the hiring trends in the context of convergence. Results show a significant growth in the demands of new media faculty in JMC. Overall, institutions were looking for Ph.D. holders who had established professional careers and accumulated teaching and research experience. In particular, new media positions require extensive new-media-specific expertise. The study attempts to provide useful indicators of the employment outlook and hiring trends for applicants seeking new media and technology teaching positions in JMC. It also hopes to shed light for job applicants on what employers want and for which positions they should realistically apply. In addition, the results of this study may be useful to JMC programs in recruiting and preparing future faculty.

Introduction

Recent years have witnessed the imperative need for new media faculty in the field of journalism and mass communication (JMC). Today's JMC graduates are walking into a field that is constantly changing because of new media technology and convergence. The skills and concepts media professionals need to survive and succeed have shifted with the evolution of technologies. While the industry undergoes

revolutionary changes, are JMC schools following the same direction?

The comparison of two early studies on faculty job market in communication had shown evidence of the tendency. DeFleur content analyzed the faculty position announcements in all communication disciplines for the 1991-1992 recruiting season.¹ After nine years, Downes and Jirari studied of hiring trends for the 1998-1999 academic year.² They found that, compared to DeFleur's study, "the biggest difference" was the striking growth in the number of positions in the multimedia, digital communication and computer-related fields using new technologies.

In the past decade or so, new media and technologies are step-by-step becoming more and more interwoven into the fabric of our lives. As a reflection of this phenomenon, demand for new media classes has rapidly increased within communication schools, departments, and programs. How does the communication education job market respond to this? It can be expected that more faculty position openings demand new media expertise. But more importantly, what is the employment outlook for doctoral students completing their graduate work wishing to teach new-media related courses?

Since it is my perspective that most of the new media faculty positions are found related to the field of JMC, I focused on this field and investigated the faculty hiring announcements with a new media emphasis in JMC for the 2005-2006 recruiting season³. The study is a content analysis of teaching positions advertised in a primary advertising vehicle for JMC faculty job announcements, *AEJMC News*, the newsletter of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. It took its inspiration from and was designed and conducted in light of Merskin and Huberlie's 1995 and Downes and Jirari's 2002 studies, both of which covered the entire communication discipline.

As a further step of my 2009 work, the present study explores the faculty position advertisements with a new media emphasis for the 2010-2011 recruiting season. Both this and the 2009 study are parts of an on-going larger project that attempts to discover the longitudinal, chronological hiring trends for new media in JMC in recent years (1995 to present). In addition to the much longer period, the larger project will extend the source of faculty position announcements to include the newsletters from three major professional communication associations in the U.S.: the *AEJMC News*, the *NCA (National Communication Association) Spectra*, and the *ICA (International Communication Association) Newsletter*.

In the current study, attention was paid to credentials, requirements, duties, and expectations set forth in the faculty opening advertisements. The study attempts to provide useful indicators of the employment outlook and hiring trends for applicants seeking new media and technology teaching positions. It also seeks to enable applicants to have a better sense of what employers want and for which positions they should realistically apply. Additionally, the results of this study may be useful to JMC schools, departments, or programs recruiting and preparing future faculty.

Literature Review

Past research has paid attention to the faculty hiring trends in the field. Several works have reported comprehensive overviews of the hiring trends in all communication disciplines. In an early study, DeFleur used government data, a survey of administrators throughout the U.S., and did a content analysis of faculty positions for the 1991-1992 recruiting season to determine the overall trends in undergraduate enrollments, retirements of professors and needs for additional faculty across the communication disciplines.

In this large project, 541 position announcements were categorized into 20 instructional fields: advertising, broadcasting, broadcast journalism, communication disorders, communication studies, cross cultural communication, film, interpersonal communication, journalism, magazine, mass communication, organizational communication, photography, print journalism, public relations, public speaking, rhetoric, persuasion, speech communication, and theater. However, there was no such category as multimedia, digital or computer-related field identified at that time.

Following DeFleur's work, Merskin and Huberlie examined announcements of positions for communication graduates. The authors attempted to draw conclusions about the nature of the advertised positions and the information the advertisements conveyed and looked for: the teaching rank and load; stated preference for candidate qualifications; and additional responsibilities, salaries and benefits such as summer teaching. In this study, the researchers identified the same instructional areas as in DeFleur's 1993 study, still with no category as multimedia, digital or computer-related.

Big changes have taken place since 1995, the so-called "Year of the Internet."⁴ There has been a tremendous increase in the number of Internet users, as well as the amount of the Internet resources. In a survey to JMC educators by Sutherland, the respondents agreed that programs without a significant Web presence were ignoring the impact of technology on the field.⁸ In their 2002 study of hiring trends in the communication disciplines, Downes and Jirari content analyzed 803 announcements for the 1998-1999 academic year in the same professional publications as in Merskin and Huberlie's 1995 study⁵. "New media" debuted in this study as a new instructional area, in addition to the 20 identified in DeFleur's 1993 work. Downes and Jirari noted a large number of positions in multimedia, digital communication and computer-related fields using new technologies. This area ranked number 2 among the 21 instructional areas identified and represented 9% of all advertised positions. Five years later, I discovered, for the 2005-2006 recruiting season, 31% of the job announcements were seeking new-media-related faculty in the field of JMC.⁶

Implementing Courses with Web Features Is Imperative

Higher education institutions nowadays face many external and internal pressures to become more actively involved in the educational applications of new technologies.⁷ The overwhelmingly rapid development of digital technology underscores the importance of JMC issues confronting us. For example, journalism professionals, educators and students are actively participating in or are at least passively experiencing a transition between traditional print and broadcast emphases in journalism training and a profession increasingly influenced by new media and technologies. The Internet is transforming how communication professionals and journalists do their work. The new generation of students is urged to combine basic skills in writing and thinking with new media coursework.⁸

Sutherland surveyed all of the 189 active 1999-2000 Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication (ASJMC) administrators regarding the diffusion of JMC courses with Web features.⁹ Analysis of the descriptive statistics suggested that administrators perceived an extensive set of needs and imperatives that might be contributing to the implementation of this innovation. Sutherland suggested that organizations must respond to these stresses and organizations were more likely to respond when the environment is rapidly changing. The survey data indicated nearly six of 10 programs began implementing courses with Web features within six years of the introduction of the Web in 1990, with another third of the programs implementing Web course features a few years after the majority. By 1999, all the programs implemented Web features into their courses. Based on the survey findings, Sutherland contended schools might consider innovations such as the Web in order to remain competitive and to attract the best students.

Technology Is Crucial in a JMC Program

Years ago, critics chided journalism education for failing to provide their students with the electronic information gathering skills they would need in the professional workplace.¹⁰ Some of the problems impeding the adoption of information technology in the classroom were lack of finances, equipment, instructors and interest. At the time, about 70% of journalism program directors across the country indicated they had no plans to offer online searching skills.¹¹ A recent study by Adams surveyed print journalism majors nationwide and found the respondents' preparedness to practice technology-related skills was still low.¹²

To study the impact of technological change on journalism education, Voakes, Beam and Ogan telephone interviewed the directors, deans or chairpersons of 58 JMC programs in the U.S.¹³ Most of the respondents agreed JMC graduates needed to learn the latest technologies, and journalism faculty needed to be able to teach them. Almost all respondents agreed "it is important for JMC programs to keep up with the latest technological changes in media industries." Respondents unanimously agreed it was important for JMC graduates to know how to search for information online, and more than 90% of them agreed that, correspondingly, it was important for faculty to be able to teach searching for information online. The importance for JMC graduates to know how to prepare information for publishing online also received agreement from most of the respondents. Nearly 80% of the respondents agreed it was important "that faculty be able to teach skill courses involving the Web, such

as Web design” and “for students to be taught with the latest technology available.”

According to Davenport, Fico and DeFleur, journalism programs now have recognized the importance of the Internet and other new technologies.¹⁴ They noted that it was unlikely many journalism program graduates would find themselves at a loss if expected to use this source on the first day of employment. They also observed that many, although not all, students would also find themselves familiar with the use of online databases or newspaper archives on the job. Davenport et al. also pointed out that, in fact, students fortunate enough to leave programs with exposure to new media technologies had a significant advantage in the job market.

As Phipps reported in her *Electronic Media* article, many JMC schools in the U.S. started expanding their *newmedia* curricula by the end of the 20th century.¹⁵ Journalism and Mass Communication moved into a \$9.25 million drastically remodeled facility. Another \$2 million was being spent on equipment, and an additional \$1 million was added to the salary budget for a director of *new media education* and eight *new* faculty members. Similarly, the Medill School of *Journalism* at Northwestern University was constructing a *new* building to house ingredients for *media* convergence, including *newmedia* and broadcast labs as well as space for online advertising and public relations studies. According to the head of the *new media* program, two additional *new media* faculty members had been hired in 2000, and the school was expanding its use of adjunct faculty from Chicago’s *new media* community.

The new media landscape continues to change dramatically in the past decade. What is going on now? Are JMC programs in search of more new media faculty? Do faculty position announcements reflect such a change? What information do these advertisements actually convey? What kind of qualifications do these JMC programs specifically seek? This study compared more recent data to the author’s 2009 study, attempting to find updated answers to these questions.

Method

Defining “New Media”

The first step of this current study was to identify new-media-related faculty position advertisements. As mentioned in my 2009 work, defining “new media” turned out to be quite challenging.¹⁶ It seemed the term “new media” meant different things to different employers. Therefore, previous research was consulted to help define “new media.”

In Panici’s survey of new media instructors in all programs belonging to the ASJMC, respondents were asked to define the term “new media” as they use it in the introductory mass communication

course.¹⁷ While the responses were quite varied, Panici's analysis of the qualitative data revealed several themes for the definition of new media. First, a majority of the sample explicitly used the terms Internet and World Wide Web as their definition of new media.¹⁸ A second theme identified by a majority of the respondents in the Panici survey included the "use of computers" as a way to define new media.¹⁹ The use of the term "digital" was the third theme apparent in the various definitions of new media.²⁰ The term "interactive" served as the fourth theme apparent in the various definitions of new media.²¹

In light of Panici's findings, this study includes faculty position announcements using the terms "Internet," "Web," "online," "computer," "technology," "digital," and "interactive."

Variables and Data Collection

Data were collected through a content analysis. The unit of analysis is the individual faculty position opening.²² All advertisements for faculty positions appearing in one of the five issues of the bi-monthly *AEJMC News* (July, September, November 2010; January, March 2011²³) were collected. This is the vehicle in which openings for JMC faculty are typically advertised.

A range of information presented in the announcements was identified through the coding system. Variables, some adopted from Merskin and Huberline's and Downes and Jirari's works,^{24,25} included four broad categories: 1) general information about the position, such as name of school, faculty position rank, instructional area, teaching load, additional non-teaching responsibilities; 2) candidate qualifications, such as degree required, professional, teaching, and research experience, publication, experience working with a diverse population; 3) salary and other benefits; 4) application materials requested, such as curriculum vitae, statement of interests, letters of recommendation, writing sample, teaching evaluations, syllabi, etc.

Results and Discussion

Ratio of Job Announcements for New Media Faculty

During the 2010-2011 recruiting season, 56 position openings solicited JMC faculty candidates in *AEJMC News*. Job announcements irrelevant to new media were first sorted out. This screening process resulted in 29 remaining position openings.²⁶ That is, 51.8% of the positions for the 2010-2011 recruiting season are seeking new-media-related faculty, which is 20% more than what the author found for the 2005-2006 recruiting season.²⁷ In that study, 46 new-media-related faculty positions were found

accounting for 31% of the total of 147 openings advertised in the *AEJMC News*. That means, despite the considerably decreased number of job openings in the JMC field due to the general economic depression since 2008, the demand for new-media-related faculty has not only remained strong but also become even more prevalent.

To make a rough comparison of these ratios to Downes and Jirari's study for the 1998-1999 academic year, 12 instructional fields that do not belong to JMC, including communication studies, speech communication, organizational communication, interpersonal communication, cross-cultural communication, public speaking, rhetoric, theater, film, persuasion, other and field not indicated, are excluded from Table 2 of Downes and Jirari's 2002 work.²⁸ After this adjustment, the ratio of the new-media related faculty positions in those instructional fields related to JMC is about 20% in that study.²⁹

It can be seen from the above analysis that the demand for new media faculty in JMC has been continuously increasing, which could be reflection of a typical adoption process in diffusion of innovations as described by Rogers.³⁰ It is almost certain that the decision stage of this process has passed and we are right in the implementation stage. Revealing the details of this diffusion process relies on future longitudinal studies.

General Information about Position

Advertising time. Nearly 66% of the job openings for the 2010-2011 recruiting season appear in the September and November issues of *AEJMC News*, comparing to 72% for 2005-2006. That means fall semester is the prime time for job seekers to begin job-hunting process for starting next year. On the other hand, for academic programs hoping to hire new media faculty members, it means they had better advertise 10 to 12 months in advance of the intended hire so that they will not miss the best candidates in the job market.

Rank for position. The largest proportion of positions are for assistant professor openings - 18 of the openings (62%) specifically search for this rank. The remainder indicates a variety of ranks - two full professor positions (6.9%), one instructor (3.4%), one either instructor or assistant professor (3.4%), five either assistant or associate professor (17.2%), and finally two director or dean positions (6.9%). The finding that the assistant professor job openings are the overwhelming majority is consistent to what was found in [Author]'s 2009 work for 2005-2006.³¹

Teaching area. The new-media-related teaching areas to be covered in these hiring programs can be categorized into three groups: 1) journalism with new media, including Online Journalism, Computer Assisted Reporting, Internet Broadcasting, Digital Media Production, Interactive Storytelling; 2) technology specific, including Visual Communication Technology, Multimedia Development, Interactive

Media Design, Desktop Publishing, Web Design and Development, Graphic Design, Game Design, 3D Modeling, Infographics; 3) new media general, including Introduction to New Media, Technology and Society, Computer Mediated Communication, Information and Telecommunications Technology, and Digital Communication; 4) other mass communication sub-areas with new media. Almost 66% of the positions are in search of new faculty to cover the area of journalism with new media. Compared to the 2005-2006 season, what's new in the current recruiting season appears that much more programs are in need of instructors to fill in new media journalism classrooms, which may well be a direct reflection of student enrollment and an indirect reflection of the media industry - this is not surprising, as currently almost all news rooms of different media outlets are moving in the trend toward convergence.³²

Teaching load. Job applicants may be particularly interested in how many courses they will be expected to teach, in addition to what is to be taught. This is of major considerations for those positions in which demands for research and publication are high or extensive advising and service duties are also involved. Unfortunately, teaching load is rarely mentioned - only one position (3.4%) specifies such information, which is teaching three courses per semester. The teaching load findings in both my 2009 work³³ and this current study resemble those in Merskin and Huberline's 1995 study in that nearly 94% of the faculty position advertisements did not include teaching load information. It seems employers assume applicants are supposed to find out more information than what a job ad presents from school Website or personal contacts. Or perhaps some schools are afraid advertising heavy teaching loads will scare off applicants. Teaching load information, however, may be critical from an applicant's perspective, and it is not a bad idea if hiring programs clearly presented it in their advertisements.

Other duties. As also noted in [Author]'s, Downes and Jirari's, and Merskin and Huberline's works, most faculty members have responsibilities that go beyond their teaching duties.^{34,35,36} Analysis of the data in this study reveals that the most frequently mentioned non-teaching responsibilities are advising students, conducting research, and committee work. Others include supervising student research, developing curriculum, attending faculty meetings, community service, and advising student publications.

Candidate Qualifications

Degree requirement. In the 2010-2011 recruiting season, 86.2% of the positions specify degree requirement. Overwhelmingly, most of the institutions are looking for Ph.D.s. Of the positions examined, 48.3% require a Ph.D. and an additional 31% prefer it. Only 6.9% of the job positions required merely a master's degree. Compared to the 2005-2006 season, it appears the employment threshold has risen as more positions are now checking in candidates only if they already hold or expecting soon to earn a Ph.D. pass.³⁷

Work experience. As for previous work experience, my 2009 study found that in the 2005-2006 recruiting season, nearly half of these new-media-related positions mentioned that they sought candidates with relevant professional experience; teaching experience was required or desirable for 34.8% of these positions; and 15.2% looked for research experience(see *Table 2A*). Compared to my 2009 study in this regard, it is evident that the overall employment threshold has drastically risen: for the 2010-2011 recruiting season, 79.3% of these new-media-related positions mention that they seek candidates with relevant professional experience; teaching experience is required or desirable for 72.4% of these positions; and 51.7% of these openings look for research experience (see *Table 2*). Both studies show that professional experience is more valued, which is not surprising, as JMC schools are usually deemed professional programs. It appears teaching experience is also considered an asset for job candidates. This too, is understandable because, after all, the primary responsibility of most faculty members is to teach classes.

Table 1: Candidate Work Experience 2005-2006*

Professional Teaching Research					
Frequency %	Frequency %		Frequency %		
Required 15	32.6	11	23.9	6	13.0
Desirable 6	13.0	5	10.9	1	2.2
Total 21	45.7	16	34.8	7	15.2

*Source from [Author] (2009)

Table 2:Candidate Work Experience 2007-2008

Professional Teaching Research					
Frequency %	Frequency %		Frequency %		
Required 11	37.9	7	24.1	3	10.3
Desirable 12	41.4	14	48.3	12	41.4
Total 23	79.3	21	72.4	15	51.7

New-media specific requirements. Besides the aforementioned general qualifications, applicants are expected to have new-media-specific expertise. Basically, some programs require candidates to have a working knowledge of multiple platforms and convergent technologies, or previous experience and a record of scholarly achievement expected in digital media theory and practice. More particularly, some positions prefer candidates with cross-disciplinary backgrounds and experience in media convergence and curriculum areas represented in the field of mass communication, or familiarity with software in the

areas of digital audio and video editing, graphic design, 3D modeling, and writing for Web. Some announcements further specify that the preferred candidates are those with familiarity with new and emerging media tools, such as mobile Internet and social media.

Publications

It is worth noting that only two of the 29 new-media-related position advertisements mention that publication is required. This is encouraging to Ph.D. students or ABD applicants. Considering the fact that most JMC Ph.D. programs are only three to four years and journal publication is a relatively long process, Ph.D. students or ABDs may not yet have a published work in hand at the time of applying for a faculty position.

Salary and benefits. In any employment, salary and benefits are important. Surprisingly, information about salary and benefits are seldom mentioned in these faculty position announcements. Benefit information is missing in almost all these announcements, except for only one vaguely mentioning “competitive” benefits. As for salary, nearly 93% of the announcements do not include such information. In the only two cases in which salary is mentioned, it is simply listed as “competitive,” or “commensurate with qualifications.”

As also noted in my 2009 work, there seem to be two reasons that salary is not disclosed, one is based on myth and the other on reality.³⁸ Merskin and Huberline observed that there is a myth that people teach in colleges and universities for some universal sense of altruism.³⁹ That is, they will be redeemed by devoting their lives to serving humankind. In light of the myth, faculty position applicants should be more interested in the opportunities brought about by the position and the chance to serve the educational institution than how much they will be paid. The reality, on the other hand, is that, although budgets are finite and higher education employers, like all business people, know what can be offered and the range within which that figure can fluctuate, they tend not to disclose an exact figure but would rather allow flexibility for negotiation, because they are under the pressure to get the most for their money.^{40,41}

Application Materials

More than 65% of these job announcements specify what documents to include in the application package. The documents applicants were required to include in the application package usually were a combination of materials. Curriculum vitae, application letter, and letters of recommendations are the three most commonly requested documents. Most advertisers required additional items, such as statement of research interests, syllabus and/or teaching philosophy, evidence of teaching effectiveness, diploma, transcript, scholarly writing sample, and honor code.

Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research

In this study, 56 JMC faculty position openings advertised in *AEJMC News* in the 2010-2011 recruiting season were analyzed, and the results were compared to a similar study for the 2005-2006 season. As expected, the demand for new-media-related faculty is rapidly diffusing in the JMC field. While the percentage of new-media-related faculty positions on the job market has become larger, compared to five years ago, the employment threshold, however, appears to have drastically risen, as many more positions are looking to candidates holding a Ph.D. Meanwhile, having professional, teaching and research experience seems to have become a must.

The job-hunting process for an applicant seeking a position in academia can be daunting. Overall, in accordance with my 2009 work, the results of this study suggest that institutions are seeking Ph.D.s who have established professional careers and accumulated teaching and research experience. In particular, new media positions require extensive new-media-specific expertise. The wish list could be difficult to fulfill, especially among applicants who do not yet have the Ph.D. diploma in hand.

One implication of this study, from a “demanding” perspective, is that JMC programs may have to hire faculty with significant professional experience but without a Ph.D. to meet their immediate need for new media faculty, given the mismatch between the relatively long cycle of doctorate supply and the fast growing demand. This immediate need could also be eased by utilizing part-time or adjunct instructors from the media industries. From a “supplying” perspective, on the other hand, the findings in this study suggest that Ph.D.-producing programs may need to consider actively seeking for candidates with the desired new media experience and expertise into their graduate programs to enhance the supply.

Admittedly, this study is limited in scope - it included one year of new media faculty position advertisements in the *AEJMC News*. It did not examine other vehicles as data source in which advertisements for communication faculty are typically found. It should be pointed out that some JMC faculty openings may be announced in other publications.

However, because the *AEJMC News* is the primary source of JMC faculty position announcements, there is every reason to believe that the results of this study are well representative of the recent hiring trends in the target field. As noted earlier, this present study, along with my 2009 work, are parts of an on-going larger project, which will cover longer time period, and more data sources.

In future research, further exploration may help paint a more detailed, richer picture of the hiring trend. For example, “specialization” may be used as a new variable to break down the JMC area as a whole to see if significant differences exist across the specializations, such as advertising, public

relations, journalism, and media studies etc. Study and analysis of area-specific job announcements would be of greater help to not only job-seekers but also the JMC programs recruiting and preparing the future faculty. In addition, as the concept of “professional experience” remains vague and ill-defined in the field, it will be worthwhile to analyze and find out from the hiring advertisements what constitutes “professional experience.”

Last but not least, we should keep in mind that, the impact of new media brought to the communication field is unprecedented. It is still unclear where the new media will go due to the constantly updating technologies. The concept of new media may be changing all the time, and defining the term “new media” may become more and more challenging. The definitions used in this study will need to be revisited in following studies so as to keep up with the development and evolution of new technologies.

The rapid development of new media has brought more massive and profound changes to the field of JMC than ever before. As commonly agreed, hiring trends in higher education reflect undergraduate enrollments and, within professionally oriented programs, the needs and demands of the professions for which they train future employees. Thus, hiring trends in new media faculty is an important window that enables us to view and understand the changing landscapes in the field and definitely is worth further examining in this new media era. This line of inquiry provides many opportunities for exploration and this study is just a beginning.

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