

REVIEW OF THE B.A., B.S. IN JOURNALISM
Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: 09.0401
Journalism

OVERVIEW

The B.A., B.S. in Journalism program at Illinois State University is housed within the School of Communication in the College of Arts and Sciences. The School offers several degree programs, including majors in Communication Studies, Journalism, Mass Media, and Public Relations, in addition to a master's degree program in Communication. The Journalism program provides students with a comprehensive education in the theory and practice of journalism across print, broadcast, and digital media platforms. The curriculum balances skill development—such as writing, editing, reporting, and using multimedia tools—with coursework in media law, ethics, and the role of journalism in a democratic society. Students gain real-world experience through campus media outlets including TV-10, WZND, The Vidette, and WGLT, the University's NPR affiliate. Journalism students are encouraged to engage with professional media through internships and alumni mentorship, fostering both academic and professional growth. The program's mission aligns with the values of civic engagement, diversity, and critical inquiry, preparing students for careers as thoughtful, ethical, and effective journalists in an evolving media landscape.

Enrollment and Degrees Conferred by Plan of Study, Fall Census Day, 2017-2024

B.A., B.S. in Journalism, Illinois State University

First Majors Only

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Enrollments	149	144	132	129	124	128	117	116
Degrees	33	34	34	33	28	32	33	36

Table notes:

Graduating Fiscal Year consists of summer, fall, and spring terms, in that order. For example, Graduating Fiscal Year 2024 consists of the following terms: summer 2023, fall 2023, and spring 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Self-study process

Program Coordinators for Communication Studies, Journalism, Mass Media, Public Relations, and the Graduate Program in Communication began planning the overall development process in September 2023, beginning with overview meetings with university officials about program review and emphasizing data collection for the self-study. Consensus among all coordinators was that the reports from the previous program review are robust and well worth using as the starting point for this program review process. During the fall 2023 semester, required content for this program review was compared with the content reported in the previous program review, and revisions and notations for revisions were made in the reporting documents accordingly. The purpose of this approach was to allow coordinators to have access to content that is useful while also identify content that must be acquired for either updates or new information. Data gathering took advantage of previously successful methods as well as new methods that were needed in process to fulfill content requirements.

Program curriculum

Shortly before the previous program review, the Journalism program curriculum was re-designed: (1) To sharpen the focus on journalism in terms of both training and education; 2) replace narrow medium-based sequences with a broader training in a range of convergence skills; 3) ensure prompt graduation through increased flexibility 4)

strike a balance between vocational training and theory, 5) increase student choice and allow them more flexibility in building towards their preferred careers, while maintaining educational safeguards. Following the redesign, there is now a single, converged, sequence in the Journalism major, although students are guided, after taking a common core of classes, to specialize in areas of interest leading to specific careers in the news industry. The Certificate of Excellence program helps to formalize this guidance and to assess the student's achievements within their chosen path. All Journalism students take a common core of required classes, which is designed to offer a 360 degree perspective on the journalism profession and its social and cultural implications as a whole, with courses offering an introduction to a broad set of journalism skills, technologies and mediums, and a careful balance between practice and theory. Since the last program review, the student newspaper The Vidette officially became part of the School of Communication.

Program or academic unit faculty

Journalism program faculty have a good mixture of professional and academic experience that enhances the ability to provide our students with an effective balance of theoretical and practical pedagogy. In addition, our faculty have published and presented on several current and important trends and issues related to the journalism profession. Our faculty also engage in extensive amounts of professional development opportunities on EDIA concerns, as well as technologies and skillsets directly involved in newsgathering and dissemination.

Program goals and quality indices

We aim to educate students in the broad range of skills involved in accurately and ethically gathering, analyzing, processing and presenting the news on multiple platforms. We aim to equip students with the skills needed to foster the sustainability of a dynamic free press and a healthy democratic, diverse, and inclusive society. We foster equitable, inclusive, diverse, and accessible lifelong learning for active citizenship. We aim to prepare students for productive, responsible, ethical, and long-term careers in journalism and to provide students the basic technical skills of journalism as well as a strong grounding in the theory and concepts related to the profession.

Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process

Three main mechanisms for assessment are being implemented: a) Portfolios of assignments and other student work; b) a survey to be administered to students at the beginning and end of the program to evaluate their experience in news-work before and after studying at ISU, and to assess their grasp of Communication and Journalism theories; c) a Certificate of Excellence program that will guide, track and help evaluate a student's progress and level of achievement in specialized areas of journalism education/news-work, including certificates in TV & Online Reporting; Documentary Reporting & Production; and Social Media Analytics, Reporting & Production. Once The Vidette is more fully implemented into the curriculum, assessment techniques will be revisited.

Specialized accreditation

Not applicable.

Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review

We have addressed recommendations from the previous program review in the following ways:

- We have continued to explore specific ways to recruit for the Journalism program through partnerships with high schools that offer extracurricular programs in journalism – most prominently the Illinois Journalism Education Association and ISU now being the home of their annual conference.
- While we do still struggle with a better balance of student-to-faculty ratio, a main reason is due to the retirement of two Journalism faculty, who have yet to be replaced. We hope that a new Journalism hire will be the focus of the next new hire the School makes. Further, it is hoped that the College will be more willing to provide funding for adjuncts and NTTs as those would be of increased importance to the Journalism program in particular in order to include staff that have very recent and/or concurrent journalism experience in order to provide the most up-to-date skill training.

- With the recent approval of the sports communication major, we look forward to the potential that has for greater solidification of our offerings in sports journalism. While we appreciate the previous recommendation to partner with other units to share resources, we are hoping to first explore partnerships with local news outlets as well as the aforementioned possibility of hiring adjuncts and NTTs who have recent specialized journalism experience.
- We have had a facilities upgrade in which WGLT and The Vidette were co-located. Ideally, all student media outlets would have access to a shared space. We have recently formed a group comprising of our student media outlet staff, WGLT staff, and Journalism faculty and staff to explore more collaboration and how to further support convergence among students, faculty, and staff.
- The program redesign is still a work in progress as recently The Vidette has been folded into the curriculum. We are still in the process of getting that functioning smoothly and will be reviewing the strategic plan recently designed for The Vidette in the upcoming year. Once that is completed, we will revisit seeking specialized accreditation.
- We plan to explore opportunities to have students visit and/or work in collaboration in some way with journalism outlets situated in the areas in which the School has study abroad programs.
- We are pleased with the alumni connections that are incredibly strong with our alums who worked at TV-10 and WZND. The alum network within those outlets has led to many opportunities for our current students to find employment. It also allows for us to keep current on trends in the industry and tap into our alums knowledge base for how well our program prepares students for careers in the profession. The alumni network is also growing for alums who worked at The Vidette and is beginning to reach the level of interaction of the other student media outlets. With convergence and our push to get students involved in all three student media outlets, we feel more confident in the ability to have a strong network overall and a more consistent mean of tracking employment and career progress. Indeed, our assessment has found our students are increasingly getting experience at all three outlets rather than only one or two, which had been the case more frequently for the last program review.
- We will be revising the assessment plan due to a couple of factors. One is the recent retirement of the former Journalism program coordinator and with that an updating of the Journalism program mission and vision. Another key factor for revising the assessment is the aforementioned recent folding in of The Vidette into the curriculum.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand

It cannot go unnoticed and pointed out that since the last program review, journalists and the news industry as a whole have been facing immense scrutiny and degradation not only by the public at large, but by influential leaders in positions of power. Of greatest note, is the amount of restrictions on freedom of the press that have been proposed by those in power and with the ability to make governmental regulations to restrict the press as well as frequent and fervent allegations of fake news any time news media reports do not align with one's own ideology. As such, we one current and strongly polarizing debate in society is over the credibility of journalists and the worth of the profession as a whole. To address these changes in the field, faculty and staff within the journalism program have increased the amount of coursework required to improve students' media literacy and overall fact-checking skill set. In addition, due to the amount of criticism of journalists, we have strengthened efforts to also instruct our students on the stressful and burdensome nature of the job and to provide them with tips to ensure personal safety as well as resources for mental health.

Major findings of this program review self-study

Exit survey results that indicate the majority of our program graduates were involved with at least one student media outlet during their time at ISU. On top of that, most of those students also indicated that they were involved with multiple student outlets and that they felt they gained a wide range of experience reporting and producing news stories on multiple platforms. This, we feel, provides strong evidence that our graduates leave with the ability to engage in truly converged journalism. Our students are also provided with and are taking advantage of a variety of off-campus internships, many of them in medium, if not, large media markets. We look forward to the strengthened recruitment strategies and reignited interest in Journalism as a vital piece of democracy that will hopefully give a boost to our enrollment figures. We could improved on: more diversity in electives offered, a more streamlined coordination and true convergence of our student media outlets, and overall greater campus-wide promotion and recognition of our student media outlets.

Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle

We plan to further converge our curriculum regarding requirements for student participation in each of our student media outlets. We would like to explore the possibility of creating space for a Student Media Hub/Hive that would be large enough to house all of our student media outlets and include multimedia capabilities. If that space can be created; we would then pursue providing more in and out of class assignments and opportunities for our students to engage in multimedia news projects. We hope to explore ways to enhance cross promotion across the platforms of our student media outlets via websites, social media, the television station, the radio network, and potentially bringing back some form of printed publication at least once or twice a year. We are in great need of more staff, particularly those who have current experience in the field to be able to teach a more diverse set of electives. Further, we are in need of the funding for a shared space for the Student Media Hub/Hive. In terms of goals to keep enrollment steady, we are hopeful of the potential a bill currently sitting on the desk of Gov. Pritzker that if signed into law would create a student scholarship program whereby the Illinois Student Assistance Commission would be required to give scholarships to students who will work at local news outlets in Illinois for at least two years. Any incentive we can provide to encourage students to pursue a career in an often maligned yet incredibly important profession is crucial. For better promotion of our student media outlets, we would like a more top-down approach and support from those in the top administrative positions at ISU to make concerted efforts at assisting in that promotion and providing any monetary support.

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Review Outcome. The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.A./B.S. in Journalism to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee commends the Journalism program on the development of a thorough and reflective self-study report that draws upon extensive unit-level data, provides relevant historical context, and highlights both program-wide initiatives and specific areas for improvement. The committee thanks the program faculty and staff for their thoughtful engagement in the review process and participation in a productive and collegial discussion.

The committee commends the program for articulating a strong set of goals that align with Illinois State University's mission and strategic priorities. These goals reflect a well-rounded commitment to professional skill development, ethical practice, critical engagement, civic responsibility, and experiential learning. The program demonstrates clear alignment between its academic objectives and its support for journalism's role in a democratic society.

The committee recognizes the program's multi-pronged recruitment strategies, which include participation in university events, targeted social media campaigns, a podcast series, and expanded scholarship offerings. The program has also revised its internal transfer policy to improve accessibility. Despite national and local declines in journalism enrollments, the program has maintained a relatively stable student base, with some early indicators that new recruitment efforts may yield positive trends. The program's role in hosting the Illinois Journalism Education Association conference is especially commendable.

The committee commends the program for its robust internship program, which provides extensive opportunities for experiential learning, builds professional networks for students, and supports the program financially through credit hour generation. The model is well-structured and vetted, with clear oversight and expectations for internship providers.

The committee notes the program's commitment to inclusivity and its efforts to increase enrollment and retention among underrepresented students. While the percentage of students from historically underrepresented backgrounds has grown slightly, it remains below the university average. The committee encourages continued attention to

inclusive recruitment and retention strategies and applauds the program's integration of EDI themes into curriculum and student engagement.

The program has demonstrated a commitment to student success through initiatives such as the COM Connections newsletter, the Career COM-petency professional development series, and informal engagement events. These initiatives appear to be positively received and well-aligned with student needs. Additionally, the committee notes the program's strong support for co-curricular involvement, including opportunities at student-run media outlets such as TV-10, WZND, and *The Vidette*.

The committee commends the program for its data-informed analysis of instructional capacity, including class sizes and course offerings. While the program maintains small class sizes and student-centered learning environments, the number of course sections has increased despite declining enrollments. The committee encourages ongoing evaluation of how instructional resources are allocated to best serve student and institutional needs.

A notable area of concern is the high number of graduation exceptions submitted over the review period (839). These exceptions, largely for elective substitutions and major requirement waivers, raise questions about the consistency of course availability, the rigidity of curricular structures, and the advising workload. The committee recommends a focused review of curriculum design and course scheduling to reduce reliance on exceptions.

The committee discussed the recent incorporation of *The Vidette*, the university's student newspaper, into the Journalism curriculum. While this move may offer pedagogical and fiscal benefits, it also raises questions about editorial freedom, as *The Vidette* was historically an independent student-run publication. The committee recommends monitoring the impacts of this integration and consulting with the Academic Senate, as needed, to ensure that institutional commitments to editorial independence are upheld.

With regard to faculty, the committee notes that the program currently includes three tenure-track and three non-tenure-track faculty, following two unfilled retirements. The self-study includes mixed signals about faculty scholarship: while narrative sections highlight active research by some faculty, the summary tables show a low overall volume of peer-reviewed publications. This discrepancy suggests either underreporting or a need for clearer documentation of disciplinary norms and productivity. The committee encourages the program to clarify expectations for faculty scholarship and to ensure support structures are in place to meet those expectations.

Finally, the committee notes the reference to a non-credit "Certificate of Excellence" awarded to students but found little clarity on its requirements or status. The committee recommends that the program clarify the purpose and expectations of this recognition and consider whether it should be formalized as a micro-credential or removed.

Follow up Report.

Assessment plan. The Academic Planning Committee recognizes faculty efforts in developing and implementing the assessment. The committee identified the program's assessment plan as an area in need of significant attention. The existing plan is dated (2009) and appears disconnected from current curriculum structures and learning outcomes. While assessment practices may be taking place informally or under other documentation, the committee recommends the development of a formal, updated plan that aligns with current practices and supports continuous improvement. A one-year follow-up report is requested to present the revised plan and detail implementation progress. The committee asks that the program faculty submit a progress report regarding the implementation of the assessment plan to the Office of the Provost by October 1, 2026.

Comparator Analysis. The committee has included analyses of comparator and aspirational institutions in the self-study report outline to provide faculty members opportunities to consider the niche the program has among its peers and to gather information for program planning. The committee asks that program faculty return to their comparator analysis to identify the program niche among comparator programs at Illinois public universities and to identify actions faculty could take to enhance the program with respect to the quality indicators faculty have prioritized. Accordingly, the committee asks faculty to revisit their discussions of comparator institutions and to summarize findings of those discussions in a report submitted to the Office of the Provost by October 1, 2026.

Recommendations.

In addition to the program's accomplishments, the Academic Planning Committee provides the following recommendations. Details describing the actions and outcomes associated with each of the committee's recommendations should be included in the next program review self-study report that is tentatively due October 1, 2032.

Continue to monitor enrollment trends and refine recruitment strategies. The committee encourages the program to assess the impact of its recruitment initiatives and to consider additional targeted efforts to increase applications and yield.

Review course scheduling and curricular structure to reduce the need for graduation exceptions. The committee recommends that the program analyze the root causes of the high number of graduation exceptions and identify changes to curriculum or scheduling that could minimize such issues.

Clarify and update documentation of faculty scholarship. The committee encourages the program to ensure that faculty scholarship is appropriately reported and aligned with expectations in the discipline. Consideration should be given to alternative or complementary metrics that reflect the nature of journalism research and creative activity.

Clarify the status of the "Certificate of Excellence." The committee recommends the program articulate the purpose, requirements, and formal status of this recognition, including whether it should be submitted for review as a non-credit certificate or micro-credential.

Continue collaborations with Milner Library. Build upon a strong existing relationship to evaluate and maintain resource availability. Consider expanding digital resources, integrating information fluency outcomes and assessment into the curriculum, and integrating library tools into assessment plans. Such efforts ensure that both faculty and students have ongoing access to the information and skills needed for effective scholarship.

Further alumni and stakeholder engagement. Strengthen ties with alumni and external stakeholders to remain current with industry trends and job market needs. Regular alumni surveys, advisory boards, and panels can inform curriculum updates and highlight career pathways for prospective and current students, enhancing the program's relevance and attractiveness.