

Chris Evans

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Education in the field of college media should help students interweave their creativity and compassion with the practical realities of the journalism world—where, of course, compassion and creativity become assets for both their careers and their personal growth. In the classroom or the lab environment of the campus newspaper, radio station or TV station, a good teacher pushes students to strive for perfection—something mass media work requires—and then helps them to recover, recoup and learn when they fall short of this ultimately impossible goal.

Starting with their first interview, reporters must learn to get their facts straight and their quotes exact. Students should go into the field to find their own enterprise stories, to unearth local issues worthy of reporting, and to produce their stories in a multimedia environment, for that is what journalists do: they write, produce, publish, broadcast and post what people must know. In my media classes, I intertwine the academic curriculum with practical application in student and professional newsrooms and broadcast booths, where students receive real-world experience, complete with critical feedback from professional journalists and those consumers of mass media who, as often as not, challenge students' work-product and ways of thinking.

And yet, while the teacher-student dialogue certainly should include the traditional in journalism education—news value, clear writing and communication, ethical reporting, use of the latest tools and so on—it cannot stop there. Our students will struggle and grow through open, honest and difficult discussions about issues perplexing even the brightest thinkers in journalism: racist culture in newsrooms; the debate over objectivity vs. transparency; and

arguments for and against unpublishing in a world transformed by technology and shifting cultural values as they relate to marginalized populations.

Attention to issues of diversity must stay central to our teaching practice. I consider myself to be on a constant journey to understand what my privilege means and what I can make of it: to work not only on an interpersonal and programmatic level but to be part of the wider effort to address systemic issues of power and oppression.

At the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, I'm the longest-serving member of the journalism department's diversity and social justice committee and our department's faculty representative on the larger college of media diversity committee. In these roles, I work to bring the voices of students from traditionally marginalized communities into conversation with faculty and staff—a conversation from which they have previously and somewhat inexplicably been excluded. As a professor and college media adviser, when I meet with students, we speak regularly of the need for student media organizations to connect with the entire student population—providing editorial content that meets the needs of all readers and viewers, not just those readers with whom students with dominant identities might personally and most immediately identify—and to include all voices in their media outlets and memberships.

But policies and committees can do only so much. We exist in a tumultuous era for anyone who cares about the multitude of issues we gather under the impossibly large umbrella term of “diversity.” As I said when drafting the Illinois journalism department's diversity statement, we must take seriously our responsibility in training the next generation of young journalists. We must help them develop the skills they need to examine, with a critical eye, the inequities and shortcomings of the communities in which they travel and on which they report. This is especially important when American society is roiled by unprecedented attacks on the

media, deeply divided into mutually antagonistic political and social spheres, and experiencing a resurgence of white supremacy. We must help our students to candidly scrutinize and report on diversity as well, to question long-held journalistic standards and practices. It's only together that we—professors, students and our wider communities—can engender the kind of dialogue needed to find a better way forward.

Through the efforts of a dedicated faculty, students can become knowledgeable critics of their own work and the work of others; they can transform so as to become independent problem-solvers: vital in a generation of students might have grown up too dependent on technology, parents or other so-called authorities. As students progress from first-year to senior year, they should move from knowledge and skills training to leadership training so that they can develop into leaders of one another. Oftentimes they teach one another better than any professor could. Through this process, they can develop their own, socially just community of lifelong leaders and learners. They can become first-rate thinkers who employ technology rather than letting that same technology guide their thinking. Moreover, they can become civic-minded adults capable of responsibly contributing to the society of which they are a part.