

History: A Critical Part of a Strong Journalism and Mass Communication Curriculum

The American Journalism Historians Association supports the mission of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, which calls for “a broad, multidisciplinary curriculum that nurtures critical thinking, analytic reasoning and problem-solving skills.” Moreover, AJHA considers historical inquiry to be a key part of such a rigorous curriculum. Media history courses commonly include material related to most if not all of the values and competencies listed in ACEJMC’s standard for curriculum and instruction.

The curriculum and instruction standard (ACEJMC’s Standard 2) addresses a wide range of expected professional values and competencies for today’s journalism and mass communication students. They include knowledge and abilities in the areas of:

- Freedom of speech and the press
- The history and role of individuals and institutions in shaping communications
- Diversity and the role of mass communications in a global society
- Theories in the use and presentation of information
- Ethical principles
- Critical, creative and independent thinking
- Conduct of research in the communications professions
- Clarity and critical evaluation of writing

Given that knowledge of history is singled out as one of these core competencies, courses in media history are naturally well-suited to help journalism and mass communication programs acquire and maintain accreditation. However, a review of syllabi by AJHA reveals that media history courses also commonly touch on *all* of the aforementioned values and competencies. Further, the rise of digital humanities methods means that historical inquiries often deal even with other ACEJMC competencies that address the use of statistical concepts and digital tools and technologies. For example, media history courses commonly include components requiring:

- Significant writing and research
- Class discussion or peer evaluation that measures students’ understanding of the importance of freedom of speech and the right to criticize those in power
- Examination of issues related to race, gender, ethnicity and other forms of diversity in media and society
- Critical analysis of news media ethics and framing
- Comparative analysis of present-day media issues against historical events

Beyond the utilitarian value of history courses as a means of achieving accreditation goals, AJHA considers history in the journalism and mass communication curriculum to be an essential means of promoting the broad-based critical thinking skills students will need to be both successful media practitioners and engaged citizens in the twenty-first century.

Do you have questions about how history can fit into your curriculum? AJHA is here to help. Contact us today!

American Journalism Historians Association Statement of Principles on History in the Curriculum

Understanding the history of mass communication is crucial to a well-rounded education. As the late *Washington Post* publisher Philip Graham said, "Journalism is the first draft of history." Many journalism and mass communication students have no background in mass media, and a history course at the very least can help provide them a base of knowledge necessary to succeed. All journalism and mass communication programs should commit to the teaching of history.

The American Journalism Historians Association is committed to promoting the creation and/or strengthening of courses and programs in mass communication history. These courses and programs should be rigorous and involve not only the teaching of historical facts but also research methods. Students should know and understand the role of the media in culture and society and how it relates to the past, present, and future. Whether students go on to work in the profession or enter other careers that will likely require an understanding of media, it is important that they appreciate mass communication's role in society from a historical perspective.

Because of the importance of understanding mass communication history in the life of a well-educated individual, the AJHA recognizes the following principles:

1. All schools with a journalism or mass communication program should offer media history courses as part of the curriculum.
2. All schools should consider the study of history to be as essential as the study of practice, theory, or any other area.
3. All schools should offer students the opportunity to study or specialize in history equal to the opportunity for any other area of study.

To achieve those objectives, the AJHA will track which programs offer courses in the history of journalism and mass communications, and it will encourage others to adopt the subject as part of their curricula. AJHA stands ready to assist schools interested in creating a course or a program in mass communication history.