



Columbia U. Reforms Journalism Teaching, Raises Standards, Limits Enrollment

Entrance Requirements Raised For Pulitzer School—Eight-Hour Work Day Planned For Students —50 Per Cent Drop In Registration Expected

“MASS production” of journalism graduates is at an end at Columbia University, New York.

Under a reorganized teaching plan to take effect July 1, enrollment in the School of Journalism is expected to drop to about half what it is at present. Addition of a third year of college work to the requirements for admission to the school, will cause part of the reduction, it is believed, and the rest will be brought about by an examination of candidates as to “general intelligence, moral character, and fitness for the work of the courses.”

Those students who are admitted will be required to put in full time at their studies, do practically double the present amount of writing, and maintain high standards in background courses taken in other divisions of the university. They will be on duty, theoretically, at least, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. five days a week, and subject to assignments which may range from writing a report of a class in public finance to covering a New York political meeting. If a student goes to the library for required reading, he will account for his time to the faculty member acting as his news editor; if he goes to his room to study, he will be asked to leave his telephone number so he can be given a later assignment if necessary.

There will be frequent discussions of news of the day, and an effort to keep the students' attention focused on news developments from the standpoint of the newspaperman. The smaller classes, it is hoped, will permit more individual contact with the faculty members.

Besides concentrating the professional courses, the new arrangement will provide a broader academic background. In addition to the extra year of college study required for admission, the students will spend a good share of their time on background courses while in the School of Journalism. Although requirements are not yet definite, the following courses will be either required or advised for the academic year 1932-33: Constitutional law of the United States; development of an international community; history of nationality and nationalism in modern Europe; basic factors in international relations; public finance, contemporary American politics; great American political personalities; business of journalism; milestones in social legislation, state and national; economic problems of the post-war period, with special reference to the part of the United States in the economic recovery of Europe; economic history of the United States; recent history of the United States; a study of religions; radical, conservative, and reactionary tendencies in present-day morals; history of science; sources and materials for the study of economic geography; contemporary dramatic literature; problems of authorship; typography and the preparation of material for printing and publishing.

While Dean Carl W. Ackerman disavows any idea of attempting to reform

journalism teaching except in his own school, the step taken at Columbia University seems likely to mark the beginning of a new phase in the development of schools of journalism. Having passed through a period of indifference or hostility on the part of news-



Dean Carl W. Ackerman

papermen, followed by a period of rapid expansion, many of the schools have come to realize in recent years that the quality of work done had suffered from the presence of students only superficially interested. The business depression, diminishing the number of jobs available for graduates, has emphasized the problem. Despite this, most schools have felt it impossible, for internal reasons, to restrict enrollment radically.

“We seek the serious interest of young men and women who have an earnest and purposeful concern for the work and responsibilities of journalism,” Dean Ackerman explained in a letter to President Nicholas Murray Butler containing the recommendations of the journalism faculty—recommendations which were later approved by both the University Council and the University Trustees.

The reorganization of the journalism course follows a year's study of the situation by Dean Ackerman, who took office July 1, 1931. The plans were formulated by the faculty of the School of Journalism after consultation with editors and publishers, alumni of the school, and Columbia authorities on education. Tentative proposals were then submitted to the advisory board of the school, and to twelve active executives of leading newspapers, periodicals, and press associations. Their criticisms and recommendations were considered in drafting the final outline of changes.

Under the new plan five years of college work will be the minimum for

a degree from the school. The degree will be Bachelor of Science, replacing the old degree of Bachelor of Literature. The present graduate course leading to the degree of Master of Science is discontinued, although it is probable that later there will be graduate work in some new form.

Students with three years of college work, either at Columbia or at any other approved school, will be required to take a two-year course in the School of Journalism. Students who have completed four years of college work, if they have had newspaper experience or show special aptitude, may be admitted directly to the second-year class.

Dean Ackerman, explaining the changed plan, cited provisions of the agreement of April 10, 1903, between Joseph Pulitzer, who endowed the school, and the Trustees of the University: “The university will establish . . . and maintain the school . . . with the highest degree of educational efficiency. . . . The course and plan so adopted may be modified from time to time by the university as experience and changing conditions may render necessary and desirable as tending to increase the usefulness of the school.”

“The Pulitzer agreement requires us to train students for the profession of journalism,” Dean Ackerman told *EDITOR & PUBLISHER*. “We are not giving a substitute college education, nor running a girls' finishing school.

“It has been obvious that the enrollment was too large, both from the students' standpoint and from the school's. Too many students have been taking journalism because they imagined they wanted to write—until they found that writing was work.

“Next year we expect to have our classes about half as large as this year, and to give more individual attention to each student. This year we have 165 students; next year we are counting on only 85 to 100. Thus far we have admitted only two or three students definitely for next fall. Other applicants have been asked to send in samples of what they have written and information about any writing experience they have had.

“We rather think that under the new plan we may attract a different type of student. For one thing, it seems likely that many will have not only three years of college work, but a full four-year course, before entering here.

“We think it would not be honest to encourage a large number of students to study for the profession of journalism if we know they can't get jobs afterward. We are trying to face realities. The reality is that there are jobs, but the market is selective and the standards are higher. We are placing men and women right along outside of New York City. Good graduates will always be able to get jobs. But we see a necessity to give all our students the best possible training for the profession as it exists today and as it seems likely to be for several years. Journalism will always need men with the capacity to carry increasing re-

sponsibilities as well as the ability to report and interpret events.

“Next year we hope to make the bachelor's degree the equivalent of the present graduate degree. We want to make all our work, from the examination of applicants to the conferring of degrees an individual matter. The period of mass production for the professions is definitely at an end.”

Dean Ackerman, describing the emphasis to be given writing and reporting, said he expected in the course of the next year to arrange for some “satisfactory non-commercial medium” for printing some of the student material. He intimated that he did not refer to a newspaper which would require advertising or be given circulation outside the school.

Prof. Charles P. Cooper's second-year course in reporting and copy editing will be reorganized as a two-year course forming the foundation of the revised curriculum, the Dean said. Prof. Cooper will be the editorial director of the first-year class, occupying a remodeled office next the junior city room and acting as managing editor. Prof. Walter B. Pitkin will serve as editorial director of the second-year class. Under each will be a news editor in direct charge of assignments.

As Dean Ackerman described the proposed program for next year, it will run something like this, for a first-year student: Reporting at 9 a.m. in the news room, he will spend the first hour in a discussion of current news and its treatment, directed by Prof. Cooper, Prof. Allen Sinclair Will, or an active editor or writer from one of the newspapers in the metropolitan area. The second hour will find the student in a class in libel, or typography, or perhaps international relations or constitutional law. Returning to the news room, he may be assigned to write on the subject he has just heard discussed, on the theory that a newspaperman must “form the habit of interpreting what he hears in terms of the present.” Other hours may be given to other classes, or to assignments to cover current news stories, or to talks by newspaper or magazine men two or three times a week. Each of the faculty members will be available at certain hours for individual consultation.

In the second year the work will be carried on similarly under the direction of Prof. Pitkin.

“The first year,” in the words of Dean Ackerman, “will be one of strict control and discipline, on the theory that the student must be able to adjust his individuality to organized effort. In the second year, if he has demonstrated ability, he will be given an opportunity for individual development. Instead of a news story, for instance, he might be assigned to write a political column, if he has shown understanding of that subject.”

The two-year course, divided into four quarters, is described as follows in Dean Ackerman's report to President Butler:

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