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The School Of Communication
At Silliman University

By

Celia E Acedo
The creation of the School of Communication at Silliman University in Dumaguete City, central Philippines, was proposed in 1964 by the late Leon O. Ty, a leading Filipino journalist at that time and member of the Silliman Board of Trustees. At that time, communism was considered the biggest threat to the Philippines and Asia. Trustee Ty thought that the anti-Communist battle must be waged in the minds of men by journalists trained in the democratic tradition. The Board of Trustees responded favorably, and a year later an American Fulbright professor from the Texas Christian University by the name of Dr. D. Wayne Rowland, came to Silliman as a visiting professor in journalism.

When the curriculum was drawn up in 1966-67, its architect, Dr. Rowland, emphasised the School's role as a potential catalyst for the development of the community press in the Philippines. According to its 1966-67 catalogue, the School of Communication, as the only school of journalism located outside the metropolitan Manila area, was in a good position to carry out its "distinctive and primary role," that of a community newspaper center in a provincial and Asian setting, giving special attention to increasing and improving newspapers in the provinces and rural communities.

The School opened in July 1966, with three faculty members and ten students enrolled either for the four-year Bachelor of Journalism degree program or for the A.B. major in journalism and creative writing. The following school year, a new director was found—Dr. Crispin C. Maslog, who held a Bachelor of Literature and Bachelor of Philosophy degrees from the University of Sto. Tomás (Manila), and an M.A. (1962) and Ph.D. (1967) degrees in journalism and mass communication from the University of Minnesota, USA.
The School of Communication, established in 1966 as the School of Journalism and Communications, was for some time the only school/department of communication outside the metropolitan Manila area offering a degree program in mass communication and journalism:

The objectives of the School are:

1. To train mass communicators who are liberally educated, socially responsible, professionally competent, ethical and steeped in Christian values.

   The organisers of the School thought that the Philippines needed not only technically proficient but also truly professional and ethical mass communicators dedicated to public welfare and total human development.

2. To train mass communicators who will work in the rural areas and contribute to the development of rural Philippines where 70 per cent of Filipinos live.

   In 1977, the curriculum was expanded to include more areas of specialisation in addition to community journalism. These are: community broadcasting, communication arts, advertising and public relations and religious communication.

   The minimum requirements for the mass communication degree are 51 units in the humanities, 27 units in social sciences, 6 units in economics, 16 units in natural sciences, 6 units in mathematics, 42 units in communication, 4 units in physical education and 4 units of military training, or a total of 152 units for women and 156 for men.

   In addition to offering a basic four-year course leading to a bachelor's degree in mass communication, the School also conducts seminars and workshops for mass media professionals, campus journalists and public information officers. It has also been engaged in mass communication research, especially in the field of community journalism.

   The School has continuing relationships with a number of international organisations which have extended it some support in various ways. They are the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Center, Unesco, East-West Center Communication Institute, Communication Foundation of Asia, Press Foundation of Asia, The Asia Foundation and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

   During the first two years after the curriculum was expanded in 1977, our enrolment increased by 107 per cent (from 66 to 137). Today our enrolment has somewhat stabilised at 120 to 150. Our faculty is composed of three full-time and three part-time instructors with an average of 10 years in media and teaching experience. Three of our instructors have masters degree, one is
working on her masteral thesis and the other is a practicing lawyer and community editor. We lost the lone Ph.D. on our staff when Dr. Crispin Maslog resigned this year.

Since 1967, we have graduated some 236 students, 72 per cent of whom is in media, in teaching or pursuing further studies. Of this number, 63 per cent is either in media or teaching, 26 per cent is working in unrelated fields and 12 per cent in studying. Of those who are in media and in teaching, 27 per cent is employed in Manila, 70 per cent in the provinces and 3 per cent abroad.

It has been 18 years since the founding of our School and we see today in the Philippines a considerable quantitative growth in media as well as in communication education. In 1972, Maslog reported that there were 12 schools offering mass communication programs; today there are some 34 such schools in the Philippines, almost thrice the 1972 figure.

This growth seems to be directly proportional to the growth of media in the Philippines, which, according to a 1983 study now consists of some 303 radio stations (more than double the 1972 figure), 320 publications (the circulation of 12 dailies in Manila alone doubling the 1972 figure to 1,290,421), and 36 television stations (including four giant networks).

This is not to mention the proliferation of jobs for information and public relations officers in government and private agencies as well as related fields like research.

Furthermore, in the region and indeed globally, we are today witnessing the amplification of concepts in mass communication which had only started to be articulated among the intellectual elite at the time when we started our program. At the same time, the unpredictable twists and turns of events in our constantly changing societies defy any reference to any earlier model. Has the press responded adequately to the challenge of its information function in our unique environments? It seems that today, more than ever before, the behaviour of the press itself in the context of that challenge has become very much at issue.

So perhaps more important than keeping pace with the growth of media, mass communication schools should ask themselves the same question. I'm sure all of us do. But anxious as we are to re-examine and re-assess ourselves, we cannot do it apart from the media.

For instance, while we have made expedient provisions in our curriculum for the study of such issues as the arrival of new communication technologies and its impact on our developing societies, the call for a New World Information Order, more access and participation in communication--to mention just a
few—we feel the need to be brought closer to the stream of intellectual exchange regarding these matters in order to bring more validity in our teaching.

And for us to contribute meaningfully to this exchange calls for the constant upgrading of our faculty, access to research and other publications, the periodic review of our curriculum and improvement of our facilities. Underlying all these is the need for constant dialogue with media. For how can the schools operate realistically in isolation from the industry that they purport to service?

In reviewing the curriculum and in taking stock of our resources, the obvious questions to ask then are: How well do the schools serve the needs of media? How easily do their graduates fit in when they join the media? Or to ask a more ambitious question: Do their graduates contribute to the upgrading of the press?

These questions can be answered better by media managers than communication educators. And media's answers are the kind of feedback that we in the academe cannot pretend to do without.

At present, the Philippine Association of Communication Educators is undertaking a comprehensive survey of mass communication schools and the media industry in the Philippines precisely to arrive at the answers to these questions. The study looks into the curricula, facilities, the faculty of these schools, the graduates' perception of the quality of their university training in relation to the demands of their jobs, and the media managers' perception of the quality of mass communication graduates they hire. Hopefully, the results of this survey, which should be finished by December, will help schools evaluate their programs and will suggest basic requirements for accreditation.

But even before we get the results of this survey, certain major problems present themselves very clearly to us.

The problem of faculty development, for instance. In our experience at the School of Communication, the past two years have demonstrated what could happen if a provincial journalism school continues to be isolated from what I earlier called as the intellectual exchange among communication scholars and media practitioners.

In 1982 our director and the only link to the larger network of mass communication scholarship left on a sabbatical and for some personal reason decided not to return. This happened at a time when our faculty development program had just taken off the ground; and so although today our needs are adequately met by the faculty, we are faced with a very unstable staffing situation in the next two years. This is perhaps an
internal problem which my university should worry about. But I suspect many schools like Silliman are having the same personnel problem.

We suggest, therefore, that while we decide on basic requirements for accreditation, we must plan for some means for continuing faculty development especially for schools outside the national capitals. Faculty development should not only mean degree training programs but also short-term courses for senior as well as junior faculty members.

Another possible measure is the modification or strengthening of a tradition we have at Silliman regarding visiting professors and lecturers. A modest grant from our donors has so far brought one American visiting professor to our school. A German professor from Heidelberg is coming next month. And we have had several practicing newsmen and communication scholars who lectured in our classes and met with our students for a few days. We highly value the contributions of these experts to enriching our courses. It would even be more enriching if we could get more visiting professors and lecturers especially from the ASEAN.

Another problem is the lack of locally produced textbooks, instructional materials and trade journals. We do get funds to buy books (like a recent gift we got from AMIC), we have no choice but to get foreign, especially American books. The same is true with communication journals. Admittedly, many of them are quite interesting reading, but the fact that they are culture-specific would make it shameful for us to refer to them so often in our teaching.

A recent appreciable response to this oft-articulated need is the publication of a book called The Asian Reporter by the Press Foundation of Asia and Unesco. The book's fresh approach to the teaching of news reporting, its perceptive treatment of themes closer to home, its emphasis on the substance rather than the form are a welcome addition to what could only be technical guidance from our foreign textbook. AMIC's Media Asia is another welcome development.

Our School's own modest response is a manuscript for a textbook in reporting, editing and feature writing, which is now at the editing stage. However, the authors of this textbook are more academicians than newsmen. Obviously, we would welcome more books on the press by people in the press.

To complement the limited practical experience we provide in school (we have a student weekly, a printing press, a radio production room and a darkroom), we have instituted since 1967 an internship program, consisting of 170 hours of practicum in media establishments. Judging from our students' experience, we now feel the need to have a more permanent and systematic network for
internship. Schools and the media should decide to adopt a more systematic program, for without this, the success of the internship can only depend on the benevolence of the media supervisor. And it would be too much to ask of the media supervisor to plan the program by himself, pay attention to his interns and do his full-time job at the same time.

If editors and school heads could sit down together to design a systematic program, we would minimise the waste of time, money, and effort both on the part of the students and on the part of their media supervisors. This again calls for a more positive response from the media, which bears the burden of the internship.

When all is said and done, mass communication schools will still be left with the fundamental problem of the deterioration of students' command of the English language. In the Philippines, where the language of media is predominantly English, this is a serious problem that bogs down much of our effort.

When we carried the name School of Journalism and Communications before 1977, the emphasis seemed to be on the journalism and the problem of language was with the minority of our students. When we changed the name to School of Communication, with emphasis on mass communication, we attracted a lot of young people who apparently were more interested in what Francisco Roque calls in his 1974 study as "the magic of projection" and "less demanding course requirements" than a respect for the English language and the opportunity to refine skills in writing and communication.

As best we could, we try to correct this misconception among our students at the same time that we incorporate basic language teaching in addition to journalism. But how can we minimise the attraction of young people with the "show biz" mentality? How can we revive the interest in journalism and communication of the best and most serious minds? How can we improve our system of admission to accurately predict a student applicant's suitability for mass media? How can we foster respect for the validity of this most maligned and embattled profession?

I suppose the point of this gathering is to attempt to answer some of these questions. Indeed, I am very much privileged just to be with this group of men and women who are in the best position to know some of the answers.