

## **Assessment of proposed M.A. in Sports Journalism**

The proposed Master of Arts in Sports Journalism at IUPUI comes at an opportune time. As newspapers, and the print business model they represent, face difficult challenges; as the internet and its open-to-everyone platforms continue to grow and spread, the need for training programs has never been greater.

Typically, newspapers have been the best place to develop reporting skills based on solid standards of journalism, and to best embrace the ethics of the craft. And, most often, this was the traditional path for aspiring journalists.

But as the internet has increasingly become the place where many get their news and information, on-line journalism job opportunities are often more prevalent than those in more traditional print.

And while many informational web sites, particularly those affiliated with newspapers, demand high standards, many more do not. Unfiltered information, information that is not developed through the practice of real journalism, is available in great volume. Often, no attempt is made to determine whether the information is credible, reliable, or based on legitimate sourcing.

As newspapers shrink, or, in many cases, go out of business entirely, a program like that proposed for IUPUI may be the last, best hope to develop strong reporters, editors, and producers, with solid grounding in journalistic principles, who leave the program properly prepared to keep the practice of journalism alive.

The program proposed here seems both thorough and creative. It certainly addresses the fact that the emergence of digital platforms, and the growth of social media networks dictates that those entities must be included in any comprehensive training program. The technology, even the cultural underpinnings, may differ from what journalists have typically been accustomed, but that doesn't mean the standards, the ethics, the basic reporting skills, are different. The best way to assure that journalism continues to thrive, regardless of the platform, is for credible institutions of education to train the reporters, editors, and producers who will ultimately people those platforms.

The program seems to offer a range of practical training, and as noted, Indianapolis is an ideal location for real-life opportunities, given the number of sports-based associations, foundations, and organizations located there. The best way to learn journalism has always been to practice it, and Indianapolis is an ideal place to do that.

The notion of requiring a core course of study that includes sports law, the business of sports, public affairs, and media reporting, is integral to developing well-rounded sports journalists. One or more of these areas touches coverage of every sport and beat. Without basic knowledge in these areas, a journalist will not be able to compete in the workplace.

Further, this wide range of course study will make the IUPUI program competitive with other notable graduate programs around the country – Columbia, Northwestern, Missouri – which typically attract working journalists who wish to enhance their skills, and broaden the market for those skills. Those programs, of course, are not sports-specific. A masters program offering both sports-specific training, along with broader subject matter designed to develop well-rounded journalists, might have a competitive edge.

In summation, the program described here, the faculty recruited to date, the outreach that has been done to news organizations and prominent individuals around the country, all point to a course of study that could be vital to growing and maintaining strong journalism in the coverage of sports, at a time when it is most needed.

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