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## Journalism, now more than ever

### PATRICIA GALLAGHER NEWBERRY

**O**f late, my T-shirt drawer bulges with pro-press slogans: Democracy Dies in Darkness, #Not the Enemy, I Back the First Amendment, America Needs Journalists and Journalism Matters Now More Than Ever.

I'm thinking I'll need a post-COVID-19 addition that reads: Yes, You Should Major in Journalism.

As a longtime journalism educator, that's been my standard answer to any student who has ever asked.

Are you curious? Do you like people? Can you write? Do you want to tell true stories? Then, yes, of course, please consider journalism.

I know that's a far harder sell than it used to be.

Like you, I've tracked the horrifying cuts at news organizations during the pandemic. Thousands of journalists furloughed, laid off, fired. News orgs disappearing or downsizing. Advertisers jumping ship. Pain, coast to coast, even as journalists cover the hell out of the most important story of most of their careers.

Like you, I know this is yet another body blow to the industry. In the 1990s, the internet ate up more journalism jobs than it created. And then 9/11, the other momentous story of many careers, caused a reset in many newsrooms. The 2008 recession accelerated contractions already in the cards. And now, so many jobs lost so quickly to COVID-19.

But history tells us journalism will survive. Newspapers feared for their existence when radio came on strong in the 1920s. Radio feared the same with TV's 1940s arrival. All of journalism fretted (and fret still) that the internet would be the end of them all.

And still they stand. Battered and somewhat bloodied—but ever-changing, ever-adapting, producing news in print, on air, online; figuring out how to keep the lights on another day as they continue to serve their audiences.

So here's why today's 18- to 22-year-olds should most definitely consider journalism.

The industry needs them to believe the slogans — “journalism *does* matter now more than ever.”

**We need their skills.** True digital natives, they are fearless. Interviews via Zoom or Facetime? No problem. Web updates, with promotion on Facebook and Twitter and Instagram? With speed and ease! Need a video clip, a sound bite, a pie chart, a digital slide show with that text? No worries. They can do it all.

**We need their solutions.** When COVID-19 is a memory, newsrooms will be different. News-gathering will be different. Maybe more journalists will work from their basements. Maybe more newsrooms will count on freelancers. Maybe newspapers and magazines will stop printing as much or as often. Maybe clarity will emerge on how to fund journalism. (OK, maybe that's asking for too much.) Today's journalism students and those who follow have never lived in a world dominated by newspaper consumption and appointment viewing, and so are not tied to yesterday's models on how to produce or pay for journalism. With entrepreneurship baked into their DNA, this generation will find the way forward for the news business.

**We need their passion.** If you need any evidence that students are jazzed about journalism, take a look at their pandemic coverage. I judged the first round of entries in SPJ's Collegiate Coronavirus Coverage contest (first in the country!) and was moved to tears over the breadth, depth and quality of students' work. (Search CCC at spj.org to see for yourself. I'm thrilled that some of my students won in Round 3, which, for the record, I had nothing to do with.)

**We need them.** In the most literal of ways, we need them to fill the jobs that will open when the dust settles. We need their fresh eyes and boundless enthusiasm. We need them to carry on the best traditions of journalism — reporting deeply, writing elegantly, producing artfully — as they bring cutting-edge skills and innovative thinking to the profession.

**We need them, too, to believe in journalism.** To beat the drum for journalism. To say to their moms and dads and peers and any other potential nay-sayers, “Yes, I want to be a journalist! I need to be a journalist! Because ‘Democracy Dies in Darkness.’ ‘Because America Needs Journalists.’ ‘Because Journalism Matters Now More Than Ever.’”

If they need T-shirts to help seal the deal, I'd be happy to lend mine out. 

### We're in This Together

As part of SPJ's comprehensive “We're in This Together” reaction to COVID-19, we're encouraging members to help members. If you can, I'd be honored if you'd recruit and cover first-year SPJ membership for a student or professional. Visit [spj.org/together.asp](https://spj.org/together.asp) for details. — P.G.N.