

TODAY'S NEWS:

IT'S A COMPLICATED STORY

Tri-C's Journalism and Mass Communications Program Adapts to Challenging Times

When Sara Liptak landed a news internship at WKYC in fall 2016, one of the first things she did was buy an iPhone. It was not a gift to herself. Liptak knew that, these days, the iPhone is a critical tool of the trade, one that defines journalism in the digital age.

"[Social media] is at the forefront of our jobs," she said.

The days when a reporter's primary responsibility was writing news copy for a newspaper are long gone. Because of the smartphone and, more broadly, the internet, people expect their news to be immediate, constant, easily digestible and — hey, if you don't mind — include video or photos.

The Journalism and Mass Communications program at Cuyahoga Community College is adapting to this new and challenging landscape, keeping journalistic ethics as part of the core curriculum while adding a social media and blogging course to its program sequence. In addition, the program includes a public relations course and a "hyperlocal" focus for students interested in working as correspondents.

"Journalism is still necessary," said John Kerezy, associate professor of Journalism and Mass Communications at Tri-C. "What has changed is the attention span of the viewer and pressure on the journalist to produce something quickly."

Kerezy said the College's journalism program provided pipelines to internships, and transfer partnerships are in place with more than 35 four-year institutions. Many students go on to earn bachelor's



Sara Liptak



Professor John Kerezy said there will always be a need for good journalism.

degrees and find work in public relations, social media, marketing and, like Liptak, television.

"The media does not just throw garbage out there," Liptak, 25, said. "The goal is to be ethical, to be unbiased and then to be respected. A lot of people think the media is out to get you. Some people may be. The majority of people working in news just want to get the facts out there and get the story told."

Liptak earned her associate degree in Journalism and Mass Communications at Tri-C in 2013 and finished her bachelor's at Cleveland State University. Today, she works as a discovery desk assignment editor for WKYC.

The job title might sound unfamiliar, but to hear Liptak tell it, her work sounds a lot like the journalism of old; she describes a newsroom where reporters monitor police and fire scanners. But, "you also have to be a social media watchdog," she said. Social

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media allows her to keep tabs on other news outlets and often can be a source of news itself. The internet also is the platform that matters for breaking news. At the same time, news outlets are struggling to create online revenue streams that replicate what they once enjoyed through traditional advertising. Without that money, paying for the staff necessary to research and report substantive news is difficult.

"For young people, paying for news is a foreign concept," Kerezy said, but he

and others in the field believe figuring out how to make the media work in this environment is not just worth it, but obligatory. An informed public is critical to a functioning democracy.

"People are better informed about trivial matters and less informed about significant matters . . . We (citizens) are not as focused, and we are not as deeply engaged in affairs as we should be," he said.

Liptak agreed. "Now is a very crucial time to learn the facts."