

Letter from the Dean

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Dear Alumni,

We are well into the fall term and it's time to take stock of our progress in implementing our Medill 2020 vision.

When the faculty voted for this new strategic plan, they said what we now call 2020 was "a vision for a 21st Century Medill." In non-strategic-planning-speak that means we are building on the school's formidable strengths. At the same time, to meet the future, we're reinventing everything from the content of the curriculum to where we hold classes.

We've promised our students and their prospective employers that they will be better prepared to meet the changes sweeping society, journalism and marketing than any graduates anywhere. We are about six months ahead of an ambitious schedule to keep that promise.

We began by becoming a true learning organization. Last spring, all of the faculty and staff went back to school for 15-20 hours a week of intensive reading and our own classes with outside, leading professionals and academics. This fall we set up 12 cross-school teams to tackle critical areas of the curriculum that relate to journalism and integrated marketing communications. Those teams will report their recommendations by the end of December.

But we're not waiting for the December plan. Some important changes are already underway. This summer, faculty made major improvements to the core graduate and undergraduate journalism courses; many of those improvements are now being implemented.

Medill has always been a standout in reporting, writing and editing. In the digital age, amid a sea of choice, those skills must become deeper and broader. So, beginning in January, we are *doubling* the time freshmen spend on those critical skills from 10 weeks to 20 weeks, and lengthening the class time while we're at it. That's a lot more learning to do: clarity and precision, grammar till they're sick of it, news judgment, how to find meaningful stories, how to produce stories using words, audio (radio, streaming audio and podcasting), still pictures and video. By the time they graduate, students will be stronger at expressing them-

selves, at reporting and finding meaningful stories, as well as skilled at telling stories across all of the digital platforms.

We also have begun to ground undergraduates and graduate students more firmly in the audiences they will be reporting about and for. As one student told me, "My stuff is going to be a lot better used now that I know the people I am writing about, what they know and don't know, and what I can do to inform them in ways no other reporter is doing."

What prompted the student to make that comment? It's what we are teaching. Medill leased some gritty storefronts in the diverse, urban Chicago neighborhoods of Rogers Park and Uptown. Using them as a home base, the students are fanning out to discover stories — we're not just covering meetings and speeches, we're discovering the news and issues that

affect real people and are important to them.

Students are seeing homelessness, drug trafficking, and the impact of government actions and inactions with their own eyes, then turning around and telling those stories with the use of the appropriate media options: text and audio video.

Next quarter we will dive into the IMC curriculum with a similar rigor. This will include looking at how to build on its current graduate programs, and how to grow audience understanding and how to engage audiences in our undergraduate classes.

IMC is one of the great marketing programs in the country. It is action based and offers people interested in sophisticated marketing both traditional and digital opportunities that are not available elsewhere. The IMC faculty is talking about deepening the program in the areas of engaging writing, messages and content. They are also looking at what IMC should be to meet needs from now to 2020. I will have a report on those efforts. Stay tuned through the Medill Web site at www.medill.northwestern.edu.

Finally, please tell us what you think. We all welcome your comments and suggestions.

Sincerely,
John



Dean John Lavine