Hiring Priorities and Skill Expectations of Magazine Editors When Considering Candidacy of Journalism School Graduates

This study examines how legacy media hiring editors evaluate recent journalism school graduates amid production and technological changes, with particular attention to expectations shaped by generative AI. When considering the history of journalism education as both professional preparation and civic training, this study builds on prior research documenting disconnects between newsroom hiring priorities and academic curricula development. Drawing on Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, a survey of judges affiliated with the 2025 National Magazine Awards assessed the importance of 16 skills in current entry-level hiring as well as anticipated needs over the next five years. Results show that interpersonal and collaborative competencies—specifically teamwork and communication—are considered most valued across both timeframes, which deviates from past research. Formal credentials and narrowly defined production skills ranked lowest, while digital, data, social media, and AI-related competencies showed significant projected growth. Overall, results suggest editors favor adaptability, engagement, and professional judgment over credentials alone in practice.

Keywords: *journalism education, magazine journalism, legacy media, hiring practices, generative AI, student involvement, media skills*

Journalism education, since the founding of the Missouri School of Journalism in 1908, has historically been viewed as an essential equalizer in objective writing and reporting as well as a blueprint of how to preserve and promote freedom of speech and of the press in democratic societies (Smith, 1990). Situated at the intersection of professional practice, civic responsibility, and higher education, the purpose of university journalism programs is to train practitioners to articulate—and at times contest—disputed information with an attempt to derive fact-based communication (Minow, 2018). Although the methods employed have pivoted—from the trailblazing Missouri Method of the early 1900s to the establishment of a silo-toppling multimedia journalism major at the University of Kansas in the early 2000s—journalism schools have functioned as both mirrors of the profession and engines of reform (Anderson, 2007). Understanding the historic role of journalism education draws attention to the normative ideals, pedagogical debates, and civic aspirations that have shaped how journalists are taught and how their work is received by a news consuming public.

According to Barnhurst and Nerone (2003), early journalism education in the United States and Canada arose in response to rapid industrialization and the expansion of mass-circulation newspapers. As news organizations grew and flexed their influence, concerns mounted about sensationalism, specifically as it pertains to politically uneven reporting. Reformers argued that journalism, like

law or medicine, required formal education grounded in ethics, history, and social science (Zelizer, 2004). The founding of the Missouri School of Journalism in 1908, followed by programs at Columbia University in 1912, Northwestern University in 1921 and the University of Iowa in 1924, reflected an effort to professionalize journalism by embedding it within the university (Pulitzer, 1912; Pitluk, 2021b). These early schools framed journalism both as a blue-collar-esque trade that involved dogged gumshoe reporting as well as public service essential to democratic life (Pitluk, 2021b).

The mid-20th century marked a period of consolidation and self-confidence for journalism education. Accrediting bodies, such as the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), formalized standards that emphasized ethics, law, and diversity alongside reporting skills were the primary aims. During this period, journalism schools helped institutionalize ideals such as objectivity, verification, and independence, which came to define a mainstream journalist's professional identity (Tsfati et al, 2020). While these ideals were often contested—particularly by critics who pointed to their cultural and political assumptions—they nonetheless provided a shared framework that journalism educators transmitted across generations.

However, times change, and while legacy media editors recognize the value of 21st century journalism education in a digital and machine-learning age, the expectations and priorities of what skills they want from recent journalism school graduates are pivoting for the first time in over 100 years of journalism education. This exploratory study of legacy media hiring editors in the AI age—is the beginning of empirical studies to track this pivot.

Literature Review

The evolution of journalism education from its trade-school infancy to one of civic duty and independent truth-seeking was deeply influenced by Progressive-Era thought. The concept was ballyhooed by John Dewey in the 1920s, which espoused that teaching technical skills such as reporting/writing and editing were essential, but so was cultivating informed judgment and social responsibility (Hernon & Metoyer-Duran, 1992). Courses in political science, economics, and sociology became central to curricula, reflecting the belief that journalists must understand the structures they report on. As Carey (1989) later argued, journalism education has always carried an implicit theory of democracy, whether acknowledged or not.

At the same time, journalism schools have consistently wrestled with tensions between theory and practice. Critics from within the profession have often accused universities of being too abstract or disconnected from newsroom realities, while academics have cautioned against reducing journalism education to vocational training (Pitluk, 2021a). This tension has proven productive as well as persistent. The laboratory newspaper, the campus radio station, and later the digital newsroom all emerged as pedagogical compromises—spaces where students could practice journalism while reflecting on its purposes and

consequences. In this sense, journalism education has historically functioned as a site of experimentation, testing new forms of storytelling married with technology and professional norms before they become widespread in industry.

Since the mainstreaming of the world wide web in 1999 and the advent of social media in the 2010s, the historic role of journalism education has been challenged by what history has shown are fundamental changes in media economics and technology. The decline of legacy news organizations, the pivot to online outshining print news, the rise of social media, and most recently, the creation of generative AI raised questions about what journalism schools should teach and whom they should serve (Pitluk, Wilson, & Inman, 2025). Yet these disruptions have also renewed the relevance of journalism education's civic mission. Far from becoming obsolete, journalism education has reasserted its role as a stabilizing force—one that anchors rapidly changing practices to enduring democratic values. The question becomes whether journalism schools are teaching the skills that legacy media hiring editors need, as past research concluded that there is a disconnect between newspaper industry hiring editors and journalism academic administrators vis-a-vis necessary skillsets (Pitluk, 2019).

More than a decade ago, Wenger (2012) published a content analysis—at the time the only study of its kind—examining employment opportunities posted by the top 10 American newspaper and broadcast journalism companies between 2008 and 2009. The study coded more than 1,400 job postings to identify the most desirable skills and attributes sought in journalism candidates. Findings revealed a notable shift over time, particularly an increased emphasis on web, multimedia, and social media competencies. However, skills associated with broader professional competencies, such as leadership or critical decision-making, played little role in hiring practices during this period (Wenger, 2012; Wenger & Owens, 2012; Wenger et al., 2018). Instead, the vast majority of skills emphasized in job postings were technical or practical in nature. Based on these findings, Wenger and Owens (2012) concluded that "educators would do well to get ahead of the industry need by preparing students who are ready to step into leadership roles in the area of social media and mobile delivery" (p. 23).

As a follow-up, Wenger and colleagues (2018) conducted a subsequent study aimed at isolating the specific skills and attributes required of journalists seeking employment in contemporary newsrooms. The authors sought to examine both the enduring traditional competencies emphasized by accredited journalism programs and the emerging areas of expertise necessary for professional success. Using content analysis, the researchers examined job postings from the top 10 broadcast and top 10 newspaper companies in the United States, as identified by a 2015 *Pew Research Center* report ranking media organizations by revenue. Across more than 1,800 postings, the most frequently advertised positions—categorized by job title—were reporter (n = 330), producer (n = 134), web writer (n = 88), photographer (n = 72), internships or unpaid positions (n = 71), web producer (n = 68), anchor (n = 66), editor (n = 61), executive producer (n = 43), and assignment editor (n = 40) (Wenger et al., 2018).

Three years later, Pitluk (2021a, 2021b) did two qualitative studies also on the intersection of journalism hiring practices and pedagogy of journalism education. He interviewed 14 newspaper editors to determine their hiring needs from recent journalism school graduates, and he interviewed 16 journalism school administrators to determine the skills pecking order that administrators expected of recent graduates. All 14 newspaper editors emphatically agreed that strong writing and reporting skills are by far the most important qualities in newly hired journalism school graduates; all other skills were divided, with none earning a majority (Pitluk, 2021b). On the academic side, however, the various journalism school administrators listed a range of different skills as most important in the pursuit of a journalism degree. Those skills that tracked at the top were ones that used the following terms: ethics/values/communications law 100 percent; news skills/writing/reporting 100 percent; curiosity/analysis/synthesis/ critical thinking 81 percent; technology/social media/ coding/multimedia 75 percent (Pitluk, 2021a). Another striking finding emerged in efforts to triangulate best practices for teaching the skills editors value: 100 percent of newspaper hiring editors said no academic administrator had ever contacted them to help inform curriculum in ways that would benefit newsrooms (Pitluk, 2021b). Conversely, 100 percent of academic administrators reported that no newspaper hiring editors had ever reached out to discuss the curriculum being taught. (Pitluk, 2021a). As such, Pitluk exposed a communication disconnect between industry and the academy, with writing and reporting skills being the only ones both sides agreed as most necessary for recent journalism school graduates.

Therefore, the presumption among journalism practitioners in the magazine and legacy media journalism industry, which has similar hiring tendencies to the newspaper industry, is that a solid journalism education will prepare students with writing and reporting skills for the journalism workforce across disciplines. That was the only measurable expectation among the two. However, because the fast-paced industry has evolved in the past five years—and ceding that academia typically changes at a slower pace than the business community—the question arises whether the writing and reporting skillsets traditionally associated with a journalism education are still the most desirable skillsets of a recent journalism school graduate in the magazine journalism industry in 2026 and for the next five years.

The definition of magazine for this research is the one used by the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME). ASME defines a magazine as a print or digital publication issued or updated regularly in a consistent format, shaped by a distinctive editorial perspective and trusted by readers to provide timely information relevant to their interests (American Society of Magazine Editors Guidelines, 2015). Magazines are usually characterized by the use of print or digital technologies to create a visually rich, immersive experience (2015). Magazine storytelling in print and online, including podcasts and videos, is characterized by extensive reporting, informed analysis, stylish writing, a distinctive point of view and the use of graphics to enrich the experience of the reader (2015).

Because this research crosses into the social science realm of psychology, the researchers used a theory from the discipline of education psychology. The theoretical lens through which this study is viewed is Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (Astin, 1984). Astin asserted that "a particular curriculum, to achieve the effects intended, must elicit sufficient student effort and investment of energy to bring about the desired learning and development" (p. 522). Central to this theory is the idea that student learning and development are not guaranteed simply through exposure to coursework or curricular offerings. Rather, meaningful educational outcomes depend on the extent to which students actively engage—both physically and psychologically—with their academic environment.

Astin (1984) defined student involvement as the amount of energy a student devotes to academic experiences and the broader higher education setting. Highly involved students are characterized by substantial investment in studying, significant time spent on campus, consistent participation in student organizations, and frequent interaction with faculty members and peers. In contrast, uninvolved students tend to minimize time spent on campus, disengage from extracurricular activities, devote limited energy to academic work, and have infrequent contact with faculty and fellow students (Astin, 1984). The theory therefore emphasizes behavior and engagement rather than institutional inputs alone as determinants of educational effectiveness.

Within this framework, students who actively seek out internships, externships, or other experiential learning opportunities exemplify Astin's concept of involvement. These activities require students to extend their learning beyond the classroom and to invest additional time and effort in professional and academic development. As such, the intangible qualities a college experience has to offer—especially teamwork and communication—transform a recent college graduate into an attractive new hire. Recent research by Melin (2025) affirms this theory, as the research indicates that critical learning in higher education—especially in media and communication studies—must be embodied, performative, and experiential, not only cognitive or text-based.

Accordingly, this study seeks to examine whether non-traditional journalism pedagogy and life lessons learned on campus (and not heretofore researched from the perspective of a magazine hiring editor) are measurable traits that magazine hiring editors are looking for. Various forms of student involvement occur outside the formal curriculum in order to better understand which non-academic criteria magazine hiring editors value when evaluating candidates for entry-level positions. By focusing on perspectives not fully captured through prior research, this study illuminates how experiential engagement and campus socialization complements traditional academic measures in shaping employability outcomes, which magazine hirings editors expressed that they want.

Research Questions

Taken together, the history of journalism education reveals a field defined less by static curricula than by ongoing negotiation over journalism's social purpose. However, are journalism schools preparing students with the tools needed by magazine hiring editors? Whereas past research examined the intersection between the needs of the newspaper industry and the pedagogical instruction of journalism schools, the purpose of this research is to determine which tools magazine hiring editors believe recent journalism school graduates need to be equipped with in order to succeed in the tindustry. Additionally, as generative AI is still in its infancy—irrespective of the profound impact and effect it is already having in the fields of communications, mass communications, and journalism—do magazine hiring editors foresee the desired skillset of recent journalism school graduates changing in the next five years. This study examined three research questions:

RQ1: When hiring entry-level candidates, how important are different skills to magazine editors (and do perceived importance levels differ across skills)?

RQ2. When hiring entry-level candidates in the next five years, how important do magazine editors expect different skills to be (and do perceived importance levels differ across skills)?

RQ3. Are there significant differences between editors' current skill importance ratings and their expectations for the next five years?

Methods

Participant Recruitment and Survey Procedures

Study population: The target population comprised professional judges for the 2025 National Magazine Awards, an event hosted by the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME) in partnership with the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. A comprehensive list of 226 judges was initially identified.

Sampling rationale: This specific group was selected for two primary reasons. First, their professional standing as editorial leaders, publishers, and directors across legacy and digital media platforms ensures high expertise and credibility in responding to inquiries regarding entry-level hiring trends. Second, utilizing this pre-vetted list was significantly more efficient and accurate than manual individual searches, which ensured that the researchers could reach the most appropriate industry experts simultaneously. After excluding one judge who was a member of the research team, a final contact list of 225 individuals was established.

Data collection procedures: The research team employed two data collection strategies to maximize response rates. First, in-person recruitment was

employed. During the ASME award events held at Columbia University, a research team member distributed QR codes to attending judges. These codes were presented via various formats, including business cards and informational displays at registration tables. From this strategy, 6 responses were obtained (n = 6, 10.71%). Second, three rounds of mass emails were sent to the identified judges by April 23, 2025. Out of the 225 initial addresses, 184 were confirmed as valid, excluding one research team member and 41 bounced emails. The number of respondents collected via email solicitation was (n = 50, 89.29%). Through these combined methods, a total of 56 judges (N = 56) completed the survey, and their responses were utilized for the final data analysis. This resulted in a final survey response rate of 30.43%.

Survey Questionnaires

Core Skills and Competencies: The survey assessed 16 distinct sets of skills and competencies identified as critical for entry-level media professionals (Wenger et al, 2018; Pitluk, 2021a). These skills included: writing, reporting, editing, visual reporting/storytelling, video production (e.g., on-camera experience), audio-visual production (e.g., podcast or narrative media production), social media proficiency, creative/design-oriented skills (e.g., Adobe, Canva, WoodWing), data-driven/ analytical skills (e.g., Google Analytics, Python), AI-based programs and tools, ability to work independently, verbal communication, teamwork, previous journalism experience (e.g., student newspapers, internships), theoretical knowledge of journalism principles, and possession of a journalism degree. Each skill was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "*Not at all important*" to "*Extremely important.*" To capture both current and future perspectives, the same set of competencies was presented under two different questions. Respondents were first asked, "When hiring entry-level candidates recently, how important was each of the following skills to you?" This was followed by a forward-looking question: "To what extent do you expect entry-level candidates to possess the skills below to be successful within the next 5 years?"

Demographic and Professional Background: The survey collected data on respondents' professional backgrounds. This included years of experience in the field (M = 23.32, SD = 8.69), current employer information, and specific experience related to hiring entry-level employees during the previous year, 2024 (Yes: n = 31, 55.36%; No = 24, 42.86%; Can't remember: n = 1, 1.78%).

Data Analysis

A total of 56 responses were utilized for the final data analysis. Two partially completed responses were retained and included in the final analysis stage. Descriptive statistics, including means (M) and standard deviations (SD), were calculated for each core skill to explore overall importance patterns. To address RQ1 and RQ2, Repeated-measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to test statistical differences in perceived importance across the 16

core competencies. For RQ3, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the 16 skill sets based on their perceived importance in current hiring contexts versus their expected importance over the next five years.

Results

RQ1. When hiring entry-level candidates recently, how important are different skills to magazine editors (and do perceived importance levels differ across skills)?

Award-winning magazine editors rated the importance of 16 skills when hiring recent graduates for entry-level positions in their recent hiring decisions. Substantial variation was observed in editors' perceptions of skill importance. Interpersonal and collaborative skills received the highest ratings, whereas technical production skills and formal credentials were rated as less important. Specifically, teamwork *(M* = 4.45, *SD* = 0.74), communication (*M* = 4.41, *SD* = 0.71), ability to work independently (*M* = 4.32, *SD* = 0.74), and writing (*M* = 4.16, *SD* = 1.01) ranked highest. In contrast, journalism degree credentials (*M* = 1.61, *SD* = 0.78), AI-related skills (*M* = 1.66, *SD* = 0.82), audio-visual production (*M* = 1.79, *SD* = 1.11), and video production (*M* = 1.91, *SD* = 1.20) received the lowest importance ratings. Table 1 displays descriptive statistics associated with each of the sixteen skills.

To examine whether this importance differed significantly across these 16 skills, a one-way Repeated-measures analysis of variance (Repeated-measures ANOVA) was conducted. Because Mauchly's test indicated a violation of the sphericity assumption ($W = .001$, $\chi^2(119) = 370.86$, $p < .001$) and given the large number of within-subject levels, a multivariate approach was adopted. Pillai's Trace was used as the primary test statistic due to its robustness to violations of sphericity. The multivariate test revealed a significant difference in importance ratings across the 16 skill types (Pillai's Trace = .753, $F(15, 40) = 8.15$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .753$). These findings indicate that editors prioritize certain skill types (e.g., teamwork, communication, writing) over others (e.g., AI-related skills, journalism degree credentials) when evaluating recent graduates for entry-level positions under current hiring conditions in the magazine industry.

RQ2. When hiring entry-level candidates in the next five years, how important do magazine editors expect different skills to be (and do perceived importance levels differ across skills)?

Editors rated the expected importance of the same 16 skills for entry-level candidates' success over the next five years. Overall, clear differences were observed in editors' expectations. Interpersonal and collaborative competencies remained the most important skills, including teamwork (*M* = 4.57, *SD* = 0.69), ability to work independently (*M* = 4.56, *SD* = 0.77), communication (*M* = 4.44, *SD* = 0.69), and writing (*M* = 4.43, *SD* = 0.69). Formal credentials and

production-oriented skills continued to receive lower ratings, including journalism degree credentials (M = 1.80, SD = 0.86), and audio-visual production (M = 2.94, SD = 1.07). Several digital and platform-related skills were rated at moderate levels of importance. These included social media skills (M = 3.63, SD = 1.07), editing-related competencies (M = 3.56, SD = 0.88), data-related skills (M = 3.26, SD = 1.07), and AI-related (M = 3.07, SD = 1.15) and video production (M = 3.07, SD = 1.04) skills, suggesting that editors anticipate broader skill requirements beyond traditional editorial competencies in future entry-level roles (see Table 1).

A Repeated-measures ANOVA was also conducted to examine whether expected importance differed significantly across these 16 skills. Mauchly's test again indicated that the assumption of sphericity was violated (W = .001, $\chi^2(119)$ = 359.62, p < .001). Accordingly, a multivariate approach using Pillai's Trace was applied. The multivariate test revealed a significant difference in importance ratings across the 16 skill types (Pillai's Trace = .492, F (15, 38) = 2.45, p = .013, partial η^2 = .492). This indicated that certain skills and competencies (e.g., teamwork, ability to work independently) were considered more important than others (e.g., journalism degree credentials) for hiring entry-level employees in the next five years.

Editors' responses comparing current hiring practices with expectations for the next five years revealed both similarities and notable change in perceived skill importance. Overall, the general pattern of skill prioritization remained consistent across the two time points; interpersonal and collaborative competencies remained consistently prioritized, with teamwork, communication, independent work, and writing ranking among the most important skills in both current and future hiring contexts.

At the same time, several skill areas showed noticeable changes in perceived importance. In particular, digital and technology-related competencies showed higher mean ratings in future expectations compared to current hiring practices. AI-related and data-oriented skills increased from being among the lowest-rated skills in current hiring to moderate levels of importance in future expectations. The pattern suggested a growing emphasis on digital and emerging technologies in the industry. Social media and editing-related skills also demonstrated modest increases in perceived importance. Traditional production skills such as audio-visual and video production, as well as a journalism degree, remained among the lowest-rated skills in relative importance, although their mean importance ratings increased in future expectations. Taken together, these descriptive patterns suggest that while core interpersonal skills are expected to remain central, magazine editors anticipate a gradual shift toward greater importance of selected technical and digital competencies in the coming years.

RQ3. Are there significant differences between editors' current skill importance ratings and their expectations for the next five years?

Based on the descriptive comparison of current and future skill importance, paired-sample t-tests were conducted to examine whether the observed changes

in perceived importance for each skill were statistically significant. To control for family-wise error across the 16 paired tests, *p*-values were adjusted using the Holm correction.

Results showed statistically significant increases in expected importance for 10 skills with large to medium effect seizes: video production ($t(53) = -8.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.10$), AI-related skills ($t(53) = -8.07$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.10$), audio-visual production ($t(53) = -7.28$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.99$), data-related skills ($t(53) = -6.64$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.90$), reporting ($t(53) = -5.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.72$), editing ($t(53) = -5.07$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$), visual skills ($t(53) = -5.04$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$), design ($t(53) = -4.57$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.62$), social media skills ($t(53) = -4.20$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.57$), and journalism degree credentials ($t(53) = -2.84$, $p = .039$, $d = 0.39$).

In contrast, prior experience was the only skill that showed a statistically significant decrease in expected importance ($t(53) = 3.14$, $p = .019$, $d = 0.43$). No statistically significant changes were observed for writing, independent work, teamwork, communication, or knowledge-related skills (*ps* > .05), which remained consistently high in the importance assigned to core interpersonal and foundational competencies. Table 1 summarizes the results of the analysis.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics and Paired Comparisons of Editors' Ratings of Skill Importance for Current Hiring and the Next Five Years*

Skill	Current hiring (N = 56)	Future hiring (N = 54))	Δ (Future – current)	*t*(53)
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		
Writing	4.16 (1.00)	4.43 (0.69)	0.26	-2.44*
Reporting	3.54 (1.06)	4.19 (0.80)	0.67	-5.26***
Editing	2.73 (1.02)	3.56 (0.88)	0.85	-5.07***
Visual storytelling	2.80 (1.29)	3.50 (0.95)	0.72	-5.04***
Video production	1.91 (1.20)	3.07 (1.04)	1.17	-8.09***
Audio-visual production	1.79 (1.11)	2.94 (1.07)	1.17	-7.28***
Social media proficiency	2.98 (1.24)	3.63 (1.07)	0.65	-4.20***
Creative/Design-oriented skills	2.41 (1.54)	3.02 (1.25)	0.57	-4.57***
Data-driven/analytical skills	2.38 (1.00)	3.26 (1.07)	0.89	-6.64***
AI-related skills	1.66 (0.82)	3.07 (1.15)	1.41	-8.07***
Ability to work independently	4.32 (0.74)	4.56 (0.77)	0.19	-2.02*
Verbal communication	4.41 (0.71)	4.44 (0.69)	-0.02	0.22
Teamwork	4.45 (0.74)	4.57 (0.69)	0.07	-1.00

Previous experience	3.45 (1.06)	3.06 (1.17)	-0.44	3.14*
Knowledge of journalism principles	3.02 (1.04)	3.17 (1.04)	0.13	-1.41
Journalism degree	1.61 (078)	1.80 (0.86)	0.20	-2.94**

Discussion

Taken together, the findings of this study offer a textured portrait of how elite magazine editors currently evaluate entry-level journalism candidates and how they anticipate those expectations will evolve in the near future. Drawing on responses from 56 judges affiliated with the 2025 National Magazine Awards—individuals who occupy positions of considerable authority within both legacy and digital media—the study captures hiring priorities at a moment of professional transition rather than crisis. What emerges is not a wholesale rejection of traditional journalism values, but a recalibration of how those values are enacted in contemporary newsrooms.

Under current hiring conditions, editors clearly privilege interpersonal and collaborative competencies over formal credentials or narrowly defined technical skills. Teamwork, communication, independent work, and writing were consistently rated as the most important attributes when evaluating recent graduates. These findings suggest that editors are less concerned with whether candidates arrive fully formed as technical specialists and more focused on whether they demonstrate the habits of mind and behavior necessary to function within complex newsroom and field environments. Journalism, as these results quietly reaffirm, remains a social practice—one dependent on collaboration, judgment, and the capacity to work productively with others under conditions of uncertainty.

Equally notable is what editors do not appear to prioritize. Journalism degree credentials, along with audio-visual production, video production, and AI-related skills, were rated among the least important factors in recent hiring decisions, this despite virtually all magazines having a digital and/or multimedia component. This does not imply hostility toward journalism education or technology but rather reflects skepticism toward credentials as proxies for readiness. Editors appear to evaluate candidates less on where or how they were trained than on what they can contribute in practice, reinforcing long-standing tensions between professional education and professional gatekeeping.

When editors turned their attention to the next five years, continuity outweighed rupture. Interpersonal competencies remained central, with teamwork, communication, independent work, and writing again occupying the top tier of importance. This is particularly important because Edogor (2025) posited that mass media institutions are considered primary forecasters of trends and as a result, of media content. At the same time, the data reveal a measured but statistically significant shift in expectations around digital and technological skills. AI-related competencies, data skills, video and audio-visual production,

editing, design, and social media all increased in perceived importance, moving from marginal considerations to moderate expectations. These changes suggest not a technological determinism, but an acknowledgment that journalists will increasingly be asked to operate fluently (and fluidly) across platforms and tools that did not previously define entry-level work.

Importantly, the only skill to decline in expected importance was prior experience. This finding complicates common assumptions about an increasingly competitive entry-level market and suggests that editors may be more willing to invest in on-the-job development, provided candidates possess strong foundational skills. Core competencies such as writing, teamwork, and communication showed no significant change across time, underscoring their durability amid technological change.

Overall, the findings point to a profession that is evolving without abandoning its core commitments. Editors appear to value adaptability over specialization, engagement over credentials, and collaborative capacity over technical mastery alone. For journalism education, the implication is not to chase every emerging tool, but to continue cultivating involvement, judgment, and professional confidence—while creating space for students to encounter and experiment with the technologies that will shape journalism's next iteration.

Limitations and Future Study Suggestions

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings; however, these limitations can be addressed in future research. First, the sample is limited to judges affiliated with the 2025 National Magazine Awards, a highly specific and elite group of magazine editors. While this ensures expertise, it restricts the generalizability of the results to the broader population of hiring managers in journalism, particularly in local, non-award-focused, or emerging media organizations. Future research could employ data collection methods that allow researchers to reach more diverse pools of editors and journalists and to collect a broader range of opinions and perspectives on similar research agendas. In addition, including journalism educators in higher education institutions and students pursuing careers in relevant fields as potential participants could support the same or similar research agenda and allow researchers and practitioners to gain a more comprehensive understanding of expectations across diverse groups. Second, the final response rate was 30.43% (N = 56), meaning a majority of potential participants did not respond. Although the response rate is consistent with established benchmarks for elite-level professional surveys, which range between 15% and 35%, nonresponse bias may have influenced the results (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Cycyota & Harrison 2006), as those who chose to participate could systematically differ in perspectives from nonrespondents. Future research should aim to include nonresponse bias checks or employ broader multi-channel recruitment approaches to further validate the representativeness of these professional insights. Third, the survey relied on self-reported assessments of skill importance, which may be subject to social desirability bias or recall inaccuracies, especially regarding future expectations.

Future research could address these limitations by employing triangulation through qualitative interviews or longitudinal observations, which would provide a more nuanced understanding of actual hiring behaviors beyond self-reported data.

However, as this is the first study of its kind in the wake of generative AI and other paradigm shifts in magazine newsrooms, it is consequential and lays groundwork for future studies of its kind.

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