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NORTHEASTERN

Northeastern students, faculty criticize proposal to merge journalism, communications schools

Posted by Matt Rocheleau October 17, 2013 02:15 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Students and faculty at Northeastern University are urging administrators not to pursue a proposal to merge the journalism and communications schools.

“The natural fit between the two programs just isn’t there,” said longtime professor Charles Fountain.

The two schools are part of the College of Arts, Media and Design, which has formed a committee that has been “reassessing” its structure, according to an email Dean Xavier Costa sent to faculty recently.

Fountain, Nicholas Daniloff, William Kirtz and other journalism faculty met with Costa several days ago. They said Costa told them the idea of merging the two schools was in the early discussion stages and no decisions have been made yet.

“But the very fact that’s it’s been brought into discussion is alarming,” Fountain said.

Some said they’re worried that administrators may be further along in their planning than they are letting on.

“We’re not entirely sure what the proposal is, but something is going on at the university and they’re not being very transparent about it,” said Daniloff.

Costa and other officials from the dean’s office declined to comment this week, and some faculty from the journalism and communications department declined to comment as well, because the merger proposal is said to be in the early stages.

Northeastern journalism students contribute stories to Boston.com’s [Your Town](#) sites as part of their studies.

Fountain said faculty and students from both schools are opposed to the idea.

“It’s not that there’s any disrespect for the other entity at all, but it’s just that what the two disciplines do is completely different,” he said. “They feel, like we do, that their discipline is best suited by the faculty and the structure they have in place.”

Members of the journalism school worry that a merger would lead to major changes in how the program operates and how it is perceived in the professional world.

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“Over the past 30 or 40 years we’ve built up a strong reputation for the journalism program,” said longtime professor and former program director Nicholas Daniloff. “If we’re merged with communications studies that lessens the brand of journalism studies.”

Sophomore Emma McGrath, a journalism and international affairs double major, helped draft an [online petition](#) against a possible merger, which as of Thursday afternoon had more than 70 signatures. A related [Facebook group](#) had more than 150 members. McGrath said Costa is working to schedule a meeting with students soon.

“People assume that journalism and communications are similar to one another and can merge seamlessly to help save on costs and reduce overhead, but journalism and communications are fundamentally different from one another,” she said.

“Journalism seeks out the truth and to send out information for the benefit of the public,” she continued. “Communications sends out information for the benefit of an employer.”

Journalism students and faculty said those who teach communications studies tend to come from a more scholarly background, whereas journalism at Northeastern and many other schools is taught by practicing journalists.

“Our faculty are all taken from the field and we’re a different sort of animal than the academic world,” Fountain said.

He said having practicing journalists for teachers is a major draw for students and also helps the school maintain connections within the field, which can help students land real-world experience through classwork, internships, co-ops and after they graduate.

“You not only learn about reporting but you get to do some real world reporting here, too,” Fountain said.

Some worry that combining the two schools would eventually lead to a journalism program that features less practice-based and more theory-based learning.

Faculty at Northeastern said the idea of merging the two schools has been floated before over the past couple decades and each time the idea has been met with opposition from members of both schools.

Those merger attempts have come as the professional journalism industry has struggled financially and as [some colleges](#) and [universities](#) have merged, or at least [proposed](#) to merge, journalism and communications schools or programs. Others have [discontinued](#) journalism studies altogether. Such moves have often faced [resistance](#).

Trustees at Indiana State University are scheduled to vote [Friday](#) on a controversial proposal to merge the journalism and communications schools there. The plan has been clarified and changed somewhat since it was first presented [about a year ago](#), but [concerns remain](#).

Kirtz said he and others recognize that journalism schools nationwide face challenges, including fighting declining enrollments.

But, he said, at Northeastern, “We have a pretty healthy department. We’re small but we’re excellent. We turn out good people. The co-op program really works. We have a reputation of sending out good people.”

“If we merge with communications, what product are we sending out there,” he added. “That’s not going to solve the numbers problem [with enrollment.]. I don’t think they should water down the program for the sake of organizational clarity.”

“Let us do our thing. We’re not hurting anybody.”

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com. Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus pages](#).

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Foggydoggbreath 10/17/13 05:52 PM

As a Northeastern University School of Journalism graduate, I'd like to point out that combining a degree program that focuses on subjectivity (marketing, public relations, etc...) and a major that

focuses on objectivity (journalism) will be a mistake for obvious reasons.

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HardToLeave 10/17/13 04:36 PM

All the communications majors I knew at NU were pretty dumb. It was kind of like the GED of college degrees.

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globie123 10/17/13 03:46 PM

I didn't realize you needed a journalism degree to chase celebrities, murders, fires and serve as the mouthpiece for manipulative politicians. There was a time when journalists had ethics and made judgment calls about things that were such BS they shouldn't be reported, but those days are gone. Look no further than the he-said, she-said coverage of the recent ridiculousness in Washington. The media are playing a major role in the deterioration of our society. Doesn't seem like you need a degree to do that.

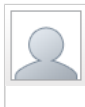
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boogie13 10/17/13 07:36 PM

good luck with that fight said everyone ever attached to the former College of Criminal Justice at NEU. With Dictator, er, I mean President Aoun and his little henchman Director, it's their way or the highway.

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Janus1 10/17/13 04:58 PM

Ever consider it is you and not your major?

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