



The Future of International Exchanges in a Post-Pandemic World

Chapter 2

Transatlantic Fellowship and Professional Exchange Opportunities for Journalists

THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

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Transatlantic Fellowship and Professional Exchange Opportunities for Journalists

BIRGIT RIECK, FORMERLY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Solid, independent journalism is indispensable in a functioning democracy. In 1902, journalist Finley Peter Dunne (2010) wrote about his profession in one of his syndicated columns, “The newspaper does everything for us. . . . Comforts the afflicted, afflicts the comfortable.” This part of the quote is repeated regularly to explain the duty of journalism. Journalism though, as the first draft of history (Schafer 2010) does so much more: at its best, it educates its readers and audiences not only in politics and public policy; it also brings subjects like sports, business, law, science and medicine, education, art, music, and news from around the world to our attention and shapes the public discourse by reporting facts. Journalists keep checks and balances on public officials and industrial and financial leaders, and they broaden our horizons by introducing us to things we never knew about. They translate science and other subjects we might not be familiar with, while teaching us more about a topic we already are interested in.

Agnes Wahl Nieman, whose husband founded *The Milwaukee Journal*, must have had all this in mind when she left over one million dollars to Harvard University “to promote and elevate the standards of journalism in the United States and educate persons deemed specially qualified for journalism” (Harvard University 2014).

This chapter will offer an overview of continued professional education programs for experienced journalists, show the outcome of these programs, not only for the journalists themselves but also for the host institutions and the greater public and explain why the transatlantic exchange between journalists continues to be an important part of these programs, now more so than ever.

Harvard University used Agnes Wahl Nieman’s bequest to establish the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University, and in fall 1938, the first nine journalists came to Cambridge to deepen their knowledge and further their careers studying on campus as Nieman Fellows.

Since then, many programs for experienced journalists have been founded on both sides of the Atlantic to help journalists advance in their careers, to understand each other and their countries, and most importantly, to inform the public better. Programs that sponsor journalists and include a component of international exchange, can roughly be categorized as follows:

- Residential Fellowships, typically housed at major universities, invite and support journalists for a full academic year and are open to journalists from around the world who follow their individual study plans.
- Shorter exchange programs offer an extensive introduction of the host country through travel, seminars, and short work visits in a host newsroom.
- Journalist-in-residence programs invite a small number of specialized journalists to a university department or research institute to work with and learn directly from scientists and researchers.

Examples of fellowships and professional exchange programs for journalists with a tradition of transatlantic exchange candidates

In 1966, nearly 30 years after the Nieman Fellowships were founded, the second residential yearlong fellowship program was set up at Stanford University with a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to “give journalists broad access to a great university, which would pay off in superb journalism” (Stanford University, n.d.). The program is now called the JSK Journalism Fellowships.

The University of Michigan received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to establish a program modeled on Harvard’s Nieman Fellowships in 1973. After the NEH stopped their financial support, foundations, private and industry donors provided an endowment for the program, now known as the Knight-Wallace Fellowships.

In 1999, the Freie Universität Berlin (n.d.) established a similar fellowship program, the European Journalism Fellowships for Eastern and Western Europe, the United States and the Middle East.

The American Academy in Berlin (2016), “committed to sustaining and enhancing the long-term intellectual, cultural, and political ties between the United States and Germany,” regularly includes journalists, permanently based in the US, in their classes of scholars, writers, and artists.

There are also subject specific residential programs like The Knight Science Journalism Fellowships at MIT in Cambridge, MA, the Knight-Bagehot Fellowships in Economics and Business Journalism at Columbia University in New York City, the newly established program for international business journalists at the Stigler Center at the University of Chicago and the Transatlantic Media Fellowships supported by the Böll Foundation and the Transatlantic Media Network.¹

Shorter, country-specific exchange programs concentrate on conveying extensive knowledge about the host countries in a short time to their participants while also giving insight into host newsrooms and the challenges journalists encounter in their daily work life.

The RIAS Berlin Commission (n.d.) was established in 1994 to “keep the spirit of the legendary Cold War-era radio and TV station ‘Radio in American Sector’ alive after it went off the air at the end of 1993” when RIAS became “Deutschlandradio.” American journalists are invited for one- or two-week-long trips to Berlin and Brussels, Belgium, with excursions to other cities to meet guest speakers, journalists, and RIAS alumni to learn about journalism, politics, history, and current issues in Germany and the EU. German fellows are invited to the US for two or three weeks. After two weeks of seminars in Washington, DC and New York City, journalists can embed in an American newsroom for one week.

The Arthur F. Burns Fellowship, part of the International Journalists’ Program, invites 20 journalists from Germany, the United States, and Canada to spend two months working in the newsroom of one of their partner news outlets across the Atlantic after spending one week in Washington, DC for orientation and seminars. American and Canadian journalists are also enrolled in a two-week intensive German language training course.

1 There are several other programs, too. The ones selected here have a history of including European and American journalists and are independently funded.

Recognizing the difficulty and lack of time scientists have to communicate their work and their research to the public, several research institutes have established journalist-in-residence programs to foster dialogue between researchers and journalists while giving journalists the opportunity to learn more about scientific research without looming deadlines.

Examples are the invitations from different units of the Max Plank Institute in Germany, where journalists can study scientific subjects or the history of science while shadowing researchers and attending workshops and colloquia at the institute. In return, journalists are expected to present a seminar on journalism and science to the internal research community.

HITS, the Heidelberg Institute for Theoretical Studies, regularly brings an experienced journalist who covers mathematics, computer, or natural science to their offices. Again, the goal is to support the dialogue between scientists and the public (via the journalist), and the journalist is asked to present a lecture.

Benefits of the shorter exchange programs and the journalist-in-residence programs are easy to ascertain: Journalists step away from their daily work to be introduced to a new country while deepening knowledge in their field of reporting and expanding their professional network. The organizations supporting the exchange programs see the improved work of their journalists after they have returned from the program and they help keep new transatlantic relationships and networks alive by organizing regular reunions and virtual seminars. Institutes who host journalists-in-residence see similar outcomes. The work of the visiting journalist improves because of the experience of shadowing and working alongside researchers. At the same time, the institute's staff has a chance to make contacts in the world of journalism, possibly leading to interviews and greater acknowledgment and understanding of their work by the public and, if needed, by possible funders and clients.

A journalism fellowship is often compared to an academic sabbatical year, and just as faculty members spend their time researching and writing, a journalism fellow is supposed to work and research; a fellowship year is certainly not a year off. There are a lot of differences though: a fellowship year is designed with firm parameters while securing time for journalists to engage in interests outside of journalism and research.

In addition to working on their individual study projects, fellows are part of a fellowship class and meet several times a week for seminars and workshops scheduled specifically for them. They audit classes on campus and are encouraged to speak with experts and community leaders outside the university population. Fieldtrips and international travel can be part of the program, too. Often, professors invite fellows to give presentations and sit on discussion panels on campus or ask them to team up with a group of students to work on a certain project.

All fellowship curriculums allow journalists to be able to deeply connect with each other and to find time to pursue interests that have nothing to do with their regular daily life: a new hobby or a re-acquaintance with an old hobby, watching the 100 movies a fellow never had time for, reading the 10 books a fellow always wanted to read, getting into the routine of doing yoga each morning to start the day with newfound energy, attending cooking classes to learn how to eat healthy when working long hours, learning to swim or ice skate, or tackling a new language. The possibilities are endless, but they all offer the same: "a spa for the brain," as Michele Genece of CNN called this part of the fellowship. Allowing your brain to learn new information, to digest information without having to turn it around to produce news stories, to just let your mind wander is an integral part of the fellowship program, too.

Why is it important to let the mind wander? According to Clare Thorp (2020), research shows that a certain kind of boredom leads to creativity. This kind of boredom, for example, combined with creative or screen writing classes, can lead to new ways of conceptualizing a news story. It offers a way to look at a subject in a different way and it can engage the audience or reader in a way that did not happen before. Discussing fellowship programs, it is important to keep in mind that not only the journalist attending the program is a beneficiary. No, in the big picture it is all of us—the readers, the listeners, the audience, all who consume news and journalism in general—to make informed decisions also benefit from improved ways knowledge is transmitted.

Fellows might also want to look at digital platforms, at inventing new tools for reporters, or at new business models for journalistic enterprises. For them, the business school, law school, or school of information technology are the places to visit for their studies. Fellows can learn how to code, how to set up a business (profit or nonprofit), how to write a business plan or how to find starter money and donors. They might look into analytics and research what kind of news the audience wants, needs and which subjects are underserved. This can be of immense value to the newsroom the fellow returns to.

How do journalists change and expand their work during and after attending a transatlantic exchange or fellowship program?

Abbie Swanson, currently the executive producer for podcasts and audio at the *Los Angeles Times*, was fresh out of graduate school and a producer for WNYC’s “The Takeaway,” when she was accepted to the RIAS exchange program. “The first part of our trip was focused on Berlin. We met with politicians, journalists and historians who gave us a crash course in German current affairs and provided insight into Germany’s place in Europe and its relationship with the United States. I remember being shocked by what I learned about the Stasi, which had kept files on millions of people. We discussed the economy, education and immigration, and met with party members of Turkish descent. We talked with members of the Central Council of Jews, and went to the Sachsenhausen Memorial, a former concentration camp that serves as a brutal reminder of what the Nazis did to people they deemed deviants.

We saw beautiful things, too. I remember a boat tour along the Spree River; [a]nd there was great modern art to take in. After Berlin, we went on to Dresden, Prague and Brussels. In Bruges, I filed an audio postcard (Swanson 2009) from atop a tall 13th century belfry that houses one of the oldest carillons in the world. I met future colleagues, got story ideas and the historical background I needed to produce future stories about Germany. The trip whetted my appetite for future visits” (Abbie Fentress Swanson, email to author, December 14, 2020).

When Der Spiegel’s military and foreign correspondent Susanne Koelbl started her fellowship program, she was already an expert in the Middle East region. But spending most of the 10 years following 9/11 in Afghanistan had taken its toll. It was time to step back and re-calibrate her career:

“I had never experienced so much professional generosity. I lived in a charming wooden house, went to the gym at 7:00 am and took voice lessons in the afternoon. I read a lot; I didn’t have to worry about income. We took fellowship trips to countries I had never visited as a foreign correspondent. I sat in gorgeous libraries and researched the war in Syria which I ended up reporting on afterwards. I gave presentations on campus and sat on international panels, learning how to present better. I took a class in negotiation at the business school and it made me think about money in a new way; I even ended up buying an apartment back in Germany!

From the outside, it might look like nothing much has changed, I still do the work I did before. But today, I feel like I'm in charge of my life for the most part, whereas before it was too often about meeting the expectations of others. I am still in contact with my classmates; when my book about Saudi-Arabia was published in the US a few months ago², several fellows helped me with promoting my work and introducing me to reporters for interviews. I still talk to a professor from my fellowship before I take part in certain public panel discussions to be better prepared.

And I founded a non-profit organization, The Poetry Project³ where minors, who fled to Germany on their own, tell their stories. We publish the stories in four languages and organize public reading events. I would have never done this if the fellowship had not taught me that the world is full of possibilities” (Susanne Koelbl, email to author, December 12, 2020).

In 2001, Italian Marzio Mian, American Michael ONeal, and Irish Maurice Walsh met in the same fellowship class. They stayed in touch over the years and it became clear that they all had one journalistic dream in common: “shedding light on the profound economic, geo-political and cultural changes taking place in the Arctic region as a result of climate change” (Arctic Times Project 2017). In 2016, they founded *The Arctic Times Project*, a small nonprofit consortium that is dedicated to witnessing the changes in the Arctic. Another former classmate introduced them to a funder who underwrote their trip to Greenland that same year. In early 2017, independent stories from all three writers appeared in *The Washington Post* (Oneal), *The Guardian* (Walsh), and *Corriere della Sera* (Mian), garnering them also a story by Laura Hazard Owen on Nieman Lab, a website dedicated to the future of journalism and part of the Nieman Foundation at Harvard.⁴

Through the Arctic Times Project, these journalists have not only come together to write stories about a part of the world that is very underreported, they also built a model of collaborative journalism, helping them to finance and write the stories they are interested in and think audiences need to know. The fellowship program allowed them to get to know each other deeply and work together without the usually necessary competitive thinking. Others might follow their model of an association, that is dedicated to a certain kind of reporting, while sharing funds and being each other's colleagues and sounding boards.

French investigative TV journalist and editor-in-chief Laurent Richard already had thought of a new endeavor before he arrived for his fellowship year: his colleague Edouard Perrin, a former fellow, had just worked on the Panama Papers, published in 2016. The Panama Papers were the result of a global investigation into offshore tax havens, managed by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) which coordinated 350 reporters from 80 countries. Richard was inspired by ICIJ's collaborations and by the experience Perrin had as a fellow in the US. He wondered if it was possible to use the model of global journalistic collaboration to keep journalists safe while letting possible perpetrators know that imprisoning or killing a journalist will not stop the investigated story from being published. To Richard's delight, one of his new classmates was investigative reporter Bastian Obermayer of the Munich newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the reporter who had received a data trove of 2.6 terabytes with information on tax havens from an unnamed source in 2015, the basis of the Panama Papers (Obermayer and Richard 2016).

2 See Koelbl's personal website for more information: <https://susannekoelbl.com>.

3 See website here: <https://thepoetryproject.de/en/news/>. Accessed December 12, 2020.

4 See article: Owen, Laura Hazard. 2017. “Reporting from ‘the Last Frontier’: The Arctic Times Project Is Bringing Journalists to a Once-Closed Region.” NiemanLab, March 10, 2017. <https://www.niemanlab.org/2017/03/reporting-from-the-last-frontier-the-arctic-times-project-is-bringing-journalists-to-a-once-closed-region/>.

By the end of the fellowship, Richard had created Forbidden Stories,⁵ a digital platform that allows reporters to deposit sensitive material in a secure digital mailbox when they feel their life is under threat because of their work. If the journalist is imprisoned or murdered, a group of investigative reporters will access the mailbox, finish the work, and publish it across the globe. While designing this new organization, Richard had not only used his classmate Bastian Obermayer as a sounding board, he had also secured him and Edouard Perrin as members for his board of directors and he had raised enough seed money to start the venture right after returning to France.

In 2018, Forbidden Stories published its first big investigation: the murder of Maltese investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia and the reasons she was killed. Since then, investigations focused on other global topics like drug trafficking and mining. The latest investigation, “The Cartel Project,” with 60 journalists from 25 international news outlets, focused on the murder of Mexican journalist Regina Martinez and her research into the relationships between politicians and drug traffickers. Among the partners working on Forbidden Stories are *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. Richard has left his job at the French TV station and now manages Forbidden Stories full time; he is the major fundraiser and directs a staff of 11.

But a journalism fellowship does not only benefit journalists, although it should be enough as we all rely on them to give us the information we need to make informed decisions. Hosts and other relating entities also benefit greatly from a journalist taking the time to complete a fellowship.

Matthew Shaw (2016) was deployment editor at BBC News when he applied for a fellowship. He had noticed that there were no guidelines in place for BBC’s leadership to deal with depression in the newsroom: “The newsroom can be a very stressful environment and I wanted to look at simple ways of helping journalists with mental health issues continue to flourish at what they do best at work.”

He started working with Professor John Greden, founder and executive director of the University of Michigan’s Depression Center (UMDC), the first of its kind on the forefront of treating and researching depression and bipolar illnesses.⁶ Shaw and Professor Greden noticed right away that the study plan was bigger than a journalism fellowship and that the Depression Center should work with the BBC to tackle this endeavor.

“I made a speech to [the Center’s] National Advisory Board about what BBC News and the UMDC could do together and what I could learn with their support which would benefit all journalists. Within 2 weeks Professor Greden had been offered a donation to set up my visiting Fellowship the following term – which coincided with a bid to [the Ross Business School] for the UMDC to run an MBA Multidisciplinary action project (MAP) which would look at how the UMDC could be involved in workplace mental health. We looked at how workplace mental health projects could succeed, used BBC News as a test case and the MBA students assessed what the UMDC could do” (Matthew Shaw, email to author, November 30, 2020).

Because of Shaw’s work, the BBC found ways to make the operation more mentally healthy and started a company-wide mental health campaign and initiative, called Open Up. The BBC also established a permanent mental health appointment in the News division, something that is especially important right now. “[T]his year we have been dealing with fear, loneliness, worry, burnout and general anxiety at levels we have never seen before (and never want to see again!),” commented Shaw in an email. In addition to what was achieved at BBC, the work of the MBA students resulted in an ongoing workplace program at Ford Motor Company.

The examples above show how much continued education influences the work of journalists and therefore serves to inform the general public. Oftentimes, as the example of Matthew Shaw’s project shows, newsrooms, industries other than journalism and students in other fields benefit from having journalists on campus.

5 See the project’s website here: <https://forbiddenstories.org/>. Accessed December 12, 2020.

6 See UMDC’s “About Us” web page here: <https://www.depressioncenter.org/about-us>. Accessed February 9, 2021.

Continued education for working journalists will remain important but why is a transatlantic exchange beneficial? And how will these programs look like after the pandemic is over?

The basic job description of a journalist is to research a subject, put it in context and then deliver what they have learned to the public. Or, with the words of journalists Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2014, 35), “There are the elements of journalism: The first among them is that the purpose of journalism is to provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing.”

The pandemic of the year 2020 has brought into the open how difficult the public discourse has become in the United States as well as in Europe. On both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, the common basis of truth from which different opinions develop is diminishing and we have many of the same topics to discuss:

- In times of crisis, the rejection of science and scientific results becomes increasingly common.
- Trust in journalism is low and media literacy is underdeveloped, as discussed by Patricia Barnes (2020) and researched by the Media Intelligence Service (2020).
- Healthcare systems are overwhelmed and the welfare system in the US is under enormous stress with high unemployment numbers, evictions and long lines at food pantries. But in Europe many people are at the brink of losing their livelihoods and safety nets, too.
- The Black Lives Matter movement, which also echoed through European countries, has opened a door into investigating police brutality, racism, and right-wing tendencies in the police force and the broader society on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.
- Diversity has been ignored in many public spaces and newsrooms are not mirroring the society they are informing or the society they cover on either side of the ocean.
- Immigration is a constant discussion topic in the US and the EU.⁷
- Sustainability and climate change are subjects put on the forefront especially by younger citizens on both sides of the Atlantic.

The list could be much longer, but these points illustrate how similar the discussions are. It is no surprise that there are more German foreign correspondents in the US than in any other country (Lay, Marschall, and Baetz 2020).

Journalist Mosi Secret had been investigating an experiment from the late 60s and early 70s to integrate several preparatory schools in the American South. In a feature story for *The New York Times Magazine*, he called attention to the costs paid by the first black students at one of these schools. The piece was accompanied by an episode of *This American Life* and Secret is now working on a book for Little, Brown and Company in which he expands on his research.⁸

7 For information on this, see two sources: 1) Felter, Claire, Danielle Renwick, and Amelia Cheatham. 2020. “Backgrounder: The U.S. Immigration Debate.” Council on Foreign Relations. Updated June 23, 2020. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-immigration-debate-0>; 2) Connor, Phillip, Jeffrey S. Passal, and Jens M. Krogstad. 2019. “How European and U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Populations Compare.” Pew Research Center. Last modified November 13, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/11/13/how-european-and-u-s-unauthorized-immigrant-populations-compare/>.

8 See “Work” page of Mosi Secret’s website: <https://www.mosisecret.com/work-1#/features>. Accessed February 9, 2021.

In August 2020, Secret started his fellowship at the American Academy in Berlin. Over the course of his fellowship, Secret gave three lectures, presenting his work-in-progress to live audiences in Stuttgart and Freiburg, and to a virtual audience from Berlin (Secret 2020). He described how interacting with German audiences affects his research:

“Germans obviously bring a very different history and background to my work, so it was interesting to get questions from German audiences and see what meaning my ideas and storytelling had for them. That kind of exchange helped clarify for me what the more universal aspects of my work are.” (Mosi Secret, email to author, December 15, 2020)

Though the pandemic limited his explorations of Berlin and the rest of Germany, Secret couldn't have come to Germany at a better time: just like in the US, there were demonstrations in Berlin and all over Europe every week. People protested against racism, against COVID-19 protection measures, against lockdowns and vaccines, against police brutality, against the rise of right-wing groups, and against global inaction on climate change.

Secret summed up his German experience very positively: “Seeing the activities of German Citizens and learning how similar their demands for change to the ones we see in the US are has certainly piqued my interest in European public life and policy. I hope to write about some of these issues once my book is finished. I'm leaving Berlin with a long list of subjects to explore, and a sense that Americans and Europeans have so much in common while having their own particular histories and challenges. It seems to me that journalism growing from these kinds of exchanges can't help but increase understanding on both sides of the Atlantic” (Mosi Secret, email to author, December 15, 2020).

International exchanges give journalists the chance to learn from each other and from audiences in host countries. They learn how similar countries try to manage these challenges and share their newly won knowledge with their audiences. Journalists are in a unique position to explain the differences, inform the public and allow for a discussion based on facts.

On both sides of the Atlantic, journalism has been vilified as fake news, as leftwing or socialist propaganda, as “Lügenpresse” (“lying press”). Journalists have been yelled at, physically accosted and threatened with harm and even murdered for doing their jobs. They are under pressure every day, and because of the precarious financial situation of most newsrooms, even those who are not directly threatened have to wonder about their future. The original business model of journalism has been upended in the past decades and so far, no new model has been successful enough to ring in a new media era. Even institutions like the BBC and other öffentlich-rechtlicher Rundfunk (public service broadcasters) in European countries like Germany, Austria, France, Denmark, Spain, etc. are under fire. Nonprofit organizations are growing globally, especially in the US. Now that newsrooms can use digital tools to disseminate information, more money can be spent on journalism itself instead of printing and delivering papers. But the dependence on foundation and angel donors supporting new journalistic endeavors is precarious. As ICIJ member and academic Bill Birnbauer (2019, 200) writes, “After several years of support, foundations naturally expect that organizations will have developed other revenue sources. Many foundations do not want to be ongoing funders of day-to-day operations. A majority of nonprofit news organizations, however, rely heavily on foundation funding, even after five to seven years.”

This highlights another interesting study topic for journalists: how to develop sustainable journalism for the future. In 2009, during an especially crisis-laden time in American journalism, the JSK Fellowships at Stanford changed their program from a more general journalism concept to focusing on innovation, entre-

preneurship and leadership. Located in Silicon Valley, fellows can take advantage of many resources for their projects, not only on campus but also from the many technology companies in the vicinity.⁹

Technology is playing a bigger and bigger role in journalism: delivery platforms change and advance. When *The New York Times* published the digital long-form story “Snowfall” by John Branch in December 2012, it was heralded as a new frontier of journalism. Now, projects like this are standard. Even a smartphone has the technical tools and applications to produce high-value products online, and consumers expect newsrooms to produce these stories regularly. Information technology departments at news outlets grow consistently, too. Back-of-house workflow changes with advanced technology and at the same time, digital communication channels and co-working platforms need to be kept secure. For example, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which manages hundreds of journalists around the world, also employs a whole team of technology experts developing secure communication platforms and sometimes even fighting off hackers (Gerald Ryle, ICIJ director, phone conversation with author, December 23, 2020).

While shorter exchange programs and subject-specific programs automatically update their syllabi to stay relevant in their fields, from business to science to public policy, the future of fellowship programs needs to be very nimble to stay relevant. Since there is a diverse group of journalists with individual goals every year, each year will be different. In 2012, the Nieman Foundation added “Visiting Fellowships.” Visiting fellows can spend up to three months at Harvard and the Nieman Foundation “working on special projects designed to advance journalism” (Harvard University 2018). The Knight-Wallace Fellowships program at Michigan has strengthened their effort to attract journalists working on the technical, digital or delivery side of news and increased the number of public lectures featuring journalists on campus to engage students and the wider community “to foster civic engagement, open conversation and spark debate” (Wallace House, n.d.).

It would be a lost opportunity, however, for all fellowship programs to concentrate too much on the technical and business aspects of journalism. In the end, consumers of regular news, just like other consumers, want a great product, in this case, the actual reporting and storytelling. In 2014, the American Press Institute and the Associated Press–NORC Center for Public Affairs published a research project on how Americans choose to get their news and found that “[t]he largest group, 45 percent of Americans indicate that they have no preference in the device or technology they use to follow the news. This suggests that many Americans prefer to receive news across devices, using whatever device or technology is most convenient when they want to follow the news” (Rosenstiel et al. 2014). There are many journalism programs, organizations, associations and foundations—too many to list here—dedicated to training journalists and newsroom leaders in the business of journalism and in the technical and reporting skills journalists need. And yes, there is a need for fellowship slots for these subjects, too. But fellowships are also the only year-long programs for already accomplished journalists to question and deepen their knowledge, to learn about new subjects, and to broaden their horizon.

A fellow should be given time to decompress, to digest the experience of their now often dangerous and always backbreaking work. Journalists often use the fellowship to look into questions that couldn’t be answered while reporting and follow up on ideas that developed in that time. The fellowship allows for time to figure out where their career can take them next. Discussing their experiences and ideas often encourages classmates to think bigger, too, especially regarding the sharing of investigations and stories, something that is still difficult for many journalists to do; after all, traditional journalism often pits journalists on deadlines from competing newsrooms against each other.

9 For more about this topic, listen to the *Medien. Macht. Meinung* podcast episode by the Hamburg Media School with guest Jeremy Caplan of the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism in New York City, December 10, 2020: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/25-mit-jeremy-caplan/id1497860507?i=1000499598938>.

“A fellowship should be mandatory for journalists every seven or 10 years,” Susanne Koelbl writes. “Why? A journalist’s career moves forward without a break. You only see the next story, again and again. A fellowship allows you to press the pause button, suddenly you are away from expectations, away from the constantly changing world of the profession. This break offers room to think and to realign your professional wishes with reality” (Susanne Koelbl, email to author, December 12, 2020).

A general fellowship program is meant to keep participants connected to the journalistic world through seminars with speakers who are on the forefront of the profession along with workshops to learn or deepen necessary skills, while taking into account the constantly changing world of the business. At the same time, the fellowship program needs to be holistic, allowing enough space and flexibility for the attending journalists to explore their personal direction. Program leaders, while facilitating connections to faculty members and other experts, must have enough faith in the journalists they selected to let them wander. Time to return to what is now more often referred to as “work-and-life-balance” or “mindfulness” is especially important for professionals like journalists who cannot count on regular work hours, or free evenings and weekends and who on top of that usually do not earn high salaries and have few other benefits.

Working on deadline, often only being able to react to what is happening in the field they cover, typically takes away from the ability to step back, look at the big picture, and work towards the next step in a career. At first it sounds counterintuitive that not filing stories for a while might make a journalist much more productive in the long run. But this is a gamble newsroom managers should take. After all, their staff members get a year of free professional development, and of course, editors can have a say in developing the study project the fellow is applying to the program with.

Often, it is not easy to assess the successful results a fellowship program brings. How can one quantify very diverse experiences? How can one qualify how the work of a journalist changed after a fellowship program? Sometimes it is an obvious win-win situation, just like Matt Shaw and the BBC experienced, but most of the time it is not. Journalists who apply to fellowship programs are usually very dedicated to the profession. They want this year to continue their education, to learn or deepen their skills or to prepare for a leadership position. Quantitative evaluations of a program itself can mainly be done by looking at the numbers of applicants, the professional experience and success of the candidates and—with limitations—the number of fellows who stay in journalism years after attending the program. However, it is important to keep in mind that in the first six months of 2020 alone, American newsrooms laid off 11,000 employees (Fischer 2020). Many journalists have no choice but to leave their chosen profession because of layoffs; others might have to leave because journalism cannot pay their bills anymore. Others are staying in journalism as newly minted freelance reporters. For them, a fellowship is the chance to find time and resources to build a foundation for their new career path.

Former fellowship director Charles Eisendrath reiterated his philosophy to every class on the first day of the program: “Your job here is to grow. I don’t know in which direction and what it takes for you personally to do that. I offer you everything a university has to offer, and you are grown up enough to know what you need.” Eisendrath wanted fellows to broaden their horizons outside of their chosen profession. In addition to asking fellows to select seminar speakers their classmates might be interested in, he often invited guests who had nothing to do with journalism. Once, somebody he had met on vacation in California appeared to speak to a class of fellows: Tom Hill had cashed in his American enterprises to become co-founder of the Big Life Foundation, a cross-border anti-poaching organization in Kenya.¹⁰ During the seminar, Hill talked about

10 See the organization’s homepage and information about the cofounders: <https://biglife.org>; <https://biglife.org/who-we-are/co-founders>. Accessed February 9, 2021.

setting up the wild animal sanctuary across country borders and about his daily challenges to keep the animals safe, employ and manage hundreds of rangers, and also fundraise to keep the foundation going. “What does that have to do with journalism? Probably not much! But I could talk all day long about you taking your professional destiny into your own hands to no avail. This man showing up and telling his story showed you that you can really do what you set your mind on doing,” Eisendrath explained. “The fellowship program and the university - we are all here to help you figure that out and get there” (Charles Eisendrath, conversation with author, December 14, 2020).

For freelance writers who are used to working on their own, a fellowship has the added bonus of the camaraderie that develops between fellows. Being independent not only means having to work alone—freelancers also have to be their own editor, business manager, and fundraiser.

When the pandemic is over, American science writer Lois Parshley will start her residency at the Max Planck Institute in Potsdam. For several weeks she will shadow researchers, discuss their work, and translate their research in ways the broader public can better understand. Parshley, a freelance reporter, is looking forward to the opportunity of being hosted at a world renown research institute. She writes:

“The pandemic has shown just how important the relationship between science and journalism is. Writing about COVID-19 as the science unfolds real-time underscores one of the challenges that science journalists often face - an expectation for big-picture conclusions. But as our current global health crisis illustrates, science happens incrementally. That’s why as a freelance journalist, having institutional support to explore these topics in depth makes all the difference.

My previous experience reporting internationally on environmental and human health systems informed my COVID-19 coverage this year. I’ve witnessed first-hand the disparities in access and resources, which helped me better understand some of the challenges these systems were facing even before the virus emerged. But it’s hard to get that experience without funding. That’s why one of the biggest gifts a reporter can get is having the time and support to pursue their curiosity.

Dark matter, which is what I was interested in focusing on at the Max Planck Institute, is obviously quite different than immunology. But the process of learning about complex science is similar.” (Lois Parshley, email to author, December 13, 2020)

We all rely on journalism to be informed, so what could be better than being informed by a journalist who has had the time to stop, think, learn and regain a broad view of issues? This is why journalism programs with an emphasis on transatlantic exchange should not change much after the pandemic: Even though delivery methods for journalistic work might change, the actual work of reporters and editors will not.

The pandemic has shown that more and more professionals can work from home. Newsrooms, just like other office spaces, will probably shrink and teams will meet less regularly in person. Everybody has become more proficient in using video conferencing and other virtual tools to connect. However, “Zoom Fatigue” (Lee 2020) is becoming a new reality, and employers see a decline of morale in their teams, as work and private life intertwine more and more (Tank 2020). Freelance writers are used to this kind of professional life and always stress how important the personal component of fellowships and other exchange programs are: being part of

a group of colleagues on a regular basis, being able to sit together over dinner and brainstorm ideas, having colleagues to muse about the possibilities for the future. Time to get to know faculty members, scientists, and other specialists in their field is invaluable as is the chance to get out into classrooms, libraries, and study halls.

The pandemic is changing how we work and the environments in which we work. We were forced to embrace technology, and working from home under trying circumstances. Exchange and continued education programs for journalists have to be mindful of these changes going forward and can take advantage of technology by adding regular virtual alumni and networking events. While seminars with speakers who help design the future of journalism and workshops to build new skills need to be re-evaluated and updated regularly, a single program cannot be everything for everybody or cover every aspect of the journalism world. Over the years, all programs have developed individual traditions and characteristics that not only bond participants of the same class together, but also create an instant connection between alumni from different groups. Though technology will play a greater role in all future workplaces, the experience of exploring a new country or a new subject, spending time with faculty members and experts, or the lasting friendships and collegiality developing between journalists from different countries and backgrounds cannot be replaced by virtual seminars and Zoom-get-togethers.

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