Journalistic Power: A Model for Skills-Based Learning and Portfolio Development

By Tonya Whitaker

The 21st century workforce demands more than just a college degree; it requires demonstrable mastery of practical skills. The National Association of College and Employers (NACE) reports 90% of employers seek problem-solving abilities in new graduates, with teamwork a close second at 81%. NACE president Shawn VanDerziel explains, "managers and recruiters considering job candidates are looking for evidence that the candidate can or will be able to do the job…Employers are telling us new college grads need to demonstrate that they can solve problems, work in a team, and communicate effectively. These are skills that make a candidate career-ready" ("The Attributes"). While degrees remain vital, graduates increasingly need to cultivate a personal brand that packages their academic credentials with tangible application of "durable" or "soft skills."

NACE identifies eight critical durable skills for career-ready graduates: communication, teamwork, critical thinking, technology, leadership, professionalism, equity and inclusion, and career and self-development ("Career Readiness"). In a job market flooded with applications, how can a graduate stand out? Journalistic learning offers a compelling answer. On college campuses, journalism students inherently develop these sought-after skills, mastering tools like audio and video production, and competencies such as precise communication, innovative thinking, and ethical decision-making. The question then becomes: Can these foundational journalistic principles invigorate career-readiness across all disciplines?

When journalistic methods are integrated into diverse courses, learning becomes purposeful and empowering. The Journalistic Learning Initiative, founded by Tara Lynda Guber, Esther Wojcicki, and Ed Madison, champions a model that "naturally aligns research skills,

critical thinking, writing, collaboration, and oral communication into non-journalism courses."
This model cultivates future-ready workforce skills through its natural features:

- Communication: Crafting audience-specific narratives

- Critical Thinking: Evaluating sources, constructing arguments

- Technology: Multimedia content creation and data visualization

A cornerstone of JL is its emphasis on publicly shareable work. Students shift from passive recipients to active creators, designing content for audiences. This work culminates in a comprehensive portfolio, the most logical means for a student to demonstrate their thought processes and skill application. As a former newspaper journalist, my hiring was contingent on showing my portfolio. It provides tangible evidence of growth, self-reflection, and professional presentation. Crucially, extending learning beyond the classroom through journalistic projects offers invaluable networking opportunities with potential employers or collaborators.

In an era increasingly shaped by generative AI, journalism fosters strategic and responsible collaboration with a chatbot. For example, accounting students can collaborate with AI tools to research and develop an article explaining non-profit accounting principles, complete with an AI-generated data visualization of expenses. For transparency, students would include a statement detailing AI's role. Such experiences deepen understanding while preparing students to critically navigate and leverage technologies ("I am a business").

As higher education re-evaluates marketable skills assessment, JL provides a compelling blueprint. It ensures academic engagement remains relevant, preparing students not just to graduate, but to excel. Employers now expect candidates to illustrate their capabilities with authenticity and direct relevance, moving beyond resume bullet points. JL offers students a dynamic way to showcase the indispensable skills for success in the workforce.

Works Cited

"Career Readiness: Competencies for a Career-Ready Workforce." *National Association of Colleges and Employers*, Mar. 2024, www.naceweb.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2024/resources/nace-career-readiness-competencies-revised-apr-2024.pdf. Accessed 17 July 2025.

"I am a business student at a community college. My professor assigned project-based learning assignment for our unit on nonprofit accounting. Within the assignment, we must use a journalism tool such as blogging, an article, or podcast to demonstrate our understanding of nonprofit accounting. Help us!" prompt. *Copilot*, Microsoft, 16 July 2025.

"The Attributes Employers Look for on New Grad Resumes and How to Showcase Them." *National Association of Colleges and Employers*, 28 Jan. 2025, www.naceweb.org/about-us/press/the-attributes-employers-look-for-on-new-grad-resumes-and-how-to-showcase-them. Accessed 17 July 2025.

"What Is Journalistic Learning?" *Journalistic Learning Initiative*, journalisticlearning.org/. Accessed 17 July 2025.