An Open Letter from the Dean
To COMM/JOUR faculty, students and alumni,

I would like thank everyone who has contacted my office to provide feedback regarding the decision to move NTC classes to Watson Hall. The feedback clearly speaks well of the program and its tremendous impact on our students. I also want to provide additional information to address misperceptions, and to offer insights into our vision for the future of journalism at NIU. We are fully committed to journalism and hands-on learning; this commitment drives our efforts to build a new curriculum that speaks to the existing challenges and to the future demands of a changing field.

Let me start by emphasizing that we have not eliminated any classes in broadcasting or in journalism. The courses that were scheduled for fall 2019 will proceed.

That said, we have seen a multiyear decline in enrollment in broadcast journalism from a number of factors, including the demographic change in the number of college-aged students, the outflow of college students from Illinois during the state’s budget crisis and the shifts in interest in particular majors. Currently, only 13 students are registered for NTC classes. The current enrollment in these classes does not justify maintaining two sets of production facilities and the cost of dedicated staff to manage NTC.

After thoughtful consideration and consultation with the journalism faculty, we believe a consolidation of our production facilities is the best path forward for the journalism major. The move to Watson Hall allows us to consolidate those two studios and their operations and to reduce costs while maintaining the ability to offer broadcasting classes. Operating in the same space and consolidating aspects of the curriculum will allow us to integrate broadcasting classes with media studies classes in new and innovative ways to mutually benefit both areas.

Journalism faculty will spearhead the restructuring of the program, which will involve curricular changes meant to address not only the enrollment challenges we face but also the transformations in the news industries. We intend to collect input from our alumni in this process of revising our curriculum, as we value the wealth of experience and expertise of individuals who are the leaders in the field. We also seek to boost enrollment in the journalism program, and this can best be done by creating a new program that offers broadcasting as part of an innovative degree; one that will draw students to the world of journalism and storytelling in all its multiple forms, without giving up the hands-on, gritty and “work in the trenches” characteristics that our alumni have found so valuable.

The Department of Communication and the journalism faculty are determined to find opportunities in this context to better prepare our students to keep up with the rapid transformations of the news industries. Journalism Professors Bill Cassidy (Journalism Area Coordinator, bcassidy@niu.edu) and Mehdi Semati (Department Chair, msemati@niu.edu) will be pleased to hear from our alumni who are willing to assist us regarding recruitment and regarding their professional involvement with emerging industry transformations.

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