

This Day in History... September 14, 1908

America's First Journalism School

On September 14, 1908, the University of Missouri School of Journalism became the first such school in the US, and only the second in the world. (The Superior School of Journalism of Paris opened in 1899.)

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, there was significant debate over journalism education. Many people believed that journalism couldn't be taught in a classroom, rather it had to be learned from an extended apprenticeship. And journalists needed to have a certain talent for the field that they couldn't simply learn.

In 1895, a bill was submitted to the Missouri State Senate seeking a chair of journalism to be established at the University of Missouri. That bill was rejected, as was the idea of granting the school the ability to give degrees in journalism. The Missouri Press Association backed these ideas again in 1896, but they were again denied.



The school developed the "Missouri Method," in which students study journalism in the classroom, laboratories, and the real world.

Walter Williams would be a driving force for change both in Missouri, and the world of journalism. Williams was a dedicated journalist who started his career as a writer for the *Boonville Advertiser*. In 1889, at the age of 25, he was the youngest president of the Missouri Press Association. By 1908, Williams was editor of the *Columbia Missouri Herald* and a university curator and pressed for a school of journalism. With the support of Joseph Pulitzer, they finally convinced the Missouri Senate to back their idea. Williams was selected to serve as the school's first dean.

On September 14, 1908, the University of Missouri School of Journalism officially opened. The first class immediately began work on their first issue of the *University Missourian*, which later became the *Columbia Missourian*.

From the start, Williams emphasized a "hands-on" approach to learning, which over time, has become known as the "Missouri Method" of journalism education. Williams stated, "The School of Journalism does not intend to make journalists. It can, however, train for journalism, and this is the purpose of its establishment." Williams wanted people from around the world to have access to the school's style of teaching, so they taught journalists from other countries and invited the World Press Congress to the school. He also wrote the Journalist's Creed.

In May 1910, the school staged its first annual Journalism Week and invited several famous media professionals to lecture throughout the week. In 1930, they awarded the first Missouri Honor Medal for Distinguished Service in Journalism. Since that time, over 500 journalists and organizations have received this award, which is considered one the most prestigious in the industry.

The school offered the world's first master's degree in journalism in 1921 and the first Doctor of Philosophy degree in journalism in 1934. They also started offering radio broadcast courses in 1936 and launched the first university-owned full-power commercial TV station in the US in 1953.

Today, students of the Missouri School of Journalism practice a hands-on approach by publishing a daily newspaper; running a television and a radio station; publishing a glossy, quarterly magazine; and providing an Internet news and information service.



Issued to mark the 50th anniversary of the school's founding.



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