

'Can Journalism Survive?'

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David Ryfe is author of *Can Journalism Survive?: An Inside Look at American Newsrooms* and associate professor and academic chair at the Reynolds School of Journalism and Advanced Media Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno. Credit: Photo courtesy of University of Nevada, Reno.

It's no secret that, with the advent of the Internet and related technologies, American newspapers and other media outlets are struggling. David Ryfe, associate professor of journalism at the University of Nevada, Reno, spent five years visiting the newsrooms of three typical mid-sized American newspapers looking for answers, attempting to define the current state of journalism and where it is headed.

In his book, *Can Journalism Survive?: An Inside Look at American [Newsrooms](#)*, just published by Polity Books, Ryfe gives a detailed account and analysis of what he observed.

"Journalism isn't dying," he said, "it's unraveling. It doesn't have order anymore. There's a struggle to define it. It doesn't have integrity anymore. It's coming unbundled."

Ryfe said he watched the confusion and angst grow, firsthand, in the newsrooms.

"In 04-05, for the most part they still didn't think that much about going online, but they were beginning to experiment a bit," he said. "They thought, 'We'll just keep telling a good story, and we'll be okay.' Then, in 06-07, panic set in, the experiments became bolder and bolder, and various factions at the papers – the journalists, the editors, and the owners and 'bean-counters' were constantly debating what to do."

Ryfe said that by 2009, practically everyone was in agreement that dramatic changes needed to occur.

"I saw them have these meetings and everyone would agree that things needed to change," he said. "But then, the meetings would end, and they just went back to doing what they had been doing – to the same old routine, because they didn't know what to do, and they still don't. And so, the downward spiral just continues."

In his book, Ryfe concludes that if journalism, as a business and a practice, is to survive, [journalists](#) need to get out of the newsrooms and out of the old context.

"It's going to take a young person, someone not used to doing things the old way, outside of the newsroom, who is willing to try anything – someone like Joseph Pulitzer – to figure it out," he said.

Ryfe pointed out that, although "news" has been around since around 900 A.D. and will continue to exist, "journalism" was coined to refer to

commercial news – news to make money, and has really only been a significant, defined profession since the advent of the penny press, in the mid-19th century. He concludes that whatever paths journalism takes over the next decade, the implications for American democracy – politics, the economy, government – will be profound, and he discusses these implications in his book's last chapters.

Ryfe has been teaching at the University's Reynolds School of Journalism and Advanced Media Studies since 2006, and was recently elected to the post of academic chair of the school. He has written or co-written nearly 30 [journal](#) articles, book chapters and monographs in the areas of political communication, presidential communication, the practice of public deliberation, journalism history and the sociology of news, as well as a 2005 book, *Presidents in Culture*.

Nevada's land-grant university founded in 1874, the University of Nevada, Reno has an enrollment of 18,000 students and is ranked in the top tier of the nation's best universities. Part of the Nevada System of Higher Education, the University has the system's largest research program and is home to the state's medical school. With outreach and education programs in all Nevada counties and with one of the nation's largest study-abroad consortiums, the University extends across the state and around the world. For more information, visit www.unr.edu.

Provided by University of Nevada, Reno

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