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One Big Newsroom: curriculum, convergence, training and scholarship

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Introduction

> The news industry has been undergoing a fundamental paradigm shift since the end of the last century…Media convergence muddies the lines among broadcast journalism, print journalism and online journalism, leaving college journalism educators to wonder whether traditional journalism programs have become dinosaurs. (Huang et al., 2006, p. 223)

Don't die wondering! This paper is an introduction and discussion starter. It outlines what I currently think is the way forward for journalism as a program at AUT. Here I have outlined why I think we should proceed with developing a Bachelor of Journalism program and laid out some thoughts on necessary changes to the curriculum in response to changes in the media industry, particularly digital convergence. I have drawn on some of the recent academic literature, including some empirical research into convergence in the news industry and how that might impact on educational requirements in new graduates. One thing that is clear from a review of recent journal articles is that we cannot ignore convergence. More than 60 per cent of American journalism schools have made significant changes to their curricula over the past five or so years to account for the impact of media convergence. Often these changes have been made after consultation with industry (Castenada, 2003; Casteneda, Murphy, & Hether, 2005). We may need to undertake similar research here to support our ambitions[1].

Draft Vision:

> Today's journalists, first and foremost must be strong critical thinkers who know enough about geography, history and the human condition to understand why events play out as they do. The must be intellectually curious. They should speak a second language…They ought to have a world view. (Thomas Kunkel, dean of the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, cited in Huang et al., 2006, p. 230)

The following is my first draft of a vision statement for the AUT journalism program:

> *Journalism education at AUT is a leading program that values its relationships with industry, but is an innovator and a leader, not a follower. We aim to produce the best graduates who are highly employable journalists and critical thinkers.*

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[1] It would be useful to know what local industry is doing in relation to convergence. Anecdotally we know of some moves, but more work can be done.

Research, teaching and learning are aligned to develop the idea of a community of practice (learning community) that is engaged in journalism scholarship (integration of theory and practice in dynamic and creative tension).

What this means for change

J-schools should place emphasis on teaching critical thinking, expose students to new technology, and design a comprehensive internship program for students to gain real-world knowledge and further develop their cross-media technical skills. (Huang et al., 2006, p. 245)

From my reading of the literature and my own experience in journalism education, there are three levels of development in the education of journalists; they are linked, but distinct and they are historically differentiated (though they may overlap in time – and be present in one school or program simultaneously):

Journalism training – this has traditionally been done on the job, but over the past 50 years or so it has been slowly changing. Today most on-the-job training is done when young reporters join the newsroom after completing an undergraduate degree; certificate or diploma qualification in journalism. Journalism training is focused on practical skills and competencies. In NZ this paradigm is perhaps best represented by the Journalists' Training Organisation's Unit Standards approach.

Anecdotally we all hear the complaints of editors that they have to 'un-train' and then 'retrain' graduates who are too full of 'media theory' and don't know enough about practical journalism. This, in my view, is more representative of the conservatising mind-set in the newsroom than it is typical of most journalism graduates.

Journalism education – journalism education is perhaps a little broader than skills and competencies training. Journalism education is usually conducted within the structures of a university undergraduate or level 8 postgraduate program. Alongside practical training in skills/competencies; an *education* will generally include some papers on law and ethics and perhaps some other theory papers. However, there are again historical reasons why much of the theory that is 'injected' into journalism programs has come from a broader media studies or cultural studies approach. There has been a certain amount of tension around this for some time. It is changing, but perhaps not fast enough.

Journalism scholarship – this is the highest level of development in the education of journalists and represents the integration of learning with research (the creation of new knowledge). Journalism scholarship is based on the idea that journalists are public intellectuals and therefore, there is a place for the discipline of journalism within a university. It is also based on the premise that there is a distinct discipline of journalism theory that is not the same as media studies or theories of mass communication. Journalism scholarship requires a strong graduate program – beginning with an Honours year, a well-regarded research Masters degree and attractive conditions for PhD candidates – including scholarships.

In order for the AUT journalism program to maintain a leading position in NZ journalism education and to develop a strong international reputation in journalism scholarship, a number of things need to happen:

- The program needs to maintain strong and effective relationships with industry; but it must also be a leader and innovator – showing the way, not tailing behind.

- The curriculum needs to be well designed, integrated and capable of turning out good graduates who are both technically competent and critically-aware of the important role of journalists in the public sphere.

- The program needs to be an innovator and leader in the use of convergent technologies and to have carefully thought through the ways in which technology can be integrated into both training and education in order to advance scholarship.

- Research outputs – including Honours, Masters (research) and PhD completions, publications and funding – need to be showing steady signs of increase. We need to create the right conditions for a strong postgraduate culture to develop around the journalism curriculum and staff; this will include PhD and Honours scholarships.

- Staff need to maintain or upgrade skills and knowledge in multimedia and convergence either through team-teaching; being involved in aspects of news production alongside students[2] and/or further training.

Rationale:

> The discourse of convergence, media cross-ownership and multimedia newswork is increasingly becoming part of the vocabulary of contemporary journalism—in practice, education, as well as research. (Deuze, 2004, p. 139)

An expression of this convergence and scholarship approach is to establish 'One Big Newsroom' where 3rd year students work as senior reporters and editors on a daily news agenda, while 2nd year students take on the reporting tasks. The OBN is led by 'editorial tutors' drawn from industry, but with some teaching experience and/or training [see below].

Digital convergence is the key technological dynamic driving the news media in the 21st Century. However, it does not take place in a vacuum, it is contextualised within a dynamic economic and socio-cultural framework in which there is also commercial convergence and a fragmentation of audiences (the broadcast to narrowcast phenomenon) and a declining value attached to the traditional public sphere function of the mass media. This is creating tensions around the question of journalism education in the age of YouTube. How do we relate to students who are digital natives and how do we keep journalism education relevant for them, for the public sphere and for the industry?

Part of the answer lies in a focus on the content and purpose of journalism – engagement with the public interest and the public sphere. Thematically I represent this as journalists being 'quotidian intellectuals' – the intellectuals of the everyday. This conceptualisation is important because to focus only, or primarily, on the

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[2] One suggestion that might help with this is the proposal to have a daily 'duty editor' to supervise sub-editing and upload of material to *Te Waha Nui Online*. This is to be trialled in 2nd semester 2007 through News Production, Online and Specialist Writing.

enabling technologies runs the risk that any new curriculum will remain at the level of industry-sanctioned training, and not lift itself into the area of scholarship. Therefore, the core of the curriculum should not be focused on simply using the new technologies, but on a critical engagement with the field of journalism. Not just the 'how', but also the 'who' and the 'why' (Harrison, Hirst, & de Wall, 2004).

The unifying theme for the journalism program is 'journalism scholarship'. This can be summarised in the following brief (non-exclusive) list of topics that require ongoing investigation in both research and teaching[3]:

- the reporter's responsibility to the public and role in the circulation of ideas

- understanding the ethico-legal paradigm in which journalism is practised, including government and other forms of regulation, self-regulation and deregulation

- a knowledge of how reporting might better cover current events and the interplay between journalism and politics

- awareness of the political economy of the media industry at both local and global levels and how this impacts on journalists, journalism and the public sphere

- the role of technology and the dynamics of change within the media

- a good knowledge of how the newsroom operates and how this too is a dynamic environment

- the relationships between journalism and other forms of literary and creative production.

Why convergence impacts on the curriculum

Clearly both faculty and students need to be well aware of the vocabulary, concepts, and skills associated with each of the journalistic disciplines involved in the convergence process. (Kraeplin & Criado, 2005, p. 54)

The academic literature shows that, almost without exception, the vast majority of media in the developed and developing world now has at least some elements of convergence. Deuze points out that it is not useful to assume a linear continuum between 'non-convergent' and 'fully' converged, rather convergence is a process of combined and uneven development (Deuze calls this 'recombination', I would call it a dialectic) where the pace of change varies according to economic, cultural and other factors. However, as a process, convergence (both technical and commercial) is a fact of life in the 21st century media landscape (Huang et al., 2006). The New Zealand experience, perhaps lagging behind other parts of the world, also suggests that there will be more, not less convergence in the future.

The ACP magazine division in Auckland is already merging print and online editorial functions within teams based on titles[4]. APN newspapers are also adapting the digital

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[3] While not explicitly expressed here, this position paper is predicted on the idea that there is an important synergy between scholarship and teaching. In the literature this is referred to as 'research-led' teaching. I prefer to call it 'research-led *learning*'.

environment—having recently (in 2007) launched an online division to process *NZ Herald* copy onto the Internet. Fairfax is also now promoting its own online portal *Stuff.co.nz*. All major broadcasting outlets also have a web presence, some better than others, again reflecting the dialectic of convergence. TVNZ is also currently experiencing well-publicised problems in relation to its own digital plans, including new free-to-air programming and 'on-demand' delivery of programs via the Internet. APN is also experiencing some problems with its plans to 'outsource' sub-editing and page make-up. There are also new media outlets that have emerged only in cyberspace, such as *Scoop* and various news-oriented blogs[5] which further highlight the uneven nature of convergence. In such an environment, it is crucial, in purely Darwinian terms, that journalism education either adapt, or die.

It would be unnatural if some staff were not a little fearful of what convergence might mean, not just for the journalism curriculum, but also for them personally. Kraeplin and Criado (2005, p. 47) make the point that many on the faculty at Southern Methodist University were out of their comfort zone talking about cross-media teaching. However, there are no magic secrets or arcane rituals associated with convergence. A simple definition is based on the idea that there is integration of what would normally be considered the discrete silos of print, radio, television, photojournalism and online media: 'a process that yields a truly integrated product' (Kraeplin & Criado, 2005, p. 49). Thus teaching and learning in a world of convergent media requires a careful blending of the various skills required in each of the traditional or 'craft' disciplines. This will, eventually, lead to a synthesis—a state in which new media reporters will be comfortable across all platforms. Staff too will need to make this transition—over time and with adequate support.

There also appears to be little consensus, particularly in larger markets like the USA, on exactly what a convergence curriculum would look like. Some favour the 'backpack journalist' approach—the teaching of all skills across platforms to all students; others argue that there is still room for some specialisation in reporting, design, production, editing and directing. However, there is some consensus around the need for graduates to be skilled in writing for print, online and broadcast media (Huang et al., 2006, p. 228). This is a good reason for us to approach the issue of curriculum re-design from the intellectual, rather than the technological end of the teaching/learning 'stick'.

From the research compiled by Edgar Huang and his associates, the following list of core curriculum areas can be described as essential ingredients in the education of young reporters for the converging media world:

- **Multimedia production skills**—the ability to work across platforms
- **Familiarity with new technologies**—able to work with hardware and software for video and audio; web sites; graphics and photographs; some

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[4] Conversation with ACP Group publisher Debra Miller, (pers comm. March 2007). It would be useful to conduct a small-scale research project with major media organisations in Auckland to test the waters on convergence.

[5] Whether or not blogging is journalism is a debate for another day. However, it is certain that we cannot ignore this new type of interaction with news. Blogs also have the potential to set the news agenda in some instances by breaking stories, or reporting on issues that the mainstream media has not yet picked up on.

lay-out and design skills; ability to operate a spreadsheet and other applications for Computer-assisted Reporting (CAR) duties

- **Good writing skills**—ability to write for a variety of publications; 'knowing how to write to make people remember and/or take action, [to] write about the beats with an expert's view' (Huang et al., 2006, p. 246)

- **Critical thinking**—good news judgment; knowledge of law and ethics; emotional intelligence and insight; knowing some statistical formulae

- **Computer-assisted Reporting**—information searching and databases

- **On-camera exposure**—ability to speak and act professionally in front of news cameras; ability to deliver 'live' inserts to programs

- **Visual production**—familiarity with both video and still cameras and editing software

- **Second language**—ability to speak and read fluently in a non-English language

- **Time management skills**—well-organised; able to meet deadlines; able to work well in a team with other reporters and professionals

It is interesting to note that shorthand is not listed among these core skills and curriculum elements. There is a small degree of difference between what editors and journalists perceived as the ranking of these skills, as indicated in the following table:

TABLE 1: WHAT NEW SKILLS NEWS PROFESSIONALS NEED TO LEARN MOST (Huang et al., 2006)

Editors' List	News Professionals' List
1. Good writing	Good writing
2. Multimedia production	Multimedia production
3. Critical thinking	New technology
4. New technology	Computer-assisted reporting
5. Computer-assisted reporting	Visual production
6. Visual production	Critical thinking
7. Time management	Time management
8. Second language	Second language
9. On-camera exposure	On-camera exposure

Convergence: the need for critical scholarship

The role of journalism academy should be very different from that of the industry. Its role should not simply be to inculcate skills that will help students flag down jobs. They should aim to provide a scholarly background for a deeper understanding of our lives, media forms and of communications in general.(Abraham, 2001, cited in ; Huang et al., 2006, p. 229)

Digital convergence appears to be in the driver's seat in relation to the changing media landscape. However, convergence (and its opposite, fragmentation) are also part of the commercial environment where ongoing mergers and deregulation create pressures for even more convergence of technologies, organisations, functions and roles (Hirst & Harrison, 2007; Huang et al., 2006, pp. 226-227). Continuing

deregulation of the media business world and the injection of new forms of capital funding and work practices are just as important to our students today as an ability to use a digital camera, or write in net-prose. As Kraeplin and Criado suggest (2005, p. 54), journalists must learn to 'think differently' in a converging world and the curriculum must 'provide the tools' to make this happen.

Mark Deuze (2004, p. 140) suggests that journalism scholars need to integrate a broad view of convergence using the following research markers:

- how the new media environment is reconfiguring journalism, journalists and the public sphere

- the institutions and structures in which technological convergence occurs

- the 'ensemble' of technical and organisational features of the new media landscape, and

- the developing 'cultural competences' of practitioners and consumers of new media.

Strategic application of vision: The classroom is a newsroom – The newsroom is a classroom

> At the Caucasus School [of Journalism], students…learn how to do journalism the same way they learned to ride a bike—by immersing themselves in the doing of it. (Idsvoog, 2005, p. 90)

The Caucasus' example may be at the extreme end of what's possible, but it is an interesting idea—immersion learning. I think it is certainly worth examining such ideas as we approach a redesign of the curriculum. What I do like about the Caucasus program is the ethic that, in the words of its academic director, "Whenever possible this is a newsroom, not a classroom." Again, perhaps a step too far, but for the past 15 years I have approached journalism education with the thought in my head: "the newsroom is a classroom / the classroom is a newsroom" (Harrison et al., 2004).

We are *training* young journalists of the future. They expect, and the media industry expects, that graduates from the AUT journalism program will have some skills and knowledge of journalism and how it works. We therefore have to replicate to some degree the 'newsroom' in our classrooms. We do this in a variety of ways – by developing our own suite of publications/broadcast outlets; by demonstrating and modelling newsroom behaviours. We also take the 'classroom' into the newsroom through placements; practicums and field trips. Part of our goal is the socialisation of young reporters, but not necessarily into the 'way it's always been done' approach that operates in some newsroom environments. We want our graduates to be open-minded; to welcome change and to know what the future news media landscape might look like. They also need to have a good working knowledge of the society in which they will work and its interaction with the global world.

To meet this last aim, we are also *educating* young journalists for the future and this requires that our graduates are also conversant with some social issues, particularly those that involve the profession of journalism, or engage news workers in controversy and debate. This engagement is what creates the scholarship aspects of what we as journalism academics (the 'hackademic') are also expected to do and should enjoy doing as part of our daily lives in a university setting.

The key, for now, is that we can work to harness the energy of the staff and students to make the necessary changes. While none of what's contained in this discussion paper is set in stone (and should be read without prejudice); there are some key salient points that I think are important to guide the discussion:

- Reduce face-to-face teaching hours

- Reduce marking/assessment loads on both staff and students

- Eliminate overlap between papers and ensure that they are well sequenced across the program

- Unpack and reposition the current 'silo' and 'sequence' approach to be more aligned with convergence and the convergent future of journalism (including citizen journalists, bloggers and MySpacers)

- Introduce new elements, particularly in relation to digital convergence and the shrinking gaps between 'publication' and 'broadcasting'

- Design some meaningful sequences that allow us to cover the basics in the early semesters and concentrate on higher-level learning in semesters 4, 5 and 6.

- We need to build the research profile of the journalism discipline as a whole:

One Big Newsroom – the convergent curriculum in action

The One Big Newsroom (OBN) is not a new idea (Harrison et al., 2004), there are examples in operation within journalism programs around the world—many of which can provide useful ideas and templates for own work in this area. Kraeplin and Criado (2005, p. 53) define the OBN news space as 'an active news environment where students would cover breaking stories'. I have some experience of establishing and managing such facilities at both the University of Queensland (NewSpace) and ECU (3rd Degree).

A key pedagogical point about adopting such an approach is that students are not recreating the old silo style of reporting and trying to then shoehorn it onto a web platform. Instead they are learning a 'truly new medium,' not simply re-purposing 'the old media in new ways' (Kraeplin & Criado, 2005, p. 53).

Convergence as a research paradigm

> Technological convergence can therefore be problematized by questions of ethics and aesthetics (regarding "cut-and-paste" journalism, lack of creative uses, dependency on external partners in hardware and software, and so on), if only to counter the sometimes overtly utopian assumptions in the modernist discourse of computerization and digitalization of society… (Deuze, 2004, p. 144)

The current low level of journalism scholarship in New Zealand creates an important opportunity for AUT to insert itself into a niche research market. There is also a need for research into many aspects of convergence in the New Zealand and Pacific contexts. The inauguration of the Centre for Pacific Media creates the framework and

'home' for this work. However, a second centre – Research in Journalism and New Media – may be a possibility in future years (dependent on critical mass).

The following list is indicative of the areas of research that are opened up for us:

- Political economy: cross-media ownership / diversity / localism v. globalisation / new and emerging markets

- Ethics: new fault lines / individual v. collective ethical responsibility / digital dilemmas in imaging; the ethico-legal paradox; the techno-legal time gap

- Newsroom cultures: work design / redesign / hiring polices / industrial issues (pay & conditions, etc)

- Implications of the technology: fragmentation (broadcasting to narrowcasting) / technological determinism v. social conditions

  o Audience studies: take-up rates / interactions / acceptance v. rejection

  o Impacts on democracy and the public sphere

  o The future of journalism and the news

- Further (future) impacts on curriculum: changes in student profiles / current and future employment patterns / graduate destinations (old & new)

  o For instance: Should we be producing graduates who are specialists in one area, or generalists – competent all-rounders?

  o How do we balance the teaching of practical skills with the need to produce well-educated critical thinking graduates?

Key Issues:

> An important facet of the competences of multimedia journalists is the noted shift from individualistic to collective and cross-departmental team-based newswork. (Deuze, 2004, p. 148)

There are many issues to work through, but there is also no point in a piecemeal approach. All changes must be seen in the context of the vision and the rationale. Deuze recognises the need to focus on 'conceptual skills' as an important aspect of curriculum change to deal with convergence. He notes that in some situations journalism educators have tended to ignore, or downplay, this aspect of change, in favour of teaching the 'techniques of production' (Deuze, 2004, p. 144). A further necessary pedagogical shift, which is, in part, dictated by the new and emerging configurations of convergent newsrooms, is the increased reliance on teamwork and the need for this to be embedded in the new curriculum:

As well as reconceptualising the curriculum to take into account the changes mentioned above, we will also need to deal with the following practical considerations:

- Retaining strong industry links, without 'tailing' behind industry

- Sorting out our commitment to the Unit Standards, which ones and where we put them / how we incorporate them into the curriculum and how we assess them. [In the Australian context this is about the accreditation debate]

- Creating, writing and implementing a new suite of journalism papers for the Bachelor of Journalism (and the reconfigured BCS major "Journalism Studies") that follow a logical sequence and retain our core business – the education of young journalists

- Ensuring that we have all journalism papers clearly articulating with each other in a logical sequence

- Maximising the value of online learning resources and the learning styles of the 'digital natives' to increase and streamline content, without lowering quality

- Aligning the postgraduate program in journalism so that the Grad Dip is Level 8 and articulates into the coursework Masters and postgraduate research degrees

- Developing the Honours program in journalism as an attractive option for BJ and BSC students and for other students from NZ and internationally

- Journalism workloads – what to do about teaching; assessment alignment; face-to-face hours; subbing student work

- Fostering a collegial and challenging teaching and learning environment based on contemporary principles of adult and student-centred learning

- Developing an online environment that dovetails the T&L aspects of AUT Online with the production requirements of the school's publications

- Breaking down the silo barriers between print, radio, TV and online through the application of latest research and thinking about convergence

- Creating and managing the 'One Big Newsroom' (Journalism, Radio & TV and Online students)

Conclusion

Convergence is both a technical and a social issue. It can not be well understood if it only theorised as a technological form – this way lies a 'determinist' dead end. Instead it has to be understood using the analytical tools of political economy, the sociology of news, audience studies and (dare I mention) cultural studies. When understood in this transdisciplinary way, it become much easier to reconfigure the curriculum into something that will be forward looking and engaging for students, not dependent on out-dated paradigms (such as 'four theories of the press').

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