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From Campus to Newsroom in the South Pacific: Credible Media Career Paths Versus 'Academic Anaemia'

Research Paper:

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Abstract

The University of the South Pacific's Regional Journalism Programme, which caters for 12 member countries¹ from the Cook Islands in the east to the Solomon Islands in the west, was founded in 1994 with French Government aid. It began producing double major graduate journalists for the South Pacific from 1996. Two-thirds of the graduates live and work in Fiji. While some news media organisations in Fiji have generally recruited graduates, others have preferred to hire untrained school leavers. Parallel with draft legislation designed to turn the self-regulating Fiji Media Council into a statutory body, there have been public calls for higher media standards and more professional training and education. This article explores the career attitudes and destination of the university's 68 journalism graduates between 1996 and 2002 based on empirical data from a five-year monitoring project that started in 1998. It also examines the policies of the Fiji media industry towards graduates and education.

Introduction

The high level of tertiary qualifications and education of journalists in countries such as Australia, France, New Zealand and the United States (all of which have had considerable influence on the region's media) has fuelled debates in recent years about the quality of journalists in the Pacific and their education. Fiji Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, for example, is among several politicians who have derided Pacific journalists as 'uncertain interviewers, poor verbal communicators [and who] have problems with accuracy' (Qarase, 2001). This contrasts with the region's developed neighbours.

At a time when Australian and New Zealand journalists were still largely trained on-the-job in newsrooms, Papua New Guinea introduced the first university journalism course in the Pacific in 1975. Since then, a generation of journalists has been educated mainly at the University of Papua New Guinea (Henshall, 1997: 32-39; Layton, 1995: 137; Robie, 2003a: 199-238). Journalism education in Fiji and the eastern Pacific developed rather belatedly with the regional University of the South Pacific (USP) introducing a certificate course in 1987-1991 (Masterton, 1989, 1988) followed by a separate degree programme in 1994 (Robie, 2003a: 261-314). In Fiji fewer than half (49 per cent) of working journalists have formal training or qualifications (Robie, 2003a: 338, 1999: 183).

According to Geoff Lealand (1998: 113), who conducted three New Zealand media industry surveys in 1987, 1994 and 2003,² journalists in that country have changed from the previous British 'craft' model; they are now well educated, with nearly two-thirds of journalists participating in the latter survey having 'gained some tertiary (college) level education'. The 1994 survey found that more than one third of journalists (37 per cent) had completed an undergraduate degree in the humanities or social sciences (Lealand, 1998: 113). Seven per cent had also completed postgraduate studies. New Zealand's three main journalism schools are now also based at universities.

Like New Zealand, Australia has a media culture modelled on Britain, although in the past decade it has become increasingly similar to the United States model (Henningham, 1998a: 91). By the 1990s, 35 per cent of Australian journalists had a degree, while a further four per cent had a diploma (Henningham, 1998b: 336) and media education was focused on the country's 22 university-based journalism schools (O'Donnell, 2001).

In France, more than 62 per cent of journalists have a degree (McMane, 1998: 196). The French system is highly influential in New Caledonia and French Polynesia in the South Pacific, overseas territories with comparatively strong news media industries. Also, the French Government funded the first four establishment years of the USP degree journalism course from 1994 and a leading French journalism school, *l'École Supérieure de Journalisme de Lille* (ESJ), assisted with developing the curriculum.

In the United States, according to Betty Medsger in a research report commissioned by the Freedom Forum, journalists are now the most educated in history — at least 94 per cent of those with one to 11 years' experience have degrees (1996: 7-8). And

in Papua New Guinea, some 81 per cent of journalists have a degree or diploma (Robie, 2003a: 338).

While some news media organisations in Fiji have often recruited graduates, others have preferred to hire untrained school leavers (Keith-Reid, 2000: 10). The Pacific media industry has provided some short course training schemes (Hooper, 1998: 4-22; Ratulele, 1999: 121-126), but the USP programme has the only comprehensive regional vocational and educational strategy outside of Papua New Guinea (Robie, 1999: 179). During 2003, parallel to controversial draft legislation designed to turn the self-regulating Fiji Media Council into a statutory body, there have been public calls for higher media standards and more professional training and education. This article explores the career attitudes and destination of the university's 68 journalism graduates between 1996 and 2003. It is based on empirical data from a five-year monitoring project that began in 1998. It also examines the policies of the Fiji media industry towards graduates and journalism education.

Context

When the draft *Media Council of Fiji Bill 2003* was made public on 4 May 2003, the Fiji Government justified it on the basis of what it claimed to be poor local standards. Information Minister Simione Kaitani accused local journalists of being biased and ill-informed, and the self-regulating Fiji Media Council of being powerless to protect the public from media transgressions (Kaitani, 2003a). The Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase, was even more scathing in his speech during the launching of a regional news website in January 2001. Qarase, who headed a military-appointed interim regime in the wake of the May 2000 putsch at the time, said:

They are uncertain interviewers, poor verbal communicators, have problems with accuracy and are short on knowledge of current affairs. The result [of poor standards] is that coverage sometimes compromises the ideals of a free press (Qarase, 2001).

Qarase's strong criticism was the second time in 16 months that a Fiji prime minister had condemned the country's media during media industry functions. In October 1999, the first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, lambasted the media at the launch of a Fiji Media Council code of ethics, singling out *The Fiji Times*, Fiji Television and *Islands Business* for particularly scathing attacks. Chaudhry accused the media of 'blurring facts, conjecture and opinion to create a certain desired effect'. He threatened to establish a 'swift justice' media tribunal and legislation to curb what he branded a 'distorting' and 'lying' news media (Chaudhry, 1999: 6-10).

Chaudhry cautioned the media against reports that could incite racial ill-will in a plural society. However, six months after he made the speech, on 19 May 2000, Chaudhry and his Labour-led Government were seized by businessman George Speight and a squad of renegade Fiji special forces soldiers and held hostage. The media has rejected claims of reckless reporting, saying it is merely the messenger and that a government's longevity depends on its performance.

Some critics, such as the Attorney-General, Qoriniasi Bale, disagree. Bale, who drafted the *Media Council of Fiji Bill*, told an editors' forum in Suva in May 2003

(Bale, 2003) that the quality of media reporting was poor enough to harm individuals and governments. Bale's statement perhaps explains his Government's haste to table the bill.

Commentators such as USP journalism lecturer Shailendra Singh (2002a) argue that media control rather than media standards is the Government's real agenda, noting the media exposure over some massive financial scams (Singh, 2002b).³ But Singh acknowledged that complaints against the media could not be dismissed out of hand, and that a decline in standards had strengthened the Government's argument for media legislation. The results of a *Fiji Times*-commissioned Tebbutt opinion poll in 2003, covering a sample of 1005 people across the country, reflected public perceptions of the media. In the survey, 22 per cent of respondents favoured 'a lot' of Government media control, 49 per cent supported 'a little control' and 29 per cent disapproved any Government control (Support for media control, 2002). Kaitani (2003b) cited the survey results as justification for a new media bill.

The Media Council of Fiji Bill

The Government claims that the draft *Media Council of Fiji Bill 2003* was based on and embodied the spirit of the 1996 Thomson Foundation report, prepared by two British consultants for the post-coup Rabuka regime in 1996 (Morgan & Thomas, 1996). In fact, the proposed bill is fundamentally different from the Thomson Report, which recommended an independent, self-regulating media council free from government influence (Robie, 2003b: 106-109; 2003c). The new bill calls for the dissolution of the self-regulatory Media Council and for it to be replaced by a statutory Media Council of Fiji to 'regulate the content or conduct' of print and broadcast media.

The Information Minister would be empowered to appoint the chairman and an equal number of members to those from each media outlet on the proposed new council (eight organisations are members at present).⁴ The Complaints Committee, which currently only holds hearings when a formal, written complaint is received, would be conferred with additional powers to initiate consideration of 'matters of public concern relating to any breach of the code'. A conviction and fines of up to F\$2000 is recommended for failure to appear before the Appeals Committee or the Complaints Committee (*Media Council of Fiji Bill*, 2003: 5-9).

Figure 1: *Fiji Times* report on 'draconian' Media Bill, 13 May 2003.



The Fiji media campaigned strongly against the bill. Opposition parties and civil society organisations such as the Fiji Council of Churches, Fiji Teachers Union, the Disabled People's Association and Hindu religious organisations supported the campaign. Most of the 20 public submissions received by the Information Ministry argued for a media independent of any undue Government control. Many letters to the editor in the three national daily newspapers, *Daily Post*, *Fiji Sun* and *The Fiji Times*, reflected similar sentiments. One contributor, Dr Mary Schramm, attacked the bill as an 'astonishingly inept and opaque document' that could lead to manipulation by governments of freedom of expression (Schramm, 2003: 6). The intensity of the campaign provoked Kaitani (2003b) to complain in Parliament about being

crucified afresh with my pound of flesh sought after by certain sections of our media outlets over the proposed media bill (Kaitani, 2003b).

Even then, Kaitani's announcement on 1 January 2004 that he would recommend that the bill be discarded came as a surprise. Kaitani said he still wanted an independent media council comprising people outside the media industry: 'Right now this organisation is a fully funded, self-serving institution that would not really help in keeping the media in line' (*Kaitani to dump media bill*, 2004).

When a new publisher of the *Fiji Sun*, Michael Richards, took up the job in September 2002, he noted that few journalists were trained properly — 'most simply learn from their colleagues and superiors, who in turn learned from their colleagues and superiors' (*Sun looks abroad for skills, mentors*, 2002). The effectiveness of the Fiji Media Council has also been questioned (Naidu, 2001; Robie, 2003b: 109-114). Dr Schramm (2003: 6) said the council needed to be more transparent and proactive in publishing breaches of the media code of ethics and in education.

Media standards and ethics were also examined at a Fiji Media Council-organised editors' forum in May 2003. A former minister in the deposed Labour government, Lavenia Padarath (2003), said standards had 'gone down the drain'. She accused media companies of hiring lowly paid, untrained school-leavers who then called themselves journalists the next day. Opposition MP Ofa Swann (2002) made a plea in Parliament for an 'urgent review' of salary and working conditions of journalists in Fiji. The Fiji Media Watch president, Father Larry Hannan, said journalism in the South Pacific would not improve unless working conditions — including pay — were improved (*Fiji Media Watch head calls for better pay, advocacy*, 2003).

Methodology

The University of the South Pacific (USP) is owned and operated on behalf of 12 island nations: Cook Islands, Fiji Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The other regional university is the University of the West Indies. USP has three campuses and five schools in the Fiji Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu, seven institutes, the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture and the Pacific Institute for Advanced Studies in Development and Governance, and through its 12 regional centres maintains an active presence in all member countries. The university has the youngest degree-based journalism school in the region. Founded in 1994, it followed the University of Papua New Guinea (1975) and Divine Word University (1982), also in PNG, at Madang. But the

USP programme has the most diverse spread of regional and international journalism students in the Pacific.

The USP programme provides regular radio broadcasting (Radio Pasifik), website news (*Wansolwara Online* and *Pacific Journalism Online* www.usp.ac.fj/journ/), newspaper publishing (*Wansolwara* and *Spicol Daily*), and television news bulletins (*WansolVisin*) (see Cass, 2002: 559-574; Robie, 1999: 194-196). By the end of 2002, USP had produced 68 journalism graduates, 62 of them in the previous five years. It has also won a string of media awards (*Ossies recognise promising talent of the future*, 2001). Nevertheless, at times some media industry executives have criticised journalism education. Critics have included veteran Fiji publisher Robert Keith-Reid who proclaimed in an editorial:

The trouble with today's academic training for journalists, as the USP effort is starting to show, is that it can produce not journalists but academic anaemics, far removed from the real world (Keith-Reid, 2000: 10).

Such remarks, usually prompted by pressure on the industry by graduates for higher pay for qualifications and skills, highlighted the need for research about the Fiji-based news media and the training of journalists. Such research has been limited in the past, with previous surveys by Vusoniwailala, (1976), Wakavonovono (1981) and Devi (1992) focusing on social-cultural influences and alleged political bias. No serious empirical research on Fiji newsrooms and journalists comparable with Phinney (1985) in Papua New Guinea or Masterton (1988, 1989) and Layton (1993, 1998) in the region was completed until Robie (1999, 2003a).

This paper summarises the findings of a USP monitoring project that evaluated the progress of graduating journalists between 1998-2002. The project involved each graduating student being given a self-administered questionnaire. The response rate was 64.5 per cent over the five-year period that began in 1998. Table 1 shows the response rates for each year covered by the survey. The first six journalism degree graduates at USP in 1996 and 1997 were outside this monitoring period. However, where statistical information has been available from the USP administration (such as majors), this has also been included in the survey where appropriate. The research also continued during 2003 and is expected to be an ongoing project at USP.

Table 1: USP journalism graduates and response rate, 1996-2002

Year	1996*	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total**
Total	(3)	(3)	13	9	15	14	11	62
Respondents	na	na	12	5	12	7	4	40
Response percentage	na	na	92%	55.6%	80%	50%	36.4%	64.5%

* USP graduates in 1996 and 1997 were not directly included in this survey.

** This total includes 1998-2002 graduates only. The total number of USP journalism graduates since the programme began in 1994 until 2002 was 68, including 10 diplomates in Pacific Journalism.

Findings

Age and gender:

As Table 2 shows, journalism graduates at USP between 2000 and 2003 had a mean age of 22.5. Surprisingly perhaps, this was not much lower than that of actual newsrooms in Fiji (24.7) during 2001 (Robie, 2003a: 333). A large cluster of 20 to 21-year-olds (39.2 percent) was offset by mature age students, one of whom was aged 42. Eight graduates were aged 27 or higher. Overall, between 1996 and 2002 almost two-thirds of the USP graduates were females (63.2 per cent) with the highest difference in 2000 when 12 of the 15 graduates (80 per cent) were women.

Table 2: South Pacific (USP) journalism graduates by age, 1998-2002

Year	1998*	1999*	2000	2001	2002	Total	%
Under 20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
20-21	0	0	7	2	0	9	39.2
22-23	0	0	1	1	2	4	17.4
24-25	0	0	0	2	0	2	8.7
26-27	0	0	1	1	1	3	13.1
28-29	0	0	1	0	1	2	8.7
30-31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
32-33	0	0	1	0	0	1	4.3
34-35	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
36-37	0	0	1	0	0	1	4.3
38-39	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
40-41	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
42	0	0	1	0	0	1	4.3
Total	0	0	12	7	4	23	100
Mean age						22.5	

* USP graduates did not provide this information in 1998-9.

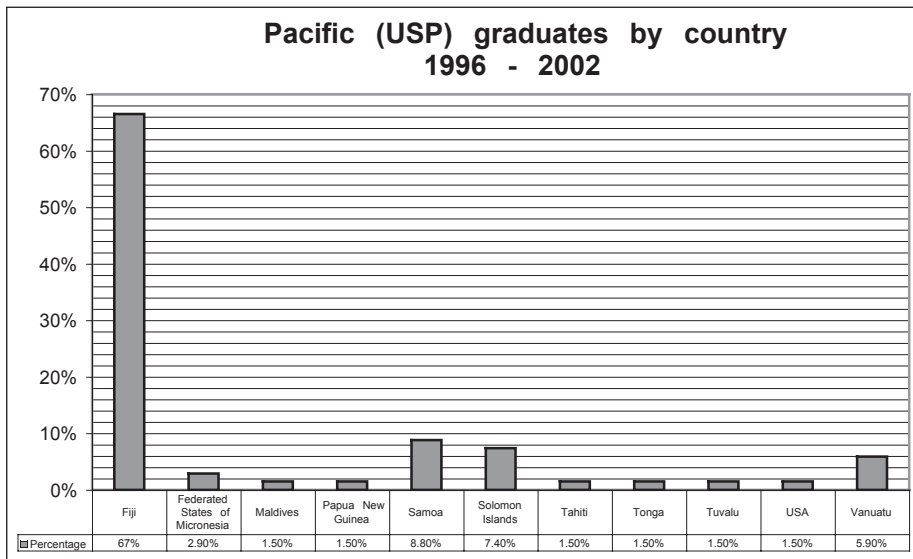
Country:

The spread of graduate journalists by the end of 2002, as Table 3 and Graph 1 show, was from 11 countries and territories, including the Maldives, Papua New Guinea, Tahiti and the United States — all four outside the USP membership zone. The programme has also attracted other students from abroad, including Australia, Germany and Nigeria. More than 66 per cent of USP journalism graduates came from Fiji, with the next largest groups being from Samoa (8.8 per cent), Solomon Islands (7.4 per cent) and Vanuatu (5.9 per cent).

Table 3: South Pacific (USP) journalism graduates by country, 1996-2002

Country	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total	%
Fiji	3	2	8	4	13	10	5	44	66.2
FSM	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2.9
Maldives	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1.5
PNG	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1.5
Samoa	0	0	1	0	0	3	2	6	8.8
Solomon Is	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	5	7.4
Tahiti	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1.5
Tonga	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1.5
Tuvalu	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1.5
USA	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1.5
Vanuatu	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	4	5.9
Total	3	3	13	9	15	14	7	68	100

Graph 1: South Pacific (USP) journalism graduates by country, 1996-2002



Major:

Most graduates — 83.9 per cent — preferred the BA degree programme with a double major, although industry journalists mainly chose the two-year Diploma in Pacific Journalism, which was introduced in 1998. Table 4 shows that 46.2 per cent of the respondents preferred history/politics as the second major. Statistically significant groups opted for literature and language (13.5 per cent), sociology (7.7 per cent) and tourism studies (5.8 per cent) as second majors.

The five to one ratio of graduates studying history/politics compared with language and literature is significant given that the latter is the home department for journalism in the School of Humanities while the history/politics department is situated in the School of Social and Economic Development. This pattern may be changing as the

2002 journalism student intake included a significantly higher number of literature and language students. Other popular options were economics, information systems, law, linguistics, and management and public administration. Two graduates who completed the diploma — both from Fiji — later returned to USP in 2003 to continue studies towards their BA degrees.

Table 4: South Pacific (USP) journalism graduates by major, 1998-2002

	1998 n=13	1999 n=9	2000 n=15	2001 n=13	2002 n=11	Total n=62	%
1 Diploma in Pacific Journalism	2	3	1	3	1	10	16.1
2 BA Journalism major	11	6	14	11	10	52	83.9
3 Second major:							
* Economics	0	0	1	0	1	2	3.8
* Geography	0	0	0	0	1	1	1.9
* History/Politics	6	3	6	5	3	24	46.2
* Information systems	1	0	0	0	0	1	1.9
* Law	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.9
* Literature and language	2	1	2	0	2	5	13.5
* Linguistics	1	0	0	0	0	1	1.9
* Management & public administration	1	1	0	0	0	2	3.8
* Sociology	0	0	1	0	3	4	7.7
* Tourism studies	0	0	2	1	0	3	5.8
4 No information	0	1	2	5	0	8	13.5
BA total	11	6	14	11	10	52	100

Preferred media:

The preferred media choice by graduates was fairly wide-ranging, reflecting the multidisciplinary approach of the USP journalism programme. Table 5 shows that within this range, radio was the most popular career choice with almost one in five graduates (19 per cent) choosing this option. Newspapers (11.7 per cent), civil society media and television (both 10.7 per cent), and government media (8.8 per cent) were the next most preferred choices.

Although new media was a key component of the USP programme after 1998, only 2.9 per cent of graduates chose this career option — probably reflecting the fact that few opportunities were available in the media industry (compared with USP's own *Wansolwara Online* news website. More than 75 per cent of the surveyed USP student journalists have gone into news media jobs at graduation.

The breakdown of actual jobs taken up by them is shown in Table 6. It shows a diverse range of media positions with some 29 employers in nine countries. The *Fiji Daily Post* led the employing organisation list with (7.6 per cent of all graduates ending there). This was followed by the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (6.2 per cent), Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (4.5 per cent), Fiji Television (4.5 per cent) and Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation (4.5 per cent).

Table 5: South Pacific (USP) journalism graduates by preferred media, 1996-2002

	1996 n=3	1997 n=3	1998 n=13	1999 n=9	2000 n=15	2001 n=14	2002 n=11	Total n=68	%
1 Newspapers	0	0	2	1	1	3	1	8	11.7
2 Magazines	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	4.4
3 News agencies:	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	2.9
4 Online media	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	2.9
5 Radio	1	1	3	4	2	2	0	13	19
6 Television	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	7	10.7
7 Information ministries	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	3	4.4
8 Government media	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	6	8.8
9 Civil society (NGO) media	0	1	2	1	2	1	0	7	10.7
10 Non media work	2	0	1	0	2	0	0	5	7.4
11 Not known	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	7	17.5
Total	3	3	13	9	15	14	11	68	100

Table 6: South Pacific (USP) journalism graduates by actual jobs, 1996-2002

Communications Fiji Ltd	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	2.9
Fiji Agriculture Ministry	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	3	4.5
Fiji Broadcasting Corp.	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	3	4.5
Fiji Daily Post	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	5	7.6
Fiji Education Ministry (media)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1.5
Fiji Human Rights Commission	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1.5
Fiji Information Ministry	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	2.9
Fiji Police Force (media)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.5
Fiji Public Service Commission	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1.5
Fiji Sun	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	2.9
Fiji Television	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	4.5
Fiji Times	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1.5
Islands Business	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	4.5
Media Centre, College of Micronesia (FSM)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1.5
Media officer, USP Book Centre	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1.5
Pacific News Bulletin (Fiji)	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	2.9
Pacnews (Fiji)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.5
Radio Australia	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.5
Radio Kalang FM (PNG)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1.5
Radio Tefana (Tahiti)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1.5
Savali'I (Samoa)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1.5
Solomon Is Broadcasting Corp.	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	4	6.2
Solomon Star	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1.5

Table continues next page

Table 6: (continued)

	1996 n=3	1997 n=3	1998 n=13	1999 n=9	2000 n=15	2001 n=14	2002 n=11	Total n=68	%
Taumu'a Lelei (Tonga)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1.5
Televise Samoa	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	2.9
The Review (Fiji)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1.5
Tuvalu Broadcasting	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1.5
USP Bulletin/USP Beat (Fiji)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	2.9
V6AH Radio (FSM)	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.5
Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corp.	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	3	4.5
Vanuatu Daily Post	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1.5
Non-media work	2	0	1	0	2	0	0	5	8.9
Not known	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	7	8.9
Total	3	3	13	9	15	14	11	68	100

Salary expectations:

Salary expectation results, given in Table 7, show that one in four journalism graduates expected a salary of between F\$10,000 and F\$15,000 a year upon joining the media industry. However, a further 15 per cent expected considerably more, ranging up to F\$30,000 a year. In reality, one graduate, in fact, gained a salary in this range in non-government media in 1998. While F\$15,000 a year may be comparable to graduates in other disciplines in Fiji, this is perhaps unrealistically high when compared with actual media industry salaries. In June 2002, USP's journalism student training newspaper, *Wansolwara*, published a survey of journalists' salaries. Reporter Joe Yaya concluded that younger Fiji journalists were being paid 'poverty-line' salaries (Yaya, 2002: 13).

Table 7: South Pacific (USP) journalism graduates' salary expectations, 1998-2002

	1998 n=12	1999 n=5	2000 n=12	2001 n=7	2002 n=4	Total n=40	%
1 F\$5000-\$8000	0	3	0	2	0	5	12.5
2 \$8001-\$10,000	2	1	4	1	0	8	20
3 \$10,001-\$15,000	1	1	6	2	0	10	25
4 \$15,001-\$20,000	1	0	0	0	0	1	2.5
5 \$20,001-\$25,000	1	0	0	1	0	2	5
6 \$25,001-\$30,000	1	0	1	0	0	2	5
7 More than \$30,000	1	0	0	0	0	1	2.5
8 No response	3	0	1	1	4	9	27.5
Total	12	5	12	7	4	40	100

Former USP journalism coordinator David Robie, as part of his doctoral research on South Pacific journalism education (2003a: 351), supported Yaya's findings. In his 2001 survey of 43 journalists in Fiji newsrooms, Robie found there was a mean salary of F\$13,000 a year while salaries and working conditions 'stirred many

strong and bitter comments' from respondents.⁵ Overall, for example, 46 per cent of surveyed Fiji journalists were earning between F\$5,000 and F\$10,000.

Sponsorship:

More than three out of four USP journalism students have some form of sponsorship, mostly from governments or ministries. Only 22.6 per cent of students were privately funded between 1998 and 2002. The major donor for student scholarships has been the Fijian Affairs Board (14.6 per cent), followed by French Embassy media scholarships (11.4 per cent), New Zealand Overseas Aid and the Samoan Government (both on 9.7 per cent). Other significant donors have included Fiji Multi-ethnic Affairs scholarships, Fiji Public Service Commission, Pacific Media Initiative (Ausaid) and the Solomon Islands Government. Significantly, no media organisation features high among the donors.

Table 8: South Pacific (USP) journalism graduates by scholarship, 1998-2002

	1998 n=13	1999 n=9	2000 n=15	2001 n=14	2002 n=11	Total n=62	%
1 Ausaid	1	1	0	0	1	2	3.2
2 Fijian Affairs Board (FAB)	2	1	2	3	0	8	14.6
3 Fiji Multi-ethnic Affairs Scholarship	1	0	1	1	0	3	4.8
4 Fiji Police Department	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.6
5 Fiji Public Service Commission	0	1	1	0	1	3	4.8
6 Fiji Times	0	0	0	0	1	1	1.6
7 French Embassy USP Media School.	0	0	3	3	1	7	11.4
8 Federated States of Micronesia Government	1	1	0	0	0	2	3.2
9 Maldives Government	0	0	0	0	1	1	1.6
10 NZ Overseas Development Aid	2	2	1	0	1	6	9.7
11 PNG Government (USP/UPNG exchange)	0	1	0	0	0	1	1.6
12 PMI (Ausaid Pacific Media Initiative)	0	0	1	1	1	3	4.8
13 Private student	4	2	4	3	1	14	22.6
14 Rabi Council Scholarship	0	0	0	0	1	1	1.6
15 Samoan Government	1	0	0	3	2	6	9.7
16 Solomon Islands Government	1	0	1	0	0	2	3.2
Total	13	9	15	14	11	62	100

Training:

Table 9 provides the graduates' views on training. Perhaps not surprisingly, almost two-thirds of the surveyed graduate journalists favoured being educated at a university-based journalism school with a media industry internship. Behind this group (60.8 per cent) came a second large section (39.2 per cent) who supported a combination of cadetship with university education. Many in this second group had worked in the media industry before commencing their journalism studies at USP.

Nobody opted for the other two choices, being recruited as school leavers with on-the-job training, or being educated at a journalism school with no internship. This is very different from the reality in the Fiji media industry where 49 per cent of journalists have received no formal training or have no qualification in journalism (Robie, 2003a: 338).

Many of the respondents were highly critical of media industry attitudes towards graduates, believing that they were being discriminated against when they spent two or three years of their life getting a formal journalism qualification yet were paid the same starting salary as an untrained school leaver. Of the surveyed graduates, 78.6 per cent believed they should be paid an extra starting salary margin over untrained staff. The balance of 21.4 per cent believed that three years should be taken off their 'cadetship', a moot point given that few, if any, Fiji media organisations now continue with genuine cadetship schemes.

Table 9: South Pacific (USP) journalism graduates' view on training, 1998-2002.

	1998 na*	1999 n=5	2000 n=12	2001 n=7	2002 n=4	Total n=28	%
1 Recruited as school leavers, on-the-job training	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2 Educated at university J-school, no media internship	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3 Educated at university J-school, with media internship	0	3	5	6	3	17	60.8
4 Combination cadetship/university education	0	2	7	1	1	11	39.2
5 No response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	5	12	7	4	28	100

* This question was not asked in 1998, so the group of 13 students was excluded from the calculation.

Perceived media role

Graduates were asked about their perceptions of the media role to gauge their knowledge of 'Fourth Estate' concepts in the developing world, based on a set of choices used by Romano (1998: 75) in her normative research into the Indonesian news media. The choices were also related to media values as discussed by Hester (1987: 8-11) and Robie (2001: 13). Interestingly, as Table 10 shows, the highest response was in support of the 'watchdog' role (30.8 per cent). But this was well below Romano's findings where 51 per cent of her Indonesian sample regarded the watchdog notion as most important. Strong support in the USP sample was also given to 'defender of the truth' (26.9 per cent) and community empowerment (16.6 per cent) functions. In contrast, both entertainment and advertising rated just 2.6 per cent support. Surprisingly, given the traditional interest in Pacific sport and the extensive coverage in regional media, none of the graduates opted for sport as an important media role.

The respondents were also questioned about journalist role models in the Pacific and the largest group (11.4 per cent) favoured a prominent Fiji Television journalist,

Riyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, who since the survey has joined the New Zealand television programme *Asia Down Under*. Comments included:

“His delivery and style of reporting is inspiring. He is prepared to go the distance.”

“He is very transparent – very well spoken. [He] asks questions without fear. Does a lot of research.”

Among other cited role models were Lisa Leilani Williams, of the Cook Islands; Nemani Delaibatiki (a former *Fiji Daily Post* editor who now lives in New Zealand) and Fiji’s Rebecca Singh, who now works with an independent NZ television production company.

Table 10: South Pacific (USP) journalism graduates by perceived media role, 1998-2002

	1998 na*	1999 n=5	2000 n=12	2001 n=7	2002 n=4	Total n=28	%
1 Watchdog	-	4	12	8	0	24	30.8
2 Defender of truth	-	4	9	8	0	21	26.9
3 Community empowerment	-	2	6	5	0	13	16.6
4 Nation builder	-	2	5	3	0	10	12.8
5 Entertainment	-	0	2	0	0	2	2.6
6 Advertising	-		2	0	0	2	2.6
7 Sports coverage	-	0	0	0	0	0	0
8 Other (specify)	-	0	0	0	0	0	0
9 No response	-	1	0	1	4	6	7.7
Total	-	13	36	25	4	78	100

* This question was not asked in 1998, so the group of 12 students was excluded for the calculation. The question sought multiple answers with up to three options. Percentages calculated on the 78 choices from 28 respondents.

Conclusion

While politicians and civic leaders continue to debate the quality of journalists and their lack of qualifications in Fiji, clearly the regional university has contributed significantly to journalism education in the South Pacific by producing some 68 graduates in the seven years since it started. As well as being taught essential journalism skills, these degree graduates have analytical minds and a double major in another discipline such as history/politics, literature, economics and sociology. With these new media entrants (some are in fact old hands who have upgraded their qualifications), Fiji has benefited most by accounting for almost 67 per cent of the graduates. More than 75 per cent of USP’s journalism graduates have taken jobs within the media industry after leaving university. They have been employed by 29 media organisations in nine countries.

But the reality is that graduates often eventually choose other better-paid career options after they leave campus. Some do not see the Fiji media industry as a serious career future because of its failure to change and treat education seriously. The pay issue remains contentious, although executives of three major Fiji media

organisations have rejected suggestions that the rate of pay impacted on the quality of its journalists (*News chiefs reject pay as media quality issue*, 2003). At a forum organised by Fiji Media Watch in Suva, *Fiji Times* publisher Tony Yianni argued that committed journalists would go the extra mile and not mind the amount in his or her pay packet. His views were supported by *Fiji One News* director Netani Rika and the *Fiji Broadcasting Corporation's* news editor, Matai Akauola. Akauola also told the forum that university graduates were not particularly preferred because of their tendency to leave the media industry.

It is not only the Government, but some sections of the Fiji public that also believe media standards have fallen and need to be improved. It is this public perception that the Government used to justify introduction of the media bill. While Information Minister Kaitani says he will recommend that the bill be shelved, he claimed the media, in return, would need to clean up its act, and that the Fiji Media Council should be revamped and turned into a more effective regulatory body. Elsewhere in the Pacific — notably Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Tonga — the media has faced political and legislative threats similar to those in Fiji.

In the Fiji context, there appears to be community dissatisfaction with media standards. But this is overridden by public desire to have a free media. This caused the Government to back off for the moment. Although the threat is not over — media freedom can never be guaranteed — it is an ongoing struggle. Public patience and goodwill is likely to erode if the media does not take this development as a wake-up call to improve standards, which should start with better working conditions and providing more training for journalists, and greater recognition for the graduates.

With this, not only will standards improve, but also Pacific journalism would become a viable career option. This would not only prompt people to take it up as an academic course, but more journalism graduates would join the profession instead of working in government ministries or in public relations. The profession would be competitive in attracting the brightest and the best instead of desperate school leavers willing to grab any job opportunity regardless of pay.

In essence, the Fiji case study is a good example of how media can become its own worst enemy by failing to commit sufficiently to training and improving standards, thus giving the Government an excuse to introduce harsh legislation. The ball is now in the court of the Fiji news media — and other Pacific media. It should not be left to those with political and vested interests who want the media under tighter control.

Endnotes

¹ The 12 USP member countries are: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

² These were commissioned by the NZ Journalists Training Organisation (NZJTO).

³ The Rabuka Government was under pressure over a National Bank of Fiji loans scam involving more than F\$250 million, while the Qarase Government faced an Agriculture Ministry scam, amounting to several million dollars. Chaudhry, as Prime Minister was under

media pressure in 1999 after state money was used to renovate his private property to improve security.

⁴ The eight member organisations of the Fiji Media Council: Associated Media Ltd, Communications Fiji Ltd, Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Ltd, Fiji Daily Post Ltd, Fiji Television Ltd, Fiji Times Ltd, Sun (Fiji) News Ltd, and the University of the South Pacific (Journalism Programme).

⁵ The mean annual salary or wages of F\$13,000 is equivalent to A\$9,620, calculated at the Universal Currency Conversion website www.xe.com — F\$1 is equivalent to A\$0.74 as at 11 January 2004.

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