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Editorial: In this issue

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Industry relevance of tertiary journalism courses

The relationship between tertiary-level journalism courses and media employers is lively but not always cordial. Questions are regularly raised by both sides about whether journalism courses are relevant to the media industry and what employment outcomes students can expect from enrolling in journalism programs. Industry and educational figures frequently engage in debates about the appropriate balance between theoretical and vocational content in journalism courses, whether the graduates should aim to be generalists or specialists, and the degree and range of competence that students should have achieved at graduation.

Such discussions point to the desire of media industry employers to have a steady supply of graduates who are either job ready or require a minimum of training to become fast, efficient and reliable news gatherers and reporters or to progress, usually later in their careers, to jobs as producers and editors. However, unlike medical practices or law firms, which only accept graduates from their specific disciplines, media organisations hire journalists with degrees in other disciplines without particular favour for journalism graduates. Thus, media industry employers and professional associations can influence but not dictate the contents of journalism courses in the way that employers in the traditional professions do. Even if journalism educators were to seek to satisfy media-industry needs the need to serve many markets pose a dilemma. The requirements of country or community media are different to those of big-city media, which differ again from those of specialist media, in-house media, international news agencies and the numerous other potential employers of journalism graduates.

A more fundamental issue is that the primary clients of journalism educators are the students, not their future employers. With statistics suggesting that more than 60 per cent of Australian journalism graduates find jobs outside mainstream news organisations, journalism educators need to provide students with intellectually stimulating material that (i) maximises their chances of finding work within the mainstream media and (ii) helps those who do not want or cannot find such jobs to attain

satisfying careers with other employers who may value the skills, insights and critical capacities taught in journalism programs.

The papers in this issue of *Asia Pacific Media Educator* address various questions about the relevance and outcomes of tertiary-level journalism education. Our contributors focus on the specific needs of suburban and rural news organisations, which arguably hire more journalism graduates than their big-city cousins. Josie Vine discusses the substantial difference in the news values of Australian rural newspapers compared to those of the metropolitan media. Frank Morgan, Kathryn Barton and Bryce McIntyre talk about the cultures and operations of suburban newspapers in Australia and Hong Kong. Rod Kirkpatrick attempts to differentiate between country and metropolitan newspaper reporting with its concomitant media values. Tom Dickson provides an overview of the industry-academia debate on the ideals of journalism education in the United States. Jane Cafarella and John Herbert argue that most journalism courses serve the needs of metropolitan media. They describe tertiary and in-house training courses that have been designed to provide the specific skills and capabilities needed by non-metropolitan newspapers. Elizabeth Hart suggests ways in which tertiary journalism courses and in-house training can lift the standards of rural newspapers.

Other authors look at related issues of graduate outcomes. Barbara Alysen's paper views the hiring practices of major metropolitan media organisations in Victoria. Lynette Simons surveys the radio training programs of Australia's Special Broadcasting Service. Finally, Matthew Ricketson's paper asks a pertinent question that brings all of these papers together – how do journalism educators prepare their students for such a wide range of jobs?

In the Research Notes, Brian Massey and Sankaran Ramanathan report on the profile of Asian journalists reporting on environmental issues; Mark Deuze looks at the integration of multicultural reporting in journalism programs in Australia, the Netherlands and the United States; and David Robie examines the Fijian press coverage of the new Coalition government's year in office.

A.R. & E.L.