

1-1997

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Recommended Citation

Robie, D., Electronic student newspaper: 'Uni Tavor' and pedagogy of experience, *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 2, 1997, 121-126.

Available at:<https://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss2/15>

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Electronic Student Newspaper: 'Uni Tavour' And Pedagogy Of Experience

A 20 year-old South Pacific journalism education program has spawned the only training newspaper of its kind, Uni Tavour in the region. After being redesigned as a desktop publishing venture in 1993, two years later it was relaunched as a professional tabloid. Now, after the debut of the paper's Internet online edition and an email news service, this article makes a case for the pedagogy of experience -- integrated learning combining theory and skills in the newsroom.

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The University of Papua New Guinea has made a significant and valuable contribution to tertiary journalism education throughout the South Pacific for the past two decades. It has produced more than 150 graduates in that time, many of them in leading positions in the news media in several Pacific countries today. Four out of the five current editors and news editors of the national media organisations in Papua New Guinea are former UPNG graduates.

According to recent research, 68 per cent of Papua New Guinean journalists have a tertiary qualification contrasting with other Pacific countries such as Fiji which has just 16 per cent.¹ The university has also produced most of the region's journalism education texts and manuals, including a three-volume News Manual² in 1992 and more recently *Nius Bilong Pasifik: Mass Media in the Pacific*.³

Print journalism at the university's new South Pacific Centre for Communication and Information in Development (SPCenCIID) has undergone dramatic changes in less than four years. At the beginning of 1993, the centre possessed just a pile of rusting typewriters and students wrote their news stories in longhand. Two Macintosh Classic computers along with limited PageMaker desktop publishing software were donated by the Ministry of Communication and Information. At the time, the

©AsiaPacific
MediaEducator
Issue No.2
Jan-June 1997

journalism training newsletter *Uni Tavour* was a modest A4 format printed on canary yellow paper with no photographs. Throughout 1993 and 1994, the newsletter was consolidated as a professional publication. The A4 format was retained because this was the only option available while printing at the University Printery: an operation that took two days for a print run of 1500.

A three-pronged plan to turn *Uni Tavour* into a highly competitive and professional newspaper along the "community newspaper" lines of several overseas countries was introduced in 1994. Advertising space was sold to cover printing and production costs, the paper was distributed free through news agencies and a photographic production house and dispatched for a modest subscription fee by airmail throughout the region.

A local network was established for the dozen computers in the desktop publishing program involved in producing the newspaper. This was followed with a design revamp of *Uni Tavour* at the end of 1994 in preparation for a relaunch as a tabloid newspaper. In February 1995, with support from a national daily newspaper, *Uni Tavour* made the transition to publishing as a tabloid. As a commitment to the training of the country's future journalists, the *Post-Courier* agreed to print the paper at cost. The first edition of the new-look paper came out on 23 February 1995. It now has a circulation of 2000.⁴

In June 1995, *Uni Tavour* won an award for the best community/student newspaper in the Pacific Media Awards.⁵ The paper also won the 1995 Ossie Award for best student journalism publication.

Newsroom Methodology

The newspaper characterises the integrated learning journalism programme adopted at UPNG. The "liberal-professional" philosophy underpinning the school includes a core programme which supports a balance between the theoretical and the practical.⁶ Courses include media law and ethics, news techniques and coverage, practical reporting I and II, media arts, mass communications (an analysis of mass media theories, issues such as race and gender, film criticism, audience behaviour, and media effects and uses and gratifications), political economy of the media, environmental studies, structural analysis, South Pacific and Asian politics, public administration, development economics and philosophy and journalism.

Print media majors hold key editorial positions on *Uni Tavour* but also embark on a print production project of their own for an identifiable publisher. Recent past and present publications include a regular newsletter for the PNG Sports Federation; the newsletter *Brukim Bus* for the Melanesian Environment

Foundation (MEF); an Action for Health newsletter promoting AIDS information; and *Ita Diba*, the centre's communications and mass media newsletter.

A student editor and a chief-of-staff are selected and appointed each semester on the basis of written applications. Editorial staff are chosen from among students enrolled on the advanced Print Production II or Advanced News Practice course. Subeditors, who are on the introductory Print Production I course, are allocated tasks such as pictures editor, sports editor, features editor, Pacific editor (responsible for sifting through stories and information from the Internet and the Association of Progressive Communications and compiling a Pacific news page).⁷

Students conduct their editorial conferences and assign rounds and stories just like any regular newspaper. The role of the lecturer as managing editor is as a guide/adviser to the students. They are taught the necessary editorial skills, while the lecturer also ensures that production targets and deadlines are met, supports the editorial conferences with continuous evaluation of their work, reinforces the social responsibility and accountability of student journalists, explores ethical and professional dilemmas as they arise, and encourages students to follow the Papua New Guinea Journalists' Association and International Federation of Journalists' codes of ethics. The practical workshops are tempered with theoretical analysis while a range of other theory courses balance the emphasis on journalism skills.

Now in 1996-97 *Uni Tavour's* emphasis has shifted to producing an electronic newspaper. In January 1996, it became the first newspaper in the South Pacific to produce an electronic edition on the World Wide Web in cooperation with the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism home page, (University of Technology Sydney) at: http://acij.uts.edu.au/UniT_Home.html.

The new arrangement gives students an opportunity to work with the Internet and email software programs through the non-government and educational Pacific-wide communications cooperative, *Pactok*. This also provides an interactive alternative news service, *Papua Niugini "Nius"* (<http://www.pactok.net/docs/nius>) at a fraction of the cost of wire services for the daily and weekly press. ■

Electronic Publishing

NOTES

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2. **Henshall, P. & Ingram, D.** (1991). *The news manual: a training book for journalists*; Vol 1: Basic Techniques; Vol 2: Advanced Reporting; Vol 3: Ethics and the Law. Port Moresby: Poroman Press.
3. **Robie, D. (Ed.)** (1995). *Nius bilong pasifik: mass media in the Pacific*. Port Moresby: University of PNG Press.
4. *Uni Tavour*, (1995). Vol. 21, No. 1, 24 February.
5. *Uni Tavour*, (1995). Vol. 21, No. 7, 21 July.
6. **Herbert, J.** (1996). *Cascade learning approach to broadcast journalism*, Asia-Pacific Media Educator. Vol. 1, No. 1, Sept. 1996, p 55.
7. *Development Communications: Journalism, Public Relations, Library and Information Studies 1996 Handbook*, Port Moresby: South Pacific Centre for Communication and Information in Development (SPCenCIID).

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