

Big Dreams, small towns:

Perceptions of journalism students at two
Queensland universities – Year 2

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Background

- “Nurturing communitarian citizenship entails at a minimum journalism committed to justice, covenant, and empowerment.” (Christians, Ferré and Flackler, 1993)
- Journalism occupies a unique position to empower and create change in communities.
- This is evident in rural areas where media and newspapers as social institutions continue to be valuable in contributing to the production of social capital (Beaudoin and Thorson, 2004).
- Putnam (2000) suggests that social capital is still more likely to be found in small towns and rural areas.

- As small regional universities, both the University of the Sunshine Coast (Sippy Downs) and James Cook University (Townsville) target students from mainly regional areas who have not yet travelled, or lived outside of their communities.





Key Research Question

What changes in attitudes and perceptions of journalism students about their chosen profession and field of study occur, if any, over their three year study at university? What may account for these changes in attitudes and perceptions?

Methodology

- The study is a three-year longitudinal study tracing the progress of the 2012 journalism student intake. **This is the second year of study.**
- A survey instrument comprising of questions asking about student background, perceptions and expectations of the university experience, views and perceptions of the journalism profession as well as individual aspirations was developed and deployed in 2012 and again, in 2013.
- The survey was undertaken during O-Week before any formal lectures or exposure to university-level study of journalism.

Methodology

There were 52 participants in year two of the study or 87% of the original number of students surveyed in 2012 (60).

- At USC, 31 of the original 35 students participated in the 2013 survey.
- JCU had 21 of the original 25 students participating in the survey.

These figures represent a 14% reduction in the number of participants.

Findings

(N=52)

I. Demographics

		N	%
1. Sex	Female	43	83
	Male	9	17
2. Age	15-18	11	22
	19-20	20	38
	21-25	12	23
	26-30	4	8
	over 30	5	9

3. Location/area classification

	N	%
Metro/capital city	2	4
Regional city	32	62
Town	10	19
Semi-rural area	7	13
Remote area	1	1
Total	52	100

II. News Consumption Habits

1. Time spent consuming news per day	N	%
More than four hours	5	10
At least two but less than 4 hours	14	27
At least one but less than 2 hours	23	44
Less than one hour	8	15
None at all	2	4

2. Through which medium do you receive your news?

Television	44
Print	32
Radio	35
Social Media (e.g. Facebook)	37
Blogs (newspaper affiliated)	36
Blogs (independent)	15
Others (podcast, email newsletter)	12

3. Tool used to consume news? (top three responses)

Laptop 47

Smart phones 40

tablet 14

4. How do you find news that you think is reliable?

Reading the newspaper 38

Tuning in to TV 38

Tuning in to radio 31

Check news sites 32

Social media 19

Word of mouth 7

III. Perceptions about the profession of journalism

	SA	A	N	DA	SD
1. Without journalists, society would be ignorant	11	26	12	3	0
2. Without journalists, governments would not be held to account	15	26	11	2	0
3. By consuming news, I feel I am able to develop opinions on issues that affect my life	27	24	1	0	0
4. Journalism is a noble, ethical profession	7	24	1	0	0

5. The public's opinion
of journalists is

Very high	High	N	Low	Very low
1	8	26	14	3

6. Journalists' salaries
are

0	2	41	8	0
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IV. University Expectations (or what I should learn)

	VI	I	SI	NI
Getting to know my classmates	14	19	17	2
Getting to know my tutors	27	21	4	0
Developing good study habits	36	13	3	0
Getting into a weekly rhythm	29	19	3	0
Expanding my knowledge	39	12	1	0
Developing qualities of a good journo	39	12	1	0
Learning how to write news style	32	18	2	0
Learning how to generate story ideas	40	11	1	0
Developing own writing style	37	14	1	0

VI= very important I= Important SI= Somewhat important NI= Not Important

V. University Expectations (or what I should learn)

	VI	I	SI	NI
Learning what makes news	32	18	2	0
Getting a job after graduation	37	11	4	0
Becoming more aware of news and current affairs	31	18	3	0
Learning to be an ethical journo	36	13	3	0
Understanding legal issues relating to journalism	36	14	1	0

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VII. Perceptions of employer's expectations

	VI	I	SI	NI
Attractive physical appearance	3	21	27	1
Possess self-confidence	35	17	0	0
News gathering skills	46	6	0	0
Expertise in use of technology	25	27	0	0
Ability to convey personality	33	16	3	0
Engagement with social media	21	27	3	1
Personal grooming	27	22	3	0
Strong voice quality	26	22	4	0

VIII. Aspirations (The Future)

1. 42% of students surveyed said they definitely plan a career in journalism. Decrease from 90% last year.
2. 58% said they have as much chance getting a job in journalism as a student attending a metro-based university. Decrease from 74% last year.
3. 23% of students said they have a very good to excellent chance of finding a starting-level position in journalism on graduation. Decrease from 60% last year.
4. 71% said it was important that they contribute to their region's media. Decrease from 75% last year.
5. 44% of students said they hope to work in a metropolitan rather than a regional media outlet for their first job. Decrease from 66% last year.



An eye on the future

The survey will be conducted in 2014 among the same cohort of students who by then, will be graduating.

Exit interviews in the third year will be conducted to yield qualitative responses to any changes noted during the course of the research.