

## **Bridging the Gap Between the Classroom and the Newsroom**

WJEC 2022 Online Conference

*Stream meeting summary report by rapporteur Desiree Hill, Assistant Professor, University of Central Oklahoma, U.S. Expert/background report by Trish Audette-Longo, Assistant Professor, Carleton University, Canada (see [wjec.net/2022-online-conference/](http://wjec.net/2022-online-conference/) at conference streams tab); panel chair Susan Harada, Associate Professor, also of Carleton University; and additional stream members (below).*

This stream's journalism educators addressed a wide range of needs and concerns in bridging the gap between the classroom and the newsroom. The international group gathered with the understanding that journalism programs are constructed to provide a range and depth of professional knowledge, theoretical training, and skills-based learning. The stream acknowledged that educators are confronting new pedagogical challenges including digital and technological expansion, race and gender in journalism, the clash between traditional and modern newsroom training, and the impact of the pandemic. The conversation was organized into multiple categories around the subject of "bridging the gap": global considerations, overall problem areas, disruption, and barriers and solutions to connecting to newsrooms.

### ***Global considerations***

The stream concurred that there is space in journalism education for an understanding that, globally speaking, journalism practice, journalism communities, and the problems of journalism are not a monolith. There is no one "right" way that should be recommended for educators on every continent. For example, the journalistic practice of objectivity is shifting in multiple ways for multiple reasons around the world. Student journalists have learned "you can present both sides of a story as a journalist living through the pandemic" even while in the midst of and being affected by it. In some parts of the world, journalists who suggest story ideas from their own communities may be seen as violating an objectivity ethic. The traditional views on objectivity are evolving as both academics and working journalists ask questions about "who decides what objectivity is?"

Race, gender, and class impact journalism in ways that can vary widely from continent to continent. For instance, the stream discussion revealed that in some journalism programs students are required to use only English, even though in their journalism work they may be speaking and writing in different languages. Journalism educators would like to have more flexibility in training students for the world they will be entering. Educators also grapple with the question of how students can bring concepts of de-colonization and anti-racism from classroom to newsroom. Even though journalism models may differ throughout specific geographic regions, journalism educators should seek to collaborate to learn from and help one another.

### ***Problems***

Just as journalism models vary around the world, journalism education can also vary widely. Some stream members work with curricula that are mostly theoretically based, raising concerns

that students may not be learning how “real journalism” works even through hands-on and practical learning. In other cases, students have only seen “bad examples” of journalism from various media throughout their lives and need to un-learn these examples so they can learn what it means to be a good journalist. (One stream educator created a weekly game to help students learn more about how journalism should be practiced.)

The group also raised concerns that journalism educators may lack skills or first-hand current knowledge related to the courses they teach. Educators who want to refresh skills may not have the ability to take sabbaticals or they may need funding to help them spend time in newsrooms to gain skills or conduct research. Conversely, universities should find ways to bring professionals back to school on a deeper level than “guest speaker.” Educators also worry about internships, where students can be exploited to do work described as “chores,” not meaningful and/or not paid.

### ***Disruption***

Disruption was discussed in terms of the pandemic and technological evolution. The outbreak of Covid-19 significantly affected professional newsrooms, with rapidly changing workflows, technologies, and safety protocols. Accordingly, students were entering very different newsrooms than the ones they learned about in university classes. The pandemic also prevented on-site learning opportunities such as field trips and internships, further restricting hands-on learning for most students around the world. On the other hand, the distancing forced some educators to collaborate more with digital and virtual newsrooms, which helped both faculty and students gain up-to-date skill sets in those areas.

Stream members further expressed concerns that the continuing technological evolution makes it difficult for educators to match the classroom to the workplace, and that journalism programs may not be adequately teaching tech skills, such as coding, data analysis, and meta journalism approaches. Quickly evolving technologies and newsroom structures can also make it difficult for textbooks to keep up with changes.

### ***What Should Newsrooms Learn from Us?***

The concept of “bridging gaps” implies a two-way knowledge exchange, so the stream also devoted time to the question of what traditional newsrooms can learn from journalism educators and their students. Journalism educators and scholars practice critical reflexivity; students learn about journalistic practice grounded in theory, ethics, and research as it applies to rhetoric, content, and journalism outcomes. Deadlines, staffing issues, and other pressures can interfere with these thoughtful approaches. More hands-on consistent connections to newsrooms can contribute to these knowledge exchanges. Students who are well-grounded in the highest quality journalism practice will conceivably pay dividends by using these skills when they are leaders in the industry in years to come.

## ***Unaddressed Gaps***

The “unaddressed gaps” are many, pointing to one of the challenges faced by educators – the long list of needs for journalism students. The group discussed a need for more trauma training, online harassment training, and curriculum that includes teaching about entrepreneurial journalism.

## **Recommendations**

1. Understand that journalism practice, journalism communities, and the problems of journalism can vary widely on a worldwide scale. There is no one “right way” that should be recommended specifically for every educator on every continent.
2. Connected to the first recommendation, journalism educators should know their local and regional journalism communities. This will allow educators not only to understand unique local needs that future journalists will face but will also create opportunities for educators to have more influence in the conversations revolving around journalism practice and problems.
3. News organizations, universities, and educators themselves should renew efforts to spend time in newsrooms, which supports the previous recommendation. This includes reimagining sabbaticals (not every educator can participate in these) and providing funding for educators to spend time off in newsrooms to make possible greater collaboration between universities, newsrooms, industry and journalism education organizations. Journalism educators should play an active role in the creation of fellowships and other opportunities to gain first-hand experiences to inform their teaching. Journalists should have meaningful relationships with universities. Advisory boards are just one example.
4. Educators should provide students with the opportunity to practice journalism through student media platforms, including traditional and digital. These efforts can create new conversations between students, educators, and practitioners using the “teaching hospital” method as a template, while still challenging this metaphor through experimentation and freedom for students to innovate.

One final note is a suggestion for the World Journalism Education Council. This stream recommends that such conversations continue, so that progress can be made before the next convention. Specifically, this would include regular communication with stream members between now and the next conference, published content to disseminate the findings more widely, and mini-conferences.

## **Conclusion**

The future of journalism is uncertain and ever-changing. The dialogue put forth by the stream participants is a starting point for journalism educators to improve students’ preparedness for the workplace of the present, while foreshadowing the newsroom of the future. These ideas chart a way forward for educators to play a more active role in bridging the gap between classroom and newsroom.

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