

Research-led Journalism Education

WJEC 2022 Online Conference

Stream meeting summary by rapporteur Merja Myllylahti, Senior Lecturer, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand; expert report by Angela Romano, Associate Professor, Queensland University of Technology, Australia (see wjec.net/2022-online-conference/ at conference streams tab); panel chair Susanne Fengler, Professor, Dortmund University, Germany; and additional team members (below).

This stream had a wide-ranging and robust discussion about how journalism training in universities has become more “research-led,” how research informs goals and standards, and lessons and academic content and approaches to learning and teaching. However, the group debated how the lack of literature hinders our understanding of what research-led education entails as there is no commonly accepted definition for research-led journalism education.

The group suggests that research from a wide range of fields and settings should inform the conceptualization of journalism programs regardless of whether they are theory or practice based. The stream members agreed that because journalism is increasingly informed by many other fields of study, including platform studies, educators should draw not just from their own research, but from a range of research sources. On the other hand, the group acknowledged that this creates some hurdles when the scholarship used in the curriculum primarily comes from Western scholarship or other research from outside the country or region, as witnessed in Ghana.

The group identified many gaps in research-related journalism education. It agreed that media ecosystems across the globe are different, and therefore country/nation-specific journalism research is needed. Additionally, the group acknowledged that journalism education should not be led just by journalism researchers; sometimes important issues are arising from the students’ work and observations or practical industry needs. Therefore a “circular research model,” which considers all three parties, may offer better outcomes for the journalism curriculum. The group also discussed how different disciplines, such as the arts, could inform the curriculum and degrees and how innovation could be used as a part of education.

Furthermore, the group explored specific topics that are excellent candidates for research-led journalism education, including reporting on trauma, especially concerning migration and refugee issues.

Recommendations

1. Research should be used to inform all elements of journalism education regardless of whether it is theory-driven and/or practice-based.
2. Research should be used to create better support systems for journalism students, including not-for-credit modules such as skills in leadership and entrepreneurship.

3. Research should inform the design and delivery of journalism education by considering changes in technological, legal, economic, cultural and other social factors impacting journalism.
4. Country/nation-specific research should be undertaken to inform local journalism education so that the curriculum is not excessively influenced by scholarship from Western and other developed nations that currently dominate research publication.
5. Scholars should also consider innovative ideas from students and the practical needs of industry when considering their research.

Conclusion

We hope that WJEC considers the need to help define what exactly is meant by research-led journalism. In addition, participants concluded that journalism education and research should be informed by other fields, national needs, students and industry. Also, the more researchers open to entrepreneurship and innovation, the better.

Additional team members included: Dave Seglins, CBC News, Canada; Elizabeth O. Asiamah, Gifty Appiah-Adjei and Rainbow Sackey, all of University of Education, Winneba, Ghana; Marcus Kreutler, TU Dortmund University, Germany; Matthew E. Pearson, Carleton University, Canada; Stijn Postema, University of Amsterdam/Ede Christian University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands.