

Changes in journalism versus changes in journalism education

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This paper is focused on journalism education in the context of changes in journalism, the professionalization of journalism, and the study programmes that are offered by universities. The author has relied on self-evaluation reports from three study programmes in Latvia, the Evaluation commission final reports, and the things which students themselves have had to say about their knowledge and skills in comparison to what is needed to work as a journalist.

Keywords: journalism, education, professional standards.

It seems that discussions about the content and form of journalism education began when the first institution to teach journalism was set up. For a long time, there were two opposing camps: “if journalists look at university journalism courses and find evidence that academics simply don’t understand the realities of journalism, so, too, academics look at journalists’ accounts of themselves and find evidence of a striking amount of myth-making” (Frith & Meech, 2007, p. 144). When it comes to the specific evaluation of university programmes, academics are convinced that “journalism programmes are too professional – just trade schools,” while journalists feel that “some of them are too academic – filled with useless ‘theory’” (Stephens, 2002). Typically, discussions about these issues are often based not on argued viewpoints as to what kinds of programmes there should be, but instead on unclear expectations that are based on the claims that programmes are “too vocational” or “too academic”.

These positions, we can assume, are explained on the one hand by virtue of the fact that journalism has emerged as a trade, with forms, methods and standards developing over the course of time. Even the theoretical aspects of journalism have been based in practice on conclusions and judgments that are based on the experience of journalists themselves.

On the other hand, these issues must also be considered in the context of changes in the functions of universities and the understanding of these changes, because education and training can blur and merge (Turner, 2000, p. 357).

Journalism is a very natural occupation. One person will be better or worse at telling others about what has happened with him, what's new in the neighbourhood, what problems exist, etc. Each person has a natural curiosity about things that are happening, and each person wants to think about it. This means that the occupation can be open to anyone who can be described as a good storyteller. At the same time, however, the professional community has established strict professional standards to ensure freedom of publication, journalistic freedom and media accountability which is based on a dialogue between active journalism and an active citizenry in the arena for public debate (Bertrand, 2005).

Journalism and its long-standing traditions have maintained quality standards while, at the same time, ensuring that strict corporate links and a clear vision as to belonging to a professional community make sure that there the public at large understands the functions of journalism and the conditions under which these functions are pursued. What's more, the professional community has actively discussed the practices of the profession, seeking to maintain self-defined standards as norms which are accepted and understood by the public.

Over the last several decades, journalism has encountered essential and very broad transformations in the occupation, and so the traditional opposition between practitioners and academics as to the best way of becoming a journalist is tending to change into a broad platform for debate, with this question serving as the central issue: "What effects have the changes in how journalists are educated had on journalism's sense of itself?" (Frith & Meech, 2007, p. 139). This is an essential debate, because journalism finds it harder to answer one of the basic questions which it has posed itself – why? And yet that is the question that is becoming increasingly more important to the public, because the other questions

of the five “W’s” can most often be provided by any eyewitness who has access to the necessary equipment and information and communications technologies.

Increasingly similar questions about the future of journalism are being posed by researchers and practitioners who have different experiences with the traditions of democracy, culture and journalism, because “for both journalists and citizens, the capacity and speed to access, retrieve, select, and reproduce information and turn it into knowledge will determine power and facilitate change in the 21st century” (Servaes, 2009, p. 373).

Even though journalism has long since moved toward unity and a determination of corporate identity, the fact is that the practice of journalism today involves different professional ideologies which are based on concepts such as objectivity, advocacy, adversarial, investigative, public/civic, interpretative, new, development, peace, precision, qualitative methods, service, popular and existential (Hanitzsch, 2007, p. 381). Journalists work not only for news or, if you will, entertainment media, but also for trade and consumer magazines, and people who identify themselves as journalists “describe many different roles and practices – reporting, writing, editing, sub-editing, managing, publishing, laying out, designing, film-making; and cover many institutional positions” (Frith & Meech, 2007, p. 143).

This situation creates many different possible understandings of journalism, as well as ideas about the content of journalistic studies and learning outcomes.

Journalism: craft and career

The understanding of the problem, however, obviously does not produce a practical solution for the problem itself, because there is a high level of uncertainty about the content of journalism studies at university and overall. The expectations of students as to the content of their studies are starting to differ not only from what universities offer, but also from the practical needs of the media and the offer of jobs. Increasingly, for instance, students want their career to be related to entertainment media and genres, while the media are looking for reporters who can write about business, economic, social, IT and similar issues. What is more,

media editors have a fairly critical attitude vis-à-vis the level and depth of general knowledge among young journalists.

As ideas about journalism as a craft have changed, so have ideas about the career of journalists (Frith & Meech, 2007).

Journalism in Latvia has never had more or less clear ideas about career models that can be seen as examples. First of all, there have never been opportunities for people to develop a professional career throughout their lifetimes, because careers have been destroyed by political changes in the country and its society. Latvia was only proclaimed as an independent republic in 1918. Then there was World War II, the occupation of Latvia, the Soviet regime, and the emergence of a democratic information space under economic collapse and then conditions of rapid market development.

Journalism in Latvia has shown that one can agree with Frith and Meech when they argue that “journalism is not an occupation with a straightforward career (or income) structure” (Frith & Meech, 2007, p. 144). This is because of horizontal careers in journalism when people move from one media outlet to another, careers related to all kinds of corporate, consumer and trade magazines, and the movement from one side of the “front line” to the other, with people moving from journalism to public relations and, less often, from public relations to journalism (Frith & Meech, 2007).

A fundamental challenge for journalists is media convergence and the need to work in a multimedia environment. It is fairly strictly assumed in Latvia that most journalists who are excellent writers in the print media cannot be equally professional in television and radio. The problem in overcoming this belief is that the need for lifelong learning in the field of journalism is poorly developed in Latvia.

Many bachelor's degree and graduate students in journalism no longer see this as a lifelong profession, but instead as a bridge to other professions, particularly public relations. Several studies conducted by the Department of Communications Studies of the University of Latvia have shown that work in the field of journalism is seen as a good opportunity to make contacts and learn more about the functions of society and politics from “the inside”, so to speak. Latvia has never had a model which is characterised as traditional in the long term. In the UK, by contrast, most journalists have begun their careers after finishing secondary school by

going to work for small and local newspapers. During the Soviet era in Latvia, careers were begun at the level of a reporter, but further career development depended not only on professional capabilities, but also the power of ideology in the field of personnel policies in the profession.

Back in the 1990s, lots of people with various levels of education and experience entered the field of journalism very quickly. Many of these people had no education or experience, because demands against journalists in a media market in which consumer magazines developed most rapidly were simplified – just be able to tell a story. This offered extensive opportunities to beginners, among whom the most talented, active and aggressive people could become very popular (particularly those who were on television) and essentially learn the basic skills of journalism. All in all, this process is characteristic of post-Soviet societies. Furthermore, a serious challenge of the new journalists was to perform in the role of entertainers (Pasti, 2005) – something which distanced them from the profession's values and standards.

Neither does Latvia have any tradition of freelance journalism, because the comparatively small market has kept this from developing. True, this aspect of the journalism profession did slowly begin to emerge in 2009 under the auspices of an economic crisis.

Views about journalism education have long since been positioned by the industry – what graduates need to know and understand to become media workers, preferably immediately after the graduation ceremony. This means that they “should adjust to the altered requirements of the industry” (el-Nawawy, 2007, p. 69). This approach is starting to change, and “many scholars turn the pyramid upside-down and want to start at the level of the public, the citizens, the ‘consumers’ of journalistic products. The choice between a reactive and pro-active attitude toward the industry has been replaced by a need for more qualitative audience and contextual research” (Servaes, 2009, p. 372). One of the first changes has to do with the importance of a systemic education.

Journalism: from craft apprenticeship to a university degree

In historical terms, journalism as an occupation “had not required formal training of the intellect beyond secondary school level, now

expected its new recruits to have had some form of higher education” (Frith & Meech, 2007, p. 139). In Europe, changes in understanding about journalism and the recruiting of graduates by the profession began in the late 1960s.

Few people today would argue that the best way to become a good journalist is to learn the craft in a newsroom. The media are increasingly looking for university graduates in the fields of journalism and other sectors, because the craft apprenticeship system is more expensive, and there is no guarantee that once trained, the individual will not abandon the relevant media outlet.

What’s more, knowledge changes so quickly today that freshmen who may lack skills in the profession may offer a media outlet a new and broader view of many different questions. That is why there is increasing support for the view that “most entry-level professional journalists come out of university-based journalism programmes, which makes universities an important factor in media capacity building” (University Journalism Education: A Global Challenge, 2007, p. 4). This is also typical in the Latvian media practice.

It seems that the debate over whether better journalists come from journalism or other programmes has ended, too. The media are interested in both. Sadly, the media industry which attained economic stability in the first decade of the 21st century before a serious economic crisis seriously reduced advertising revenue never did strengthen corporate interest in promoting the development of journalism so as to operate more effectively and reduce spending while “simultaneously gaining access to the cultural capital associated with a graduate workforce” (Nolan, 2008, p. 734).

What is more, many media outlets have largely been accustomed to personnel turnover ever since the mid and late 1990s. As the media market developed rapidly, media outlets typically hired first or second-year students, and some even organised journalism schools and training themselves. All in all, however, the journalism community, media owners, and the public media are not focused on the idea that the process of training journalism should have changed the results of education from the consumer arena to the role of more active participants.

If we look at changes in public opinion vis-à-vis the role of education in a journalist’s career, then a good example is provided by the information of popular content and advice that is focused on gaining an educa-

tion as the first step in a journalism career: “Becoming a journalist can be a fun and rewarding job, but getting that job starts with a good education [...] Choose the right college. Most working journalists went to journalism school and got a journalism degree.”¹

The quality of journalism often faces public criticisms in Latvia, with people citing shortcomings that could be reduced or eliminated during the study process – poor language skills (both in the Latvian and the Russian language media), a lack of knowledge about areas which journalists cover, and an overall lack of intellectual background.

In some respects, these processes in Latvia differ from the relevant experiences in Europe and the rest of the world. First of all, pre-war Latvia did not have a professional community which agreed on ways of teaching journalism, and the press mostly turned to literary writers to fill their staffs. Second, journalistic education during the Soviet period was based on Russian traditions in journalism, with the educational process focused on a study of literature and language, plus ideologically focused subject matter. There was very little in the way of practical training. The long-lasting dependency of journalism on Soviet ideology had a fundamental effect on attitudes vis-à-vis university-level journalism education in the late 1980s and early 1990s, because it was linked to the traditions of the old regime. At the same time, however, there was a fundamental breaking point in curricula – one that was based both on Scandinavian and American experience.

Many authors have pointed to the dichotomy between journalism as a vocation and an academic discipline. This is affected first and foremost by the academic environment, which is fairly conservative when it comes to its views of university studies in journalism and the effects of journalistic studies and research on the social sciences. That is why there are differing approaches to journalism studies and research in the context of university studies.

The orientation of study programmes occurs in the context of the social sciences, cultural studies and the humanities, and the content can be included in professional or academic degree programmes. The same is true with the positioning of journalism in the field of communications studies and the context of the social sciences or, perhaps, the humanities.

¹ See < http://www.ehow.com/how_2053760_become-journalist.html > [Accessed 04.01.2010].

When we assess problems with journalistic education, we must also look at journalism as a field of research and studies. Journalism and communications studies, which are most directly linked to research into journalism, still lack “an established disciplinary core of classic theories and research exemplars. The field comprises diverse academic traditions, each having produced or appropriate its own, more or less coherent intellectual resources, which have converged institutionally under the culturally resonant symbolic banner of ‘communication’ and are only now just beginning to overcome their mutual ignorance” (Craig, 2008, pp. 17–18).

In Latvia’s context, it has to be said that research in the field of journalism and communications studies has developed for less than two decades. During the Soviet period in Latvia, communications as a field of study did not exist at all. It is also true that there are still traditions related to the humanities – ones which focus on a description, but not an analysis of phenomena.

According to Deuze, several authors have argued that there is a “lack of coherence in the field of journalism (education and studies)” – something that may be down to the fact that journalism “is and has been theorised, researched, studied and criticised worldwide by people coming from a wide variety of disciplines” (Deuze, 2005, pp. 442–443).

Analysis of journalism studies and research in the university context does not involve much consideration of their potential in comparison to other areas of the humanities and the social sciences. Journalism cannot be taught or learned as a static field, because “to do journalism today is inevitably to be involved in an ongoing, ‘active, argumentative dialogue’ on the profession’s purposes and performance” (Stephens, 2002). Thanks to these close and direct links to practice, this represents a “combination of the reflexive practical and the applied theoretical which makes journalism such a terrific subject – and an academic discipline with great potential” (De Burgh, 2003, p. 105).

This means that a time when the professional journalistic community may be unable to define its boundaries and standards in a clear way, it is of fundamental importance to consolidate journalistic and university professionalism so as to retain an abiding influence (Nolan, 2008). This is all the more so because the development of journalism shows that journalism programmes can no longer be focused exclusively on “the basics”. They must focus far more extensively on advancing journalism, even

though “it is easier to teach what we know – or think we know – than to teach what still needs to be figured out” (Stephens, 2002).

The aim of this paper is to analyse these processes from two perspectives – journalism courses at Latvia’s universities (making use of self-evaluation reports and the final reports of the Evaluation commission that can be found on the website of the Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre²) and the judgments of students as to whether their knowledge and skills would be in line with the jobs of journalists (here we used students’ self-evaluation reports that were produced between 2006 and 2010).

Journalism training in Latvia

There are some 20 licensed and accredited communications studies programmes in Latvia, offering instruction in journalism, public relations and advertising. Some of these programmes also offer training in international relations and marketing.

The courses are offered by public and private universities and colleges at the bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral level.

This situation reflects the problems with higher education in Latvia – problems which have attracted substantial public attention during the economic crisis that is ongoing in the country.

The first question is whether the number of educational programmes is not excessive (800 programmes have been accredited for six years, and 48 have been accredited for two³). Second, one can ask whether the large number of programmes is not a factor that can have a deleterious effect on the quality of studies. Third, there is the matter of whether government financing is used sensible if so many programmes receive subsidies.

It has to be said that the study of journalism is not too popular in Latvia when it comes to communications studies. There are no journalism programmes at the level of colleges. There are three higher education institutions where journalism is taught – a bachelor’s degree programme in communications studies at the University of Latvia, an academic study programme in journalism at the Rīga Stradiņš University, and a profes-

² See < <http://www.aiknc.lv>> [Accessed 04.04.2010].

³ See < http://www.aiknc.lv/lv/prog_stat.php > [Accessed 04.04.2010].

sional bachelor's programme in media studies and journalism at the Vidzeme University College.

There are also three higher education institutions which offer master's degree programmes in communications studies. None is fully oriented toward journalism or media studies, and only the University of Latvia offers an MA programme which covers media theory, media anthropology, the culture of journalism, and internships in journalism worth 20 to 30 ECTS credits. Only the University of Latvia offers a doctoral programme in communications studies which ensures scholarly studies related to the media and journalism.

Table 1. BA programmes in journalism in Latvia

	Study form	Duration	ECTS credits	Degree
University of Latvia	Full-time	4 years, 8 semesters	160	BA in communications studies
	Part-time	5 years, 10 semesters	160	
Rīga Stradins University	Full-time	4 years, 8 semesters	160	BA in communications studies
Vidzeme University College	Full-time	4 years, 8 semesters	240	Professional BA in media studies with certification in journalism
	Part-time	5 years, 10 semesters	240	

All of the BA programmes are accredited for six years. The one at the University of Latvia is in its second period of accreditation, while the two at the other schools are in their first. The evaluation commission recommended two-year accreditation for the professional BA programme in media studies and journalism, but the Education Ministry's Accreditation Commission voted for six-year accreditation in 2009. This fact reflects the problems that exist when it comes to assessing higher education programmes in Latvia.

There is a fairly stable, but narrow range of experts who are called in to evaluate study programmes. Evaluation committees are to be made up of at least one expert from the EU, Estonia, Lithuania, or another foreign country and "at least one expert with previous experience in quality evaluation process organized by his/her own, or foreign state [...] leader of the Committee takes responsibility for the methodology of the evaluation

process, while the experts, who are proficient in the field of study represented by programme being evaluated, take responsibility for the content of the programme. The experts proficient in the field of study for the programme are not required compulsory previous experience in quality evaluation process organized by his/her own, or foreign state. The Leader of the Committee might represent any field of study.⁷⁴ For instance, one of the experts of journalism studies had a doctorate in agronomy, one of the expert group was headed up by a specialist in sociology, criminal studies and philosophy. This reduces the purpose of accreditation and makes it harder to develop the programmes, because a more careful selection of media and journalism experts from universities in the Baltic States alone (to reduce costs) would promote a broader and more in-depth exchange of information about the development of study programmes.

There would also be debates about how to improve the quality of study programmes and to find new methods in journalism studies. It is of key importance right now to analyse the issue of whether higher education institutions are not only offering programmes, but are also reacting to fundamental changes in journalism and the media. Programmes must not only teach courses which correspond to current demands, they must also make an investment in the development of the future of the media. Sadly, the expert reports focus very little attention on the content of study programmes and courses taught therein.

These are important issues in a small nation state in which the media market is small and most people are unaware of international trends in journalism. That's because few people look at the news or analytical media outlets in English, German, French or some other language. In Latvia, there's another reason why this is important. None of the study programmes train journalists to work in the Russian language media, in part because public universities must teach all classes in Latvian according to the country's media law. Despite this, the Russian language media make up a substantial part of Latvia's media market, and the influence of Russia's own media is great and increasing in the country.

Analytical and future-focused evaluations as to studies in journalism

⁴ Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes Evaluation Committee Experts Selection Principles. Approved by the Accreditation Commission on the 30th of April, 1997. See <<http://www.aiknc.lv/en/kopmat/>>[Accessed 04.04.2010].

are also hindered by the fact that the Latvian Association of Journalists is so weak that it does not represent the overall professional environment and is unable to identify and promote goals related to the quality of journalism. That, in turn, means that it is not a stable or professional partner in specifying and facilitating the quality of the relevant study programmes.

Journalism programmes are offered only at public universities, while private higher education institutions mostly focus on public relations and marketing programmes.

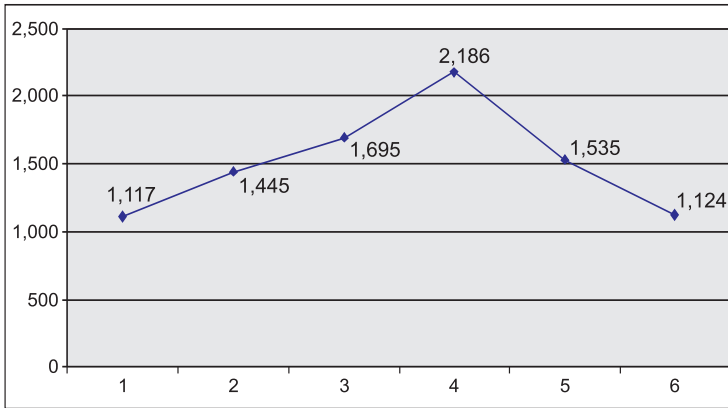
There is negligible support from the national budget for journalism and media studies. The state finances 75 study slots in the BA programme at the University of Latvia – this against a total of 700 students. It finances 38 of 75 study slots in the MA programme. The support is given on the basis of the successes of students, but it is not divided up proportionally to the students who are pursuing journalism, public relations and advertising. Each year, 100 to 120 students choose journalism for their BA studies and 10–15 students – the media and journalism at the MA level. The Riga Stradins University, which is basically a school of medicine, the social sciences, including journalism, receives no state financing for students at all in the area of journalism studies, where about 80 students are enrolled⁵. The Vidzeme University College has 19 government-financed study slots of 52 in 2009⁶.

State-financed study slots in the fields of communications, the media and journalism are compared to the cost of social science programmes. Although the financing was increased up until 2009, it remained among the lowest levels of financing in higher education in Latvia.

⁵ See <http://www.rsu.lv/component/option,com_phocadownload/Itemid,1174/id,80:/view,category/> [Accessed 04.04.2010].

⁶ See <The self-evaluation report of the professional BA programme in media studies and journalism. http://www.aiknc.lv/en/prog_view.php?id=5627> [Accessed 04.04.2010].

Table 2. State budget subsidy for budget seat (2005–2010, EUR)



That is not adequate for the resources that are needed to ensure group and individual work, mentoring of the creative work of students, and involvement of the best professional journalists in the study process. The subsidy from the national budget also does not help to improve the technological infrastructure of university programmes so that the training which students undergo is in line with modern media needs.

The programmes differ in terms of orientation toward academic or professional studies. They also differ in terms of content – general communications studies with a specialisation in journalism, PR and advertising (the University of Latvia), academic studies in journalism (the Rīga Stradiņš University), and professional media and journalism studies (the Vidzeme University College). Still, they are quite similar in terms of the way in which the programmes are implemented.

The University of Latvia’s programme is organised in four different areas – communications theory, general studies, the social sciences, and journalism. The programme offers three ECTS credits for elective courses. Background studies in the humanities and social sciences and the number of ECTS credits earned through electives had to be trimmed when the university moved from four-year to three-year studies so as to maintain sufficient amounts of studies related to professional training.

Students undergo fundamental theoretical training during the first three semesters of their studies. During the next two semesters, they focus on a specific area of studies. The last semester is devoted to work-

shops focused on professional mastery and courses that are oriented toward MA studies. Internships are worth at least nine ECTS credits, but students have the option of increasing that number to 15 credits. The bachelor's thesis earns another 15 ECTS credits.

The programme at the Riga Stradins University includes mandatory courses (120 ECTS), mandatory electives (55.5 ECTS), and free electives (4.5 ECTS). The programme also requires internships which offer an additional two credits⁷.

The programme of the Vidzeme University College consists of six parts – general education courses (30 ECTS), fundamental theoretical courses in the selected area of studies (48 ECTS), professional specialisation courses in that area (90 ECTS), state exams (18 ECTS), an internship (39 ECTS), and electives (9 ECTS)⁸.

Table 3: The structure and courses of programmes offered by the University of Latvia, the Riga Stradins University and the Vidzeme University College

University of Latvia	Riga Stradins University	Vidzeme University College
Mandatory Courses		
93 ECTS	120 ECTS	204 ECTS
72 ECTS Communications studies Introduction in communication studies Introduction in research and academic writing Interpersonal communication History of communication Communication psychology Communication law Communication sociology Introduction in journalism	Introduction to studies and speciality Methods of social research Introduction to communication theories The history of communications Communications rules and ethics Psychology of communications Intercultural communication Introduction to journalism Modern communication technologies The history of Ideas	0 ECTS General education courses Philosophy Sociology Social psychology Public administration Macroeconomics English for communication science Computer science 48 ECTS Basic theoretical courses Introduction to media studies and journalism Latvian language culture Mass communication

⁷ Academic Study Programme “Journalism” for the Social Science Bachelor’s Degree in Communication Science (code 43321). Attachments to accreditation application. Riga: 2007. P.26. See <<http://www.aiknc.lv>> [Accessed 04.04.2010].

⁸ Application for study programme accreditation. Valmiera, I 2009. P. 6. See <<http://www.aiknc.lv>> [Accessed 04.04.2010].

Public relations and advertising as communication Communication ethics Communication and semiotics Communication theories International and global communication Bachelor's thesis	Social anthropology Introduction to the politics of Latvia Introduction to economics Introduction to sociology The history of European integration Contemporary political theories	New media theories Information society theories Research methodology Qualitative research methods Media ethics Media legal aspects Media economics and management New media and politics
21 ECTS university general studies including courses in humanities and natural sciences		66 ECTS Professional specialisation courses Information collection methods in journalism News journalism Radio and TV journalism Online journalism Socio psychological aspects of virtual space Public relations Advertising Public speech Modern information technologies Multimedia 39 ECTS Internship 18 ECTS Bachelor's thesis
Mandatory electives		
72 ECTS	55.5 ECTS	24 ECTS
60 ECTS: Journalism Methods of collecting information News writing Features writing Mass media environment in Latvia	Printed journalism: methods and genres Speech communication: persuasion and argumentation Introduction to radio journalism State communication	Knowledge management Argumentation and persuasion Communicative semantics European Union communication policy Intercultural communication

Rethorics Reporter's workshop Analitical and research journalism Argumentation theory and practice TV and Radio journalism Internet journalism Magazine production Multimedia workshop Practice Creative workshop Research project Creative project 12 ECTS Social sciences	Audiovisual communication and producing for the television Intercultural communication Non-verbal acoustic communication Gender and sex Communication law and ethics Editing in print and other media Criticism and analysis of media Media communication in the EU The anthropology of politics and economics Investigative journalism	Public diplomacy Communication theories Organisation theories Human resources management Marketing Corporative communication Finance management Visual communication Conflict management
Free electives		
3 ECTS	4.5 ECTS	9 ECTS

The programme of the Vidzeme University College, as a professional BA programme which provides certification of qualifications, has stricter government regulations as to its structure. For instance, there is the requirement that internships be worth 39 ECTS credits. Before the professional programme could be accredited, the college had to draft professional standards which were submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science on March 17, 2009 (not registered on the data basis of professional standards where only the standards of reporter are available⁹).

The journalist professional standards were drafted by four experts, one apiece from the college itself, the Riga Stradins University, a school of business, and a media outlet (also a member of the Vidzeme University College's Convent). So, the standard was set by schools themselves.

The standards identified norms related to the structure and content of professional standards, as applied whenever such standards are prepared. The document speaks to the competence, skills and knowledge which qualified journalists require. Twenty-three areas of competence are listed in all:

- 1) *selecting information collection methods that are in line with the assignment and the fundamental requirements of the selected media type and genre of journalism;*

⁹ See < http://visc.gov.lv/saturs/profizgl/stand_registrs.shtml > [Accessed 04.04.2010].

- 2) *interviewing, observing, conducting experiments, analysing documents, working at a press conference, working with other methods to accumulate information, using modern information and communications technologies;*
- 3) *organising work with sources of information, systematising and ensuring balanced use of information sources;*
- 4) *observing precision in collecting and selecting information;*
- 5) *properly processing information (the rest is identical with the first area of competence);*
- 6) *accumulating, arranging, organising and structuring information via the use of modern information and communications technologies;*
- 7) *explaining, analysing, interpreting and commenting upon the information that has been obtained;*
- 8) *carefully analysing and comparing facts and viewpoints that have been obtained while observing precision and making sure that the views are true and believable;*
- 9) *presenting information in accordance with the work assignment and the principles of the selected media type and genre of journalism;*
- 10) *presenting journalistic materials via the use of modern information and communications technologies;*
- 11) *presenting information with proper Latvian language and speech techniques;*
- 12) *ensuring a balanced representation of diverse viewpoints and voices in news journalism, avoiding any identification with the positions that are taken and avoiding any statement about the journalist's own views;*
- 13) *planning, organising and managing processes related to the collection, selection, processing and dissemination of information;*
- 14) *ensuring links between journalistic text and the audience, ensuring reciprocal links with the audience, ensuring that the audience can be involved, and working professionally with the marketing and public relations aspects of the relevant media organisation;*
- 15) *ensuring the systematisation and archiving of information to the extent that is required by quality work;*
- 16) *evaluating the quality of journalism and drafting mechanisms to improve that quality;*
- 17) *developing the infrastructure which ensures quality in journalism (media research, media journalism, media education, the professional press, professional and public organisations);*
- 18) *collecting, selecting, processing and disseminating information, managing information processes, and handling other professional assignments in accordance with relevant legal regulations and the interests of a sustain-*

able media system so as to increase media believability and to pursue the highest standards of professional ethics;

19) collecting, selecting, processing and disseminating information in ways which conform to best practices and professional standards in journalism;

20) honestly serving the diverse interests of society and of socially responsible media businesses;

21) handling the professional duties of the journalist in accordance with the values of democratic culture;

22) improving knowledge and skills by self-education;

23) monitoring the latest trends in the development of journalism and the media sector, improving knowledge and skills in line with that development, and particularly focusing on the opportunities that are afforded by new information and communications technologies.

The standards also define 27 professional activities related to the skills that are needed to handle the job. Approximately one-half of these are of a general nature, while the other half are focused on skills that are needed in order to ensure the aforementioned areas of competence. The knowledge needed to handle basic aspects of the profession is divided up into three groups: 1) knowledge at the level of ideas (fundamentals of contacts, fundamentals of business, the exact and natural sciences); 2) knowledge at the level of understanding (communications theory, media economics and management, the social sciences, media research); and 3) knowledge and the level of usage (journalism, media ethics and legal regulations, ICT, the state language, at least two foreign languages at the conversational level, job protection, environmental protection, legal relations in the area of labour).

The standards are presented in a document which speaks to the professionalization of the vocation and to the needs of the media in the here and now. This marks out a focus on the diversity of media formats and genres, because the standards speak to the ability of “creating new media content formats (articles, columns, inter-genre formats) in line with the trends in developing media technologies and content”, but the document does not point toward many issues that are under debate. An example is whether and how these standards apply to entertainment journalism. Emanating from this fact is a dilemma for journalism programmes – whether and how these vast and diverse journalism practices can be taught to students.

All three study programmes are more or less linked to the overall study process at the relevant university, which means a common planning system or at least common planning principles when study programmes are organised. They are fairly strictly focused on a norm in the Latvian law on higher education – the rule that the number of class hours cannot exceed 20 hours a week. Sometimes programme directors are concerned that their study programmes may not be declared to be in line with academic standards, although that applies more to university programmes which, according to Latvian programme classifications, are academic programmes. The issue is the possibility that there is an excessive orientation on vocational training.

All in all, problems with the improvement of journalistic studies reflect shortcomings in the overall system of higher education in Latvia – a narrow focus on a single area of science, the lack of major and minor degrees, an excessive effort to satisfy normative requirements without evaluating the specifics of areas of study and study programmes, etc.

There is no doubt that studies in journalism in Latvia ensure a balanced learning of theory and practice, offering sufficient skills to those who wish to work for the media. The education is also sufficient to make sure that graduates can compete well in the job market for public relations and advertising specialists. Those students and graduates who want to work in journalism, however, often point to a dilemma which they encounter in practice – their studies are focused on ideals, not actual media practices.

Students reflections on journalism practice: between reality and ideals

Fifth-semester journalism students at the University of Latvia do a six-week internship, although that is not a demand for academic programmes. When they finish the work, students must prepare a self-evaluation as to their skills and their ability to work with editorial processes in the media. They're also asked to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their study programme and to make recommendations on how it can be improved. In this section of the paper, we are analysing 84 statements made by students between 2006 and 2010.

A fundamental criticism from students that appears each and every year is that there must be more practical work sooner in their academic career:

“The internships offers more than academic knowledge, because it shows whether you will or will not be able to work in that area;”

“A six-week internship is not enough to evaluate whether the specific medium or type of journalism is appropriate or of interest;”

“The internship is too short. I felt fully adapted at the newspaper only when the internship was coming to an end;”

“There should be internships during the first year, because you can only become a good journalist if you actually work for a newspaper.”

These demands create a difficult situation for an institution of higher education. Of course, student views need to be taken into account, but on the other hand, there are problems with the media and with study programmes. Media aren't interested in accepting freshmen before they've been taught the basics, and there are comparatively few papers with the capacity or the desire to ensure an appropriate level of coaching. There's also the issue of paying the coaches – study programmes don't have the necessary financing.

The chosen solution here has been to organise practical work in the media for students who have been better prepared, because that requires less effort on the part of the newspapers, and also because this means better human resources for the relevant media outlet. Depending on the paper's abilities and the quality of student work, newspapers sometimes pay them, although the internships are positioned as work without pay.

This approach has proven itself, because when asked to rate the work of students on a 10-point scale, editors have never given a grade below 8. True, editors still commonly complain that students don't have enough practical skills of the type that even professional journalists don't always have – newspaper design, newspaper photography, shooting TV scenes, computer editing in radio and TV, etc. One student wrote that she didn't learn those skills during her internship because

“I still lack skills related to shooting and editing video. Professionals did that work, and because of a shortage of equipment, I didn't have any opportunity to try it out for myself.”

In 2006, reports on the internships marked out a fairly shocking trend – students denied the need to learn fundamental news writing, arguing that this was an out-of-date approach which newspapers no longer needed.

In 2005 and 2006, many newspapers shifted toward more soft reporting and features. The judgments from students made the process clear – newspapers were more focused on changing their form, as opposed to content changes, the finding of niches in investigative reporting and analytical writing, or interaction with their readers. Now, against the background of an economic crisis, there has also been a substantial decrease in reader interest.

Students have distinctly varied opinions when it comes to the scope of theoretical studies and research methods in the programme:

“Theoretical courses offer a background of knowledge which helps us to decide on what to do in practice. They also make it easier to structure information, and we learn skills as to justifying the work that we do;”

“The theoretical knowledge was of virtually no use at all during the internship, because we talked more about professional issues.”

If we look at how these views relate to the media outlets where students did their internships, we find that scepticism about the need for courses focusing on theory and research methods was more typical among those students who had worked for the entertainment media. In most cases, they had written articles on the basis of press releases or publications from other media outlets, or on the basis of visiting presentations of products or services, as well as entertainment events.

In general, it must be said that students are more interested in working for the entertainment media than for outlets focused on news and analysis, and there is less of an interest in dealing with “difficult topics” such as economics, business, corruption, education, social problems, and also culture.

This shift in student interests poses a very important challenge for the university in future. The mission of the university is to take public interests into account in teaching analytical and investigative journalism, as well as social science research methods in the collection and processing of information. At the same time, however, the reality of the media is different – the entertainment media and self-reflective blogs are the focus now. It may be that study programmes have to take these transformations into account, and introduce classes focusing on popular culture and the media so as to share in the best practices in that particular genre.

A second major challenge is making sure that journalism has co-orientation with Internet and mobile communications technologies, because training cannot be based on clear principles and formats if we evaluate

the work of students in the context of more or less recognised examples and achievements. Instead, training must include research in the broadest sense, as well as creative work on the basis of the assumption that students can move ahead of professionals with their ideas and create innovative approaches. This requires new approaches in higher education.

Typically, students who have completed their internships are far more positive about the need for a study process that is more focused on a broad background and on assignments which help them to learn skills:

“I’m unaware of things that happened ten or more years ago;”

“I had difficulties with writing narration and the introduction to the story, because that has to be done much more quickly than the university ever demanded;”

“I’d like the study process to involve real articles which are based on real events;”

“There should be more practical courses to develop language;”

“Sometimes I’ve found that I cannot clearly formulate that what I need to say so that readers can understand it, and that’s why more a greater number of practical assignments should be offered.”

Approximately one-third of students call for more training in terms of personal communications skills, because they lack the “shamelessness” that journalists need, the ability to communicate by telephone, to begin a conversation with a stranger, and to remember what interviewees have said.

The self-assessment of students shows that many interns had to re-evaluate their ideas about their knowledge and skills, because reproofs given by the media have been harsher than estimations given at the university. That may be partly due to the fact that students who pay their own tuition see themselves as paying clients – something that encourages higher demands vis-à-vis the university, with students themselves remaining in the position of a consumer. When they do their internships, however, the situation changes very rapidly, because the media seek not to develop the student, but instead to demand that useful work be done.

Conclusions

Journalism education in Latvia reflects problems with policies and management issues at Latvia’s institutions of higher education, but it also reflects the uncertainties of the media and journalism. This may be an “academic discipline with great potential” (DeBurgh, 2003, p. 105), but

this is not appreciated much in Latvia. On the contrary, the focus is on a bureaucratic or formally organised higher education system in which there is regulation on the basis of areas of study and sectors of science, but not enough flexible opportunity to integrate theory and practice and organise study programmes on the basis of flexible study models.

Additional difficulties are caused by the long-lasting organisational crisis that has existed in the media environment. There are no institutions to represent the professional community and to provide assistance in implementing study programmes, as well as supervision of the relevant learning outcomes.

According to international experts, journalism education in Latvia is rated positively when it comes to tested standards, methods and principles, but there is also a series of ambiguities when it comes to the future. How to strike a balance between the stability of the academic environment and the unclear demands for change in the professional environment? How to make sure that the university serves the development of society and facilitates critical debates at a time when there is increasing market demand for soft news and entertainment? How can the professional standards of journalistic culture be merged with user-created content? What to say about the confluence between journalism and public relations?

There is no doubt that university journalism programmes face great changes and challenges. The role of these programmes in the culture of journalism is to promote social practices in which journalists interact with the public and with individuals, and that role is bound to increase.

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Kintanti žurnalistika ir kintančios žurnalistikos studijos

Santrauka

Straipsnyje aptariamos žurnalistikos studijos kintančios žurnalistikos, jos profesionalumo bei universitetinių studijų programų kontekste. Autorė remiasi trijų studijų programų, vykdomų Latvijoje, savianalizės ataskaitomis, vertinimo komisijos ekspertiniu vertinimu ir studentų atsiliepimais apie studijų metu įgyjamas žinias bei įgūdžius, atsižvelgiant į darbo rinkos reikalavimus.

Raktiniai žodžiai: žurnalistika, žurnalistikos studijos, profesiniai reikalavimai.