

## ***Promises, promises: are Australian universities deceiving journalism students?***

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In June 2009, the former editor of *The Scotsman* newspaper and journalism Professor at the University of Kent, Tim Luckhurst, created headlines when he told the Association for Journalism Education's annual conference that there was "an element of fraud in journalism education". He later elaborated in an article in *The Times* that a lack of academic ability in many students "means it is implausible that they will ever have a career in journalism," saying universities "need to be a lot more honest. We have a duty to be candid," (Newman, 2009). Was he right? If, as Australian literature suggests, no more than a third of graduates end up as 'journalists' (Green & McIlwaine, 1999; Hill & Tanner, 2006; O'Donnell, 1999), should universities be more candid about this when promoting journalism education to potential students? In this paper we examine the online descriptions of 27 undergraduate journalism courses offered in Australia, noting in particular how strongly their promotional material links journalism study with a career as a journalist. We found many programs make an explicit link between studying journalism and an eventual career in newspaper, television or radio, and, although some universities and colleges do highlight other careers, these are often downplayed.

### **Introduction**

In June 2009, former editor of *The Scotsman* newspaper and journalism Professor at the University of Kent, Tim Luckhurst, created headlines when he told a panel at the British Association for Journalism Education's annual conference that there was "an element of fraud in journalism education" (Newman, 2009; Oliver, 2009). He later elaborated in an article in *The Times* that a lack of academic ability of many students made it unlikely they would ever work in the industry.

"It's an unspoken truth, which everyone knows, that far too many people are being accepted whose lack of academic ability means it is implausible that they will ever have a career in journalism," he was quoted in The Higher Education supplement of *The Times* as saying. "We need to be a lot more honest. We have a duty to be candid." (Newman, 2009, para. 5)

The term 'fraud' is a strong one, but Professor Luckhurst is not alone in this position. The same report from *The Times* quoted Joanne Butcher, the chief executive of the National Council for the Training of Journalists — which accredits some but far from all of the journalism courses in the UK — as saying the vast majority of courses didn't meet the council's standards and "I don't think universities should be selling the dream of becoming journalists to students who do not have the potential to develop the necessary skills" (Newman, 2009, para. 18).

Similar arguments have been raised in Australia, as part of the debate over whether there should be accreditation of journalism education and how best journalism education should be delivered (see, for example, Alysen, 2007; Henningham, 1999; O'Donnell, 1999; Patching, 1996; Pearson, 1994; Sheridan Burns, 2003; Stuart, 1997). As the number of journalism courses in Australia has grown, the debate has taken different paths, from whether we are able to teach journalism at all to whether we are teaching it well, whether we are teaching it to too many, whether we are educating students to be journalists, or whether we are educating students about journalism. All these are questions that go to the heart of the rationale for journalism education.

In this paper we seek to further the debate by considering another side — whatever our intentions in teaching journalism, are we sufficiently truthful in telling potential student about the employment realities? Are universities promoting too strongly the likelihood of a career in the industry? Should we be more candid, even before enrolment, about the difficulties in securing such a job — particularly for students who may lack the academic ability to be viable journalists? To do this, we revisit the debate a decade after questions were initially raised about the low level of industry employment of journalism graduates, by considering whether Australian journalism courses are overselling to students the chances of a career in journalism.

### **What jobs do journalism graduates get?**

A university degree is not the same as a vocational training course, but in some fields, at least, you might be forgiven for thinking so. Take veterinary science: according to Graduate Careers Australia, which each year surveys graduates to find out where they end up in the workforce, veterinary students, by and large, end up working in the field of veterinary science. Most architecture students head into architecture. Education students end up teaching (*Graduate Destinations 2007, 2008*). Since the third wave of journalism education in Australia in the post-1970s (Stuart, 1997) there has been continual tension over where the course sits in the higher education spectrum — as a general, liberal arts program with an emphasis on journalistic studies, or as a vocational field? It is not a debate fully resolved, however. Stark (2000, p. 65), for example, describes the development of journalism education courses within the higher education sector as following the vocational model of law and medicine, while using the teaching model of the newsroom. Numerous other authors (among them Adam, 2001; Henningham, 1999; Martin, 2008; O'Donnell, 1999; Ricketson, 2001; Sheridan Burns, 2003) have looked at the development of journalism education in the light of how best to prepare potential journalists. At the same time, only a few authors (including Alysen, 2007; Green & McIlwaine, 1999; O'Donnell, 1999; Patching, 1996) have really addressed the issue of the 'other' students: those who either set their cap at a journalism job but fail to secure one or who don't really want to be journalists in the first place.

Although the Graduate Careers Australia statistics don't reveal what percentage of journalism students find work as journalists, it is well documented that they have very diverse careers. Research conducted over the past 15 years suggests fewer than half of students will end up working in a mainstream media publication. The Australian Press Council's annual report on the state of the print media in 2007 gave a fairly optimistic figure, estimating "35 per cent of graduates find jobs in mainstream media, 30 per

cent in non-mainstream media, and 30 per cent in non-journalism areas” (Hill & Tanner, 2006).

Green and McIlwaine (1999) claim a similar percentage of University of Queensland journalism students find jobs with mainstream journalism employers, with 9 per cent finding work at metropolitan dailies, 5 per cent in suburban papers and 6.4 per cent in regional dailies. It isn't entirely clear whether these figures include 'non-journalism' roles at these institutions (such as advertorial writing) because elsewhere the authors say total employment in "mainstream journalism" is under 10 per cent. The authors also note that those students with double degrees, such as journalism and law or journalism and broadcasting, are more likely to find work than straight journalism majors (Green & McIlwaine, 1999, p. 138).

Similar issues arise overseas, with an annual survey in the US that tracks graduates from journalism, broadcasting and mass communications programs noting that only a small proportion of graduates end up working in journalism and broadcasting. In 1987, 40 per cent of bachelor-degree recipients with news-editorial emphasis gained jobs with newspapers or wire services. In 1997 it was 35 per cent. By 2008 — a period of increased pressure on American newspapers due to the global economic crisis — it was 23 per cent. In contrast, broadcasting employment for broadcasting students was much more static over time, remaining roughly 30 per cent since 1987, with a brief peak of 38 per cent in the late 1990s (Becker, Vlad, Olin, Hanisak, & Wilcox, 2009, pp. 64-65).

What the literature and institutional experience suggests, then, is that a portion of journalism students — perhaps as many as a third but this may be generous — will find work within the journalism field. The rest are more likely to end up in non-journalism roles with media groups, work in other forms of communication (such as public relations), or work in different fields altogether.

This outcome is not particularly surprising to those who understand the industry — and nor would the alternative be possible. For example, Patching (1996) and Alysen (2007), both argue that expecting journalism schools to produce only journalists is unviable, with very few positions actually available within the industry for entry-level journalists each year. Patching (1996) said that restricting courses was not likely to be a solution, but that “journalism educators need to think seriously about the ramification of more than 1000 journalism graduates a year ... for only a few hundred mainstream journalism jobs” (Patching, 1996, p63). O'Donnell (1999) calls for a rethinking of the education of journalism students precisely to cater for what she calls “the other 66 per cent”, saying that “newsrooms may well seem the natural or preferred destination for journalism graduates but they are not the *most likely* destination” (O'Donnell 1999, p. 135). The question remains, however, whether students themselves understand these odds or whether they are unduly optimistic about their individual career prospects.

### **Is this actually a problem?**

The employment of just a small percentage of journalism graduates in journalism roles is only a problem in two instances: firstly, if the studies of the remaining students are not adequate for alternative careers; and secondly, if the students

themselves are unhappy with this outcome. Considering the first of these possibilities, it appears that for many non-journalism jobs, including public relations and advertising, a journalism degree is an advantage in gaining employment and journalism graduates may earn more in these careers than in traditional journalism roles (O'Donnell, 1999, pp. 135-136).

Dissatisfaction with the student experience may be a more problematic issue, however. There have been only limited studies of the employment destinations for journalism graduates, but what research has been conducted suggests many graduates are unhappy about having to resort to a non-journalism career. In looking at the results of a survey of University of Technology Sydney journalism graduates in the workforce, O'Donnell (1999) reported that nine out of ten were employed and, overall, they were earning higher than average incomes — with those employed *outside* journalism earning more than those employed in the field. But just one in three employed graduates was working in a newsroom and the majority of those who were not were dissatisfied with their non-journalism roles, saying they were “not doing what they expected to be doing after finishing a university degree in journalism” (O'Donnell, 1999, p. 131.)

The author argues that journalism graduates have strong expectations of a career in journalism, describing what she says is seen as a

... vocational offer made by universities to journalism students. The offer is that journalism graduates should be job-ready for entry-level employment in the media. The implication is that professional education in the university context can equip all those who graduate with the intellectual and technical skills needed to be a journalist. This is clearly debatable. (O'Donnell, 1999, pp. 133-134)

The UTS study considered the career perspectives of newly graduated journalism students, but it is worth looking at what new journalism students expected their eventual careers to look like as well. Alysen & Oakham (1996) questioned 130 undergraduate students and found “... 103 said they intended to major in journalism and, of those, 64 said they were planning a career in the profession, while 34 had not made up their minds” (Alysen & Oakham, 1996, p. 41). Of the 103 planning to major in journalism, most had optimistic views of their chances of finding a job in the industry. Some 35 per cent rated their chances as good to very good and another 2 per cent believed their chances were excellent. Only four students thought it would be nearly impossible to secure a job in the industry (Alysen & Oakham, 1996, p. 45).

In other words, almost two out of three likely journalism major students wanted to work in the industry and almost four in ten believed their chances of doing so were good to excellent. Their perceptions may be misguided, say the authors, but they argued “if those students are the raw material with which we will shape the nature and practice of journalism then we would ignore their expectations, even their misconceptions, at our peril” (Alysen & Oakham, 1996, p. 51).

**How much does the promotion of a university course affect a student's expectations?**

As academics may not be intimately involved with the promotion of their courses — leaving this to the university marketing department — it is easy for them to downplay its importance. But it is worth considering the extent to which promotion material affects what students expect from university and the selection of what they will study. This can assist in answering the question of whether students are entering courses based on what universities are saying in handbooks, course guides and other promotional material, or whether they have some other reason for their enrolment.

Certainly, students can be influenced by very different factors when making a course choice. In a British study of journalism students and their expectations, Hanna and Sanders (2007) found 10 per cent of new students had a parent or guardian who had been a journalist, suggesting a generational influence. Alysen & Oakham (1996) reported that some students said they had been influenced by others — particularly careers advisors, family and friends — in considering journalism as a profession and many students had also undertaken work experience in the industry or had enjoyed writing for high school or other publications. They also found students held a number of assumptions about what a career in journalism might be like, including that journalists wielded both power and influence, which also played a role in influencing course choice (Alysen & Oakham, 1996, pp. 42-43).

But broader studies within the field of marketing that explore the decision-making process of students when considering universities and individual programs have found the information that is provided by universities on offered courses to be a dominant factor in student choice. Moogan and Barron (2003) found the course content viewed by students “to be of prime significance as a starting point for the majority of pupils who wished to continue studying, with nearly half of the sample rating it in first position” (Moogan & Barron, 2003, p. 279). Soutar and Turner (2002) said that the premier factor in choosing a program or university was the fact an institution offered a course that the would-be student really wanted. This ranked above the academic reputation of the university and their potential job prospects (Soutar & Turner, 2002, p. 44). Brown, Varley and Pal (2009) found that what students thought about courses on offer was a deciding factor in their initial decision-making about institutions and programs, with other factors such as content, teaching style and assessment considered later (Brown, Varley, & Pal, 2009, p. 318).

In considering how students learned about what was on offer at universities and within courses, Moogan, Barron and Bainbridge (2001) found that prospective students usually had limited knowledge of higher education, and researched the educational market using promotional materials such as prospectuses, guide books and electronic sources of information (Moogan, Barron, & Bainbridge, 2001, p. 180). A more recent study found the internet was the key place where students sought information, particularly as it was more up-to-date than many hardcopy publications, followed by the prospectus (Brown et al., 2009, p. 318).

Putnis and Axford (2002) identify the prospect of students misinterpreting the handbooks and other material as being a real issue within Australian media studies courses, particularly for first-generation and overseas students. These students were considered vulnerable to misunderstandings about the link between course and employment and the authors warn there needs to be much clearer articulation between the skills taught and likely employment destinations.

... the principle of 'buyer beware' seems to apply for potential students. Whether the course they enrol in fulfils their expectations will largely depend on how well they can interpret the course handbooks and outlines. Students need to 'read between the lines' and have other sources of information — such as contact with students already in a given course if they are to be able to make an informed choice about the course in which to enrol. (Putnis & Axford, 2002, pp. 16-17)

It can be said, then, that although there are multiple influences that may lead a student to choose one course over another, including the influence of family and friends, their previous work experience and assumptions about what that field might offer, the role of the institution in promoting the particular course and describing its content through prospectuses and online cannot be underestimated, and there is a very real risk that students will misinterpret or overestimate the power of a particular course to deliver employment in a given field.

### **Methods**

In this study, we sought to examine what universities were offering new journalism students as likely career outcomes of their studies, and whether there was a strong link represented to students that their studies would lead into a career in journalism. In trying to determine those representations, we concentrated on what was offered on the websites of the universities, as it was considered this was most representative of the type of search a potential student might make, and was supported by the findings of Brown (2009) and Moogan et al (2001) that electronic sources such as online handbooks are primary tools used by students to research information. The one exception was the University of South Australia, which provided a PDF of information to be downloaded rather than supplying the information on the site.

The first step was to identify the universities and private institutions that offered journalism degrees, and this was done by considering those associated with the Journalism Education Association. There are 23 Australian university courses listed with the JEA, at 22 universities (Griffith University offers courses on two campuses but they share a common information page), and two private college courses ("Journalism Education Association — associated courses," 2009). As not all journalism programs are associated with the JEA, searches were made of universities not on the list to see if undergraduate degrees in journalism were offered, leading to a final list of 27 courses at 25 universities and two colleges. The next step was to visit the websites of each course, found by seeking options such as 'course handbook', 'what can you study?' or 'information for prospective students', to see what information they might offer a potential student seeking answers to two key questions:

1. Where will this course lead me?
2. Why should I choose this course over another one?

These hypothetical questions were chosen as they allowed us to assess how the university or college was positioning its course not only against its competition but also in terms of the career outcomes of graduates. By posing specific questions, it also narrowed down the amount of information that was being considered and made comparison between websites easier: Some universities included many pages of

information for potential students about course plans, assessments, industry placement and other aspects of their program, whereas others contained very little information at all.

Finally, key paragraphs that answered these questions were selected from the websites to assess how clearly a link was made between studying journalism and eventual employment as a journalist. This was the most subjective part of the research and considerable care was taken not to take information out of context. In order to be fair to all programs, we thought it was necessary to take into account not only what was said about the likelihood of industry employment, but also how prominently any qualifications were made. In some cases, a university might clearly link their program to industry employment but qualify it in the next paragraph by adding that the skills were also useful in industries such as public relations. In other cases, any qualification was placed on a different web page altogether or in a location that required the hypothetical student to scroll far down a page.

There are some drawbacks with the method used. As previously noted there are numerous avenues for students to find out about the university courses on offer, and it is not possible to judge in this research how much an orientation day, career expo or personal contact between students plays a role in influencing selection. Nor is it possible to say that a university is overstating its success in placing students in the media industry — however strong the link it makes online — because there are few independent reports that give this kind of information. Finally, selecting information is always a subjective process and it is possible an alternative reader of the websites would develop a different impression. For this reason, key paragraphs are quoted where possible in this research to aid understanding.

Still, what this process of distilling the online information provided to students does is give a clearer picture of the impression many would-be journalism students receive about their career prospects as a result of undertaking a particular program. It demonstrates the strength of the link between journalism as a career and journalism studies by many Australian universities, and also suggests areas where additional explanation or candour may be useful.

## **Findings**

For a potential student looking to study journalism, there are numerous options in Australia. The JEA website lists 23 associated courses, at 22 universities ("Journalism Education Association — associated courses," 2009), plus two college courses, Macleay College and Jschool. Journalism is also offered a number of other universities, however, not associated with the JEA and a wider search was made leading to an eventual list of 27 courses at 25 universities and two colleges. Twenty-four of the courses are undergraduate bachelor degrees, we also considered the Graduate Certificate in Journalism, Media and Communications offered by the University of Tasmania and the two diplomas offered by the colleges, as outlined in table one.

### **Table one: University and college programs investigated**

<b>University or College</b>	<b>Program offered</b>
Bond University	Bachelor of Journalism
Central Queensland University	Bachelor of Arts (Journalism)
Charles Sturt University	Bachelor of Journalism
Curtin University	Bachelor Arts (Humanities)
Deakin University	Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communication)
Edith Cowan University	Bachelor of Communication (Journalism)
Griffith University	Bachelor of Journalism
Jschool (college)	Diploma of Journalism
La Trobe University	Bachelor of Journalism
Macleay College	Diploma in Journalism
Monash University	Bachelor of Journalism
Murdoch University	Bachelor of Communication (Journalism)
Newcastle University	Bachelor of Communication (Journalism)
Queensland University of Technology	Bachelor of Journalism
RMIT University	Bachelor of Communication (Journalism)
Southern Cross University	Bachelor of Media
Swinburne University of Technology	Bachelor of Arts (Journalism)
University of Canberra	Bachelor of Journalism
University of Queensland	Bachelor of Journalism
University of South Australia	Bachelor of Journalism
University of Southern Queensland	Bachelor of Communication (Journalism)
University of Sydney	Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communication)
University of Tasmania	Graduate Certificate in Journalism, Media and Communications
University of Technology Sydney	Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Journalism)
University of the Sunshine Coast	Bachelor of Journalism
University of Western Sydney	Bachelor of Communication (Journalism)
University of Wollongong	Bachelor of Communications and Media Studies (Journalism)

The course material was examined to see how clearly the link was made between studying the particular program and going on to a career specifically as a journalist. What became clear is that there are several approaches taken by universities and colleges to this issue. The first approach was to make an extremely strong connection between study and employment in the industry, as does the private college Jschool, which on its homepage sums up what it says are the reasons for studying its course:

In a nutshell ... the best chance of a job in journalism of any course in Australia ... Hey it's a no-brainer! If you really want to be a journalist and do a fun course, get yourself into Jschool! ("Jschool, Journalism Education and Training," 2009).

Deakin University describes its course as providing “students with the skills and knowledge to become qualified journalists in the broadcast and print media” (“Deakin University, Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communication),” 2009). Swinburne says its course will “ensure you are fully equipped to work as a journalist now — and in the future” (“Swinburne University of Technology, Bachelor of Arts (Journalism),” 2009). Newcastle University also makes a strong connection, saying:

As a graduate of the journalism major you can find work as a reporter, producer, publisher, editor and sub-editor, feature and freelance writer, investigative journalist, media researcher, and strategist in print, broadcast and online media. (“Newcastle University, Bachelor of Communication,” 2009)

The second approach links the design of the course to employment, by making the link not between the studying of the course and eventual employment as a journalist, but between what the course was *designed* to do and such a career. The University of Technology, Sydney, describes its journalism program thus:

The emphasis is on developing journalists who are innovative, reflective and have a strong understanding of the role of journalism and the contexts in which it is practised in Australia and internationally. (“University of Technology Sydney, Journalism,” 2009)

A similar approach is taken by Charles Sturt University, which says its program:

... is designed and taught to produce industry-ready graduates able to respond to the rapidly changing media environment. Graduates work professionally as broadcast and print journalists. (“Charles Sturt University, Bachelor of Communication (Journalism),” 2009)

A third approach describes the career of journalism without making an explicit link to studies, although students may bridge this semantic gap without being aware of how wide the gap can be. Griffith University takes this tack. It poses the question, “why choose this program?” then answers by linking the decision to the career.

Journalism is an exciting profession covering a broad range of activities including government and political reporting, business and finance, police, local government, health, science, urban and rural affairs and sport. As a journalist you will have the chance to inform people and question the decisions that affect the community. (“Griffith University, Bachelor of Journalism,” 2009)

Curtin University similarly describes what graduates will be like on completion without clearly linking the studies to this outcome, although it does promise that its course provides students with “an edge in the employment market”:

You will graduate from this major with a strong portfolio of published work which will set you up well for employment in local, regional, national and international newspapers, radio and TV, magazines, online media outlets and community publications. (“Curtin University, Journalism,” 2009)

These examples demonstrate the clearest link made between the studying (or, at least, the design) of a particular course or program to a career in journalism, of all courses considered. The connection is strong enough that it may be construed by a potential student as forming the “vocational offer” described by O’Donnell (1999), above. The next level of approach taken by universities is more equivocal about the likelihood of graduates progressing into journalistic roles. However, in many cases, potential students still need to apply a level of critical thinking to read between the lines of the promotional material.

Murdoch University says its course “prepares students for the professional practice of high quality journalism ... [and] will give you the practical skills and understanding of industry to work as a journalist.” But immediately after this it states that “if you combine your course with a degree in Media studies, Public Relations or even Radio, you can expand your skills for more niche roles” (“Murdoch University, Journalism ”, 2009). This can be taken to qualify the link to professional practice with a recognition that extra study may be needed, or that alternative career paths are on offer. The University of Western Sydney similarly balances its strong link to a journalistic career with a qualifying statement that the skills are useful not only in traditional journalistic roles but in “corporate and community” media contexts — although again it is suggestive rather than explicit:

The Journalism major of the University of Western Sydney's Bachelor of Communication degree gives you the skills and on-the-ground experience you need to succeed in modern journalism ... You'll develop journalism skills for newspapers, magazines, Internet, radio, television, corporate and community media contexts, and you'll come to understand news team culture and management. (“University of Western Sydney, Journalism ”, 2009)

La Trobe University also describes a range of different career paths for students, although its primary focus is on journalism:

This course offers training for students who plan to work in the areas of print, television, radio and online journalism ... Graduates can enter the media and communications industries in such areas as local and regional newspapers, corporate communications, online information design and development, and government communication. (“La Trobe University, Journalism,” 2009)

The University of Sydney also describes its Bachelor of Arts in broad terms, saying graduates

... will possess the training and skills required for entry into areas such as print, broadcast and online journalism, international communications, media regulation and public policy, and media and public relations. (“University of Sydney, Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communications) ”, 2009)

Several courses take an explanatory approach, recognising in their descriptions that studying journalism will not automatically lead to a career as a journalist and using a variety of methods to try to convey this to students. The University of South Australia, which offers the only program of its kind in that state, says:

Most of those entering Australian journalism are university graduates, and in South Australia most are graduates of the UniSA program. While success as a student does not guarantee success as a working journalist, it greatly improves individual career prospects. (*UniSA, Experience. Communication and Media*, 2009)

RMIT University says:

...the journalism profession has no single point of entry, so RMIT journalism graduates, with the range of skills they bring to the profession, have an increased likelihood of gaining a job in the news media. Most graduates find work in the news media or a related field within six months of graduating.

It also qualifies this, however, by saying:

...although the focus of the degree is to prepare you for a career in journalism, it can also serve as a general preparation for other careers in the communications field. ("RMIT University, Journalism — Bachelor of Communication ", 2009)

Universities making clear statements about other career paths also tend to speak in terms of the transferability of skills and their usefulness in other areas. Says the University of Southern Queensland, "Journalism skills are also valued in public relations, publishing, law, commerce and business" ("University of Southern Queensland, Journalism Major," 2009). The University of the Sunshine Coast says: "Skills are also transferable across a variety of communications roles in the public and private sectors" ("University of the Sunshine Coast, Bachelor of Journalism," 2009), whereas Bond University describes its course as being designed for students "with a career focus aimed directly at working in mainstream journalism ... [but] Your skills and knowledge will also be useful in other vocations where journalistic skills are required" ("Bond University, Journalism," 2009).

The final approach distances the studies from career prospects altogether. While uncommon, this is the approach used by Edith Cowan University, which simply describes its course thus:

In a world awash with spin, the practice of high quality journalism has never been more important. This journalism major covers writing and research skills, working in audio, video and online environments, and the legal and ethical frameworks of the profession ("ECU, Bachelor of Communications Major in Journalism," 2009)

### **Discussion and conclusion**

In analysing Australian universities' promotion of journalism courses to would-be students, does Tim Luckhurst's criticism of British programs — that they lack transparency and need to be more candid — hold true for Australian courses as well? It is clear that a link between *studying journalism* and *becoming a journalist* is made repeatedly by universities and colleges, although the strength of that link varies widely between programs. The universities and colleges making the strongest approach appear to directly link their studies to future employment in the industry,

without providing clear qualification or explanation of the real likelihood. For would-be students reading the promotional material for journalism programs, it may seem therefore that a job in journalism is, if not assured, at least likely or the obvious outcome. This is compounded by language that embraces the student in discussion of working journalists, or uses phrases such as “as a journalist, you will ...” which can only suggest that a student has a substantial prospect of a journalistic career. While this study has focused on the primary descriptions of courses provided to students, this impression of study leading to industry employment could only be enhanced by other material outside this study’s scope, such as discussion of the employment of former graduates at mainstream news publications or media outlets.

In most cases, however, universities waver somewhat between linking their programs with journalistic careers, and acknowledging that this is not always possible. Although they may promote the success of their programs in placing graduates, most universities appear to be wary of making too direct a link. Several, as noted, specifically recognise the diversity of career outcomes for students and speak of the transferability of journalism skills. That said, many universities have carefully crafted promotional text that on close inspection is accurate and correct about the multiplicity of roles a journalism student may have, but which a young prospective student, giving only a cursory read of the text, may end up misinterpreting. This ambiguity may be accidental or deliberate, but it certainly doesn’t lead to transparency.

In commonsense terms, universities and colleges use promotional material to entice prospective students to enrol in their programs and courses. Because of this, the material is worded in a way that highlights the benefits of a course, its desirability over other options, and, where possible, links the study to career outcomes. But this does not excuse promoting a course as something it is not — a certain ticket to employment — or writing the material in such a way that prospective students struggle to divine the true meaning. There may be lecturers who look at this promotional material simply as advertising, and believe they are sufficiently informing students after enrolment about the difficulties of journalism as a career. But this is hardly a substitute for being honest about career prospects *before* a student enrolls and commits time and considerable money towards a course that may not deliver the goods.

As noted at the outset, the absence of widespread research on where journalism graduates end up working makes it difficult to say whether they do or do not progress into journalism roles. Despite this, it is neither fair nor ethical for universities and colleges to obfuscate on this issue — nor to tell students they will be exclusively prepared for such roles, when it is clearly not possible for them all to be employed in this way. There is surely wisdom in not misleading students, by qualifying expectations early on, lest they believe enrolment and graduation will automatically translate to qualification and career.

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