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**Enabling international journalism students to
understand and report effectively on serious health
issues in their own countries.**

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Abstract

Twenty seven universities in Australia run journalism programs and they attract a large number of international students. Yet, do we prepare these students to report on serious health issues in their own countries such as TB, malaria, diabetes and HIV (*Human Immunodeficiency Virus*) which has reached epidemic proportions in many African, Asian and Pacific countries. Currently, 33 million people live with HIV, there are 7,500 new infections every day and some countries report infection rates as high as 20 per cent of their populations. These figures are so alarming that this paper focuses solely on HIV and examines ways to develop effective media coverage of the disease for international journalism students who intend to work as reporters in their own countries. The author reviews the findings of two studies that tracked press coverage of HIV in southern African and Papua New Guinea (PNG) from the mid-1980s. They are the most extensive studies to date on the topic and include countries that share distinct cultural similarities. The findings, while wide-ranging, present new challenges for journalism educators and international students. Both studies highlight gaps in press coverage of the disease and stress the need to extend the scope of news reporting on HIV from a purely health perspective to stories that are linked to political, social, economic, cultural, religious and relationship aspects. Acknowledging these connections will help international journalism students on their return home to engage in meaningful coverage of the crisis and its broad ramifications.

