

# Academic Matters

OCUFA'S JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION  
LA REVUE D'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR D'UAPUO

MAY-MAI 2011

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literature review?

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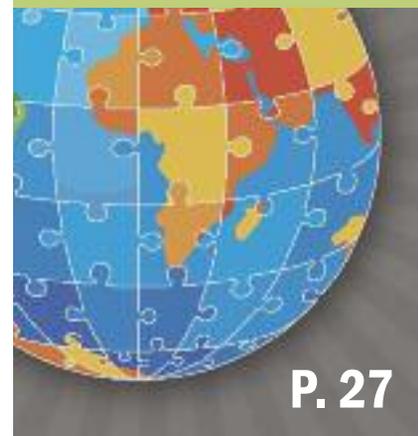
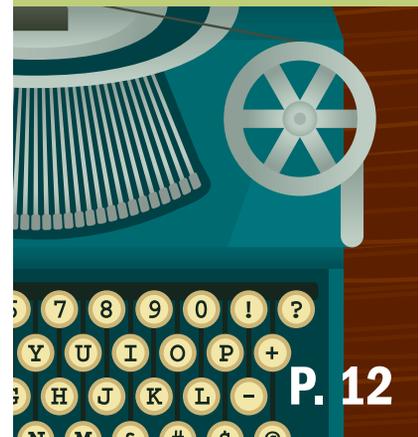
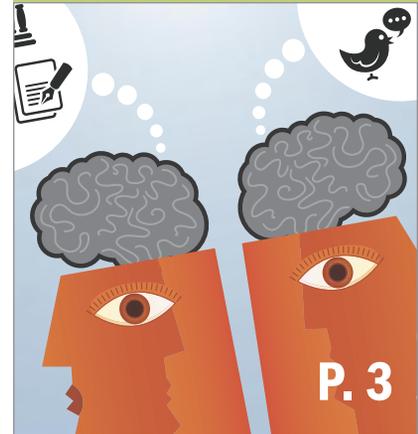
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# Academic Matters

OCUFA'S JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION  
LA REVUE D'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR D'UAPUO

Academic Matters is published two times a year by OCUFA, and is received by 17,000 professors, academic librarians and others interested in higher education issues across Canada. The journal explores issues of relevance to higher education in Ontario, other provinces in Canada, and globally. It is intended to be a forum for thoughtful and thought-provoking, original and engaging discussion of current trends in post secondary education and consideration of academe's future direction.

Readers are encouraged to contribute their views, ideas and talents. Letters to the editor (maximum 250 words) are welcome and may be edited for length. To provide an article or artwork for Academic Matters, please send your query to Editor-in-Chief Mark Rosenfeld at mrosenfeld@ocufa.on.ca.

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## Reader Matters

### Re: Steve Joodens, "You can lead students to knowledge, but how do you make them think?" Academic Matters October/November 2010 issue

An excellent piece on the barriers that may impede students' critical thinking skills—especially those students who are attending university for the very first time; indeed, indoctrination is present and accounted for. As a teaching assistant, I am at the point in the semester where my first-year students will need to know the finer points of the "whats" and "hows" of critical thinking, to consider the "adversarial position" in an argument, and engage (and write about) social phenomena with an "open mind." This piece will inform the approach that I will take with my students in tutorial next week. It will be interesting to observe their reactions as they engage directly with their defences—hopefully!

**CRAIG BUTOSI, UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO**

Loved this article and the comments. I teach a course on racism and I teach introduction to anthropology. But I was trained as an ethnomusicologist. Just came from Norway attending the International Student Festival in Trondheim (ISFIT.org), and food was one of the workshops focused under the theme GLOBALIZE THIS: HEALTH. This article is a must read for the group SURVIVAL OF THE FATTEST.

**KYRA GAUNT, BARUCH COLLEGE, CUNY**

An excellent article. I study and teach sociology and I found this article very relevant to the concept of socialization—the idea that the forces around us (family, media, etc) influence our viewpoints and who we are. I thought that the link between slavery/racism and animal exploitation/speciesism was very clearly argued. It was interesting that the "major life change" that would result as a result of abolishing slavery was a major obstacle to achieving this. I would argue the same is the case for animal exploitation—many people would ideally like to see the abolition of animal exploitation but are reluctant to change their own habits. My only (minor) criticism is that, as is common with articles that bring up animal exploitation, the focus was on meat rather than animal products in general. I'd argue that animal products in general are responsible for animal exploitation, with meat being just one of these products. Products such as eggs, dairy and leather involve a similar amount of suffering and death as meat, and are also equally as unnecessary as meat.

**NICK PENDERGRAST, CURTIN UNIVERSITY, AUSTRALIA**

### Re: Ken Snowden, "Is the teacher-researcher faculty model just too expensive?" Academic Matters October/November 2010 issue

Overall, I agree with the concerns raised by this article. I have taught in the university system, as a part-time professor, as a Canada Research Chair and as a tenured faculty member for almost 20 years. Throughout all of this time, I have done research, as well as working as a consultant in international development. In all of my teaching evaluations, one of the elements that students most appreciate is the depth that my research experience and my practical work bring to the classroom. Research enriches the student experience and does not take away from it. Part-time faculty, if they were paid well, not the pittance that they are paid now could only provide diversity and new horizons for students.

**VILLIA JEFREMOVAS, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY**

Ann Rauhala, a former journalist now teaching at Ryerson University, says the worlds of academe and journalism are not quite the two solitudes they seem.

*Ann Rauhala, ancienne journaliste qui enseigne maintenant à l'Université Ryerson, déclare que le monde universitaire et le monde du journalisme ne sont pas les deux solitudes qu'ils semblent être.*

# So where's the literature review?

**Ann Rauhala**



A reporter and a professor walk into a bar.

The barkeep, sliding a menu forward, asks them what they want.

"Give me whatever's new and delivers a buzz," the journalist says, smacking her lips and barely opening the menu's sticky cover.

The scholar pores over the menu for 15 minutes and then looks up, aghast. "Where's the lit review?"

This opening is what we in journalism call a lead—or a "lede" if you cut your teeth journalistically, as I did, at the *Globe and Mail*.

The lead is supposed to alert readers to your most important or interesting message and lure them into absorbing it. Please note that "important" and "interesting" are often of equal weight in a newsroom. More on that later.

This fable at the table sheds some light on what the media and the academy can learn from each other so that they can drink together in peace and, in doing so, improve our collective grasp of significant ideas, whether they are social, scientific, or simply wondrous.

All capable journalists operate with a key assumption that runs precisely counter to that which capable scholars hold dear. That is, the less anyone knows or understands about a subject, the better a topic it is for investigation.



Despite what you might think, given the bountiful reports about Justin Bieber's bangs, this assumption is not a mindless celebration of superficiality. Rather, it is a commitment to unbiased discovery.

The first question an editor will ask a keen reporter who thinks she has a juicy idea for a story is: "Has anyone done it before?" The best answer is: "No, never." Or at least: "Not the way I'll do it."

Reporters want to ask questions that no one has asked and to find out for themselves what's going on. They don't want to plant their row of non-genetically-modified beans where someone else has been ploughing (and fertilizing) for decades. They do not want to gather news with a preconceived notion of what they will find. They certainly don't want to be accused of having a carefully crafted hypothesis that they want to prove. They want to be open-minded and to be seen as open-minded.

John Sawatsky, a Canadian guru of interviewing who has trained a generation of journalists, has said repeatedly

that the best questions cannot be answered yes or no.

Open-ended inquiry doesn't seem to be the norm or expectation in academia. Most research is carefully attuned to what went before. That doesn't mean it's unoriginal or incremental, just that scholars like to keep everything in context. They're aware of what they're building on, even if it is new. Journalists, however, need to find a foreground that entertains viewers and may not consider the background.

Not exactly the scholarly path. It is difficult to imagine any scientist or other scholar smacking the desk and saying, "Hell, Rupert, let's just get out there to see what we find."

Negotiating the distance between those two worldviews can be challenging for those who leave journalism to teach at the post-secondary level and then find themselves pursuing research in a scholarly setting. Our number may be small, but our plight may be instructive to those on both sides of the chasm.

When I moved from journalism to the scholarly world, I thought that my background in documentary and newspaper research would be useful. I was mostly wrong, of course, and found out the hard way.

I embarked on my first research project with a colleague who also had a news background. Thinking like journalists, we chose a multi-layered investigation that had not been done

in Canada before. We chose it because it seemed interesting and important, and we couldn't believe our good luck that no one had done it yet! It was a great angle.

Thinking like journalists, our areas of inquiry cut wide swathes across many fields and disciplines. We did that because we wanted a comprehensive view, not a confining one, and we weren't sure which sets of questions would reveal the most meaningful results. Let's ask everything, we thought, and we're sure to find something.

Like journalists, we avoided expressing a specific hypothesis. To do so would have predetermined our findings and made them suspect by news standards.

You can guess the punch line this time. We gathered our data—rather quickly—and started writing about what we found. The findings were unwieldy but exciting, like driving an overburdened bus on a mountain road. When we showed an early draft of our first paper to a colleague with more scholarly acumen, he gently inquired about our literature search. We hung our heads and said our lit review suggested that very

little had been done in this area. I do remember wondering why he seemed concerned.

Then he asked us whether we had thought about which journals might publish this work or which conferences we were planning to attend. We realized that we had mostly thought about how scintillating the findings—about situations in newsrooms—would be to our former colleagues in the media. I actually said that I imagined us talking about our findings on CBC radio.

But the unkindest cut was last. He looked over his bifocals and ever so softly said: “You seem to have no hypothesis.” I suddenly knew how very much I had to learn. As scholars, our goal was not primarily to discover and to share. It was to build on what went before and to add to the corpus of knowledge.

Luckily, there was a happy ending. We were able to grab the wheel, ditch the extra baggage, and steer our work to completion. We did have a working hypothesis—actually several, given the omnibus approach we had taken but simply never called it that. We both knew what we had expected to find but, since we were former journalists, it seemed to us to be very bad form to say so out loud. We were able to tease out the good stuff then interpret and write about most of what we had found. We managed to present and publish, several times, in fact.



Like journalists, we avoided expressing a specific hypothesis. To do so would have predetermined our findings and made them suspect by news standards.



This fundamental difference in outlook between scholars and reporters is one that is seldom acknowledged but recognizing it may help us understand each other. Other differences, usually caused by this lack of perspective, are much easier to identify.

- Journalists tend to be generalists. This has always been true but is more so now that the news industry has been so outflanked and overrun by tweets and tweets that its future is unknown. In that besieged environment, few are encouraged to build areas of expertise. Yes, some of us do know who the first famous Anne Hathaway was. Yes, many reporters do possess the intellectual equipment to understand the basics of histology or Habermas. (Granted, we're more likely to know our way around materialism than our way around a microscope.) Yes, it would be great if every news organization had a science writer with a M.Sc. in *anything* and a film reviewer with a PhD in cultural studies. Sadly, most have neither.

- Journalists have an unfortunate tradition of being defiantly anti-intellectual while at the same time being too proud of their magpie approach to collecting information. It was journalists, remember, who invented the board game Trivial Pursuit. I told an editor at the *Globe* one day that Jean Piaget had died and suggested someone should run an obit. “Am I supposed to know who that is?” she bellowed, somehow implying that I was a misfit in fancy pants.
- Journalists do well with short deadlines, and they work fast. The best reporters are quick and accurate; the rest are dangerous. Except for magazine and documentary writers, who face their own kind of torment in editing, many journalists may have to churn out a few thousand words a day. Imagine how plump your SSHRC or NSERC applications would look if you did that. The need for speed is what fans the embers of academic anxiety into a flaming fear of media. Journalists talk too fast, jump to conclusions too quickly, take words out of context, and are impatient. I will seem foolish, the scholar thinks. My work will be misunderstood, he fears. I will look fat on camera. (A tip: do not wear houndstooth blazers.)

- Journalists also believe that a deadline is the time when you must produce what you promised. Never later, and rarely sooner. Academics evidently see deadlines as more elastic entities. How else can you explain why it takes eight or nine months to get journal articles reviewed by peers? Just asking.
- Journalists are trained to respond to certain stimuli. We listen for the reassuring ring of “newsworthiness,” that quality that makes developments interesting even if they are not important. Conflict, timeliness, relevance, proximity, celebrity—to name a few elements—can set the bells clanging. A conflict at city hall *might* be newsworthy, while a conflict that affects citywide garbage pickup probably *will* be. A conflict between the mayor and the union will be news, but if George Clooney joins the picket line, it will attract full coverage. By way of contrast, the stimuli most likely to activate scholars are emails about upcoming grant deadlines.

Yet, the media and the academy share so much, and from this hope springs for greater understanding and solidarity.

- We both love ideas, and we love to spread them widely. For journalists, this means reporting a development that 300,000 people will read on the front page, and tens of thousands more will read online. For academics, it may mean presenting a paper to 17 people (if you count the grad students who have to be there) in a hotel meeting room in Cincinnati and publishing it in a journal read by 273 experts.
- We both love to analyze, interpret, and share findings. By this I mean that both groups truly relish gossip, although seldom about people's marriages or ailments or new condos. More likely the talk is about who had to defer a vacation (read: sabbatical), got a raise (read: merit), did a front-page story (read: got a SSHRC), appeared on a CBC panel (same), won an undeserved award (same), or was passed over for a plum assignment involving a trip to Hawaii in March (same).
- We each are a mix of personalities with every kind of brain and every sort of interest, together weaving a rich tapestry. By which I mean a lot of egos scrambled in the bowl with no small sprinkling of muesli. Actually, the variety is probably wider



among scholars. My own hypothesis is that although many reporters have university degrees in economics and even mathematics, journalists' Wechsler scores tend to skew markedly toward verbal, rather than non-verbal, abstract reasoning. That makes them rather ill-suited to writing about the sciences. They like lawyers and actors, though. And actors playing lawyers. I cannot prove my Wechsler hypothesis yet, but if any psychologists are interested in this question, email me at Ryerson. Journalists really like interdisciplinarity (and someone else to help do the lit search).

- We both strive to succeed, we compete for kudos, and it isn't always pretty. At the *Globe*, when a *Star* reporter scoops you, you say, "Oh, I did that story last week anyway." This is the same impulse that prompts 11 of the 17 people in that Cincinnati meeting room to get up and tell you how you should have done your research—usually in the guise of

asking a question: "Why didn't you...." or "When I looked at this issue...."

- We both seek the greater good and want to make everyone's lives healthier, safer, more democratic, and more equitable (except for those Bush Administration retirees turned Ivy League business pros who were interviewed in the film *The Inside Job* and most Fox News reporters). Journalists want to make the powerful accountable and to inform the public by telling good stories. Scholars want to contribute to humanity's understanding and to stimulate brilliant young minds. Both groups are never more delighted than when they have new insights or new information to discuss.

On this common ground, we can build. Capable journalists understand that their obligation is to the reader and to the truth. They resent you only mildly for "having summers off." So please return their phone calls and share your wealth of knowledge. ■■

*Ann Rauhala is an associate professor of journalism at Ryerson University as well as the associate director of the Ryerson Journalism Research Centre. She was the foreign editor and columnist with the Globe and Mail, as well as a correspondent and producer with CBC television.*

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# Intellectuals and democracy

Mark Kingwell

WHAT'S AN EDUCATION FOR? Philosopher Mark Kingwell analyzes our era's market-utility responses to this question. He argues, however, that education is about making us better and more engaged citizens, perhaps even better people.

*À quoi sert l'éducation? Le philosophe Mark Kingwell analyse nos réponses axées sur l'utilité marchande de notre ère à cette question. Il soutient toutefois que l'éducation a pour but de faire de nous de meilleurs citoyens plus engagés, voire de meilleures personnes.*

**Y**ou might think judges would make diverting dinner companions, but I can tell you that on the whole they don't. The judge sitting next to me, who shall go nameless, condemned all modern art as overpraised child's play. She railed against graduated income tax. She told me I would outgrow my socialist tendencies (I'm 48). She left without contributing to the bill.

So I was not at all surprised when, after hearing what I did for a living, she said, "But what will your students *do* with that?"

There is a special intonation to this use of the verb "do", familiar to anyone who has studied classics or considered a graduate degree in mathematics, with its long vowel of contempt honeyed over by apparent concern. When I was in my second post-graduate year, a woman in an Edinburgh bus queue delivered the best version I have so far encountered: "Philosophy! Really! Do you have *any idea* what you'll *do* with that?" (Poor sod: useless *and* out to lunch!)

I could have told the judge something she ought to know already, which is that *philosophy students usually rock the LSAT*. They get into prestigious law schools, even sometimes make

it onto the bench. Statistically speaking, there is no better preparation for success in law than an undergraduate degree spent thinking about the nature of knowledge, the meaning of being and, especially, what makes a valid argument.

But even though this is itself a valid argument, it's not a good one. I mean that its success concedes a greater failure; it gives away the game of justification to a base value. A degree in philosophy, or humane study more generally, does not require validation in the court of do-with usefulness. It is a convenient reality that such validation is sometimes gained, but the victory is really a surrender performed on the enemy's ground.

What's surprising is how many of today's university administrators are rushing to do just this, hyping "competitiveness" and "pragmatism" of higher education. The annual higher education supplement published by *Maclean's*, the Canadian weekly newsmagazine, is ground zero for the transactional reduction of learning. The latest version of the supplement included this representative claim from Robert Campbell, president of Mount Allison University in Sackville, N.B. Parents of prospective students, he told a reporter, "are looking for a return on investment" in their child's tuition.

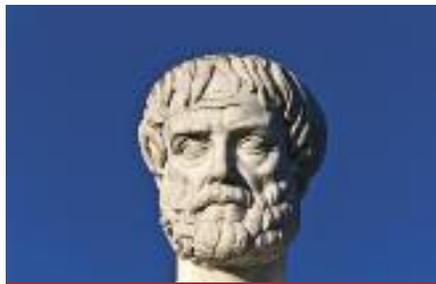
And so professors are told that they need to justify their activities according to a market model of “research effectiveness”, where quantifiable “impact indicators” and “external research use values” can be totted up and scanned. Students respond by assuming a consumer stance to their own education, swapping tuition dollars not for the chance to interact with other minds but to acquire a post-graduate market advantage. When a 2010 survey of 12,500 students asked, “What was the single most important reason in your decision to attend university”, just nine per cent picked “a good general education” as their answer, while almost seventy per cent had enrolled to “get a good job” or “train for a specific career.”

Historically, median earning power for university graduates is indeed higher than that of college or high school grads, and over their lifetimes university graduates earn substantially more—seventy-five per cent by some estimates—than non-graduates. And yet, paradoxically, recent years have witnessed an avalanche of over-qualification. “[M]ore than a quarter of a million Canadian university students are about to graduate into the workforce this spring,” *Maclean’s* noted. “Yet studies show that fifty per cent of Canadian arts and science grads are working jobs that don’t require a university credential two years after graduation.”

All is not lost, however. “As the knowledge economy continues to grow—and manufacturing jobs disappear—there’s more demand for university grads in the workforce than ever.” Rest easy, parents. Pony up, students. There’s still a reason to get an education! It’s just not anything to do with education.

Call this familiar mixture of doom and market optimism the *standard position*. It can be summarized this way: university education must be judged according to its ultimate usefulness. That usefulness will be understood as career success of one sort or another, especially as measured by wealth. The position then adds the *soft option*: get a degree because the “knowledge economy” will otherwise crush you.

The soft option is favoured by presidents as well as university presidents. Barack Obama, speaking in March of this year, noted that America’s need to “remain competitive” was an argument for higher education: “If we want more good news on the jobs front then we’ve got to make more invest-



And so professors are told that they need to justify their activities according to a market model of “research effectiveness”, where quantifiable “impact indicators” and “external research use values” can be totted up and scanned.

ments in education.” He offered no other arguments in its favour.

For all its currency, the standard position strikes me as wrong-headed, if not dangerous. It is a philistine position, obviously; it works to hollow out the critical possibilities of education. Holders of this position regard real humanistic education as a dispensable luxury of idiosyncratic and purely personal value, and that makes them, in turn, dangerous.

They are correct, however, that the standard position is now so deeply presupposed that even calling attention to it can be enough to brand one an ivory-tower wackjob, tilting at windmills. The 2011 *Maclean’s* authors noted with some satisfaction that nobody would nowadays express the indignation that greeted similar reductive accounts of education a decade ago, not apparently aware of the role *Maclean’s* and its consumer-style surveys have played in that reduction.

As far as I’m concerned the judge and all those in the standard-position camp are the enemy. They are not enemies of philosophy, or me, or my

students; they are enemies of democracy, and insofar as we refuse to admit that—insofar as we soft-pedal the value of the humanities when confronted by a scale of value keyed only to wealth—we are not being serious about what democracy means. We are witnessing the *regulatory capture* of universities under the general influence of a market model that can only be challenged by arguments rooted in another, human code of value.

Most defences of the humanities fall back on preaching to the choir: they assume the value of the very thing they need to defend, namely the cultivation of self and world that marks genuine study, what Aristotle called *skholé*, or leisure (hence the word “school”). At that point, there is usually a predictable spin-off into denunciations of elitism and counter-denunciations of its reverse-snobbery evil twin, anti-intellectualism. The net result is either an impasse or a trail into absurdity: witness the 2006 *National Post* reader poll which concluded that bombastic hockey commentator Don Cherry was the nation’s “most important public intellectual.”

But there’s no need to go through any of that, because the standard position is actually self-defeating.

Let’s do a little casual philosophical analysis. What are the unspoken premises of the standard position?

Most obviously, it assumes (1) that we know what *use* is. Something is useful when it has instrumental value. Things of instrumental value serve needs other than their own, either some higher instrumental value or an intrinsic value. And yet, in practice “use” almost always comes down to money, which is itself a perfect example of a *lower* instrumental value. Money is just a tool, but we talk and act as if it were an end in itself.

So the position likewise assumes (2) that we know how to value things that contribute to use. We can convert any activity or human possibility into some quantified assessment and, thus, dispose of the question of whether it is worth doing. Not only does this make a mockery of human action, quickly narrowing the scope of what is considered worth doing, it also simultaneously narrows the scope of argument about the nature of worth. This leads to a market monopoly on the notion of the “real”: anything that is not in play in a market is irrelevant or imaginary.

The position in turns presupposes (3) that education is in thrall to this “real world” of market value—actually a massive collective delusion as abstract as anything in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*—because according to (2) all human activities are. The market’s monopoly on reality reinforces the dominant value of competition and selfishness, incidentally converting education into a credential-race that can (and rationally should) be gamed rather than enjoyed in itself.

Lurking nearby are two other implicit ideas about life after graduation: (4) education must be intimately linked to work; and (5) doing work while “overqualified” is a bad thing. This link between education and work is a nifty piece of leg-erdmain which preys on the uncertainties all humans have about the future, even as it leaves untouched the general presumption that one must have a job to be human. Parents and children alike fall for it.

Finally, at least in the soft option, there is (6) the assumption that education can find its match in white-collar work of the knowledge economy and so justify doing a degree after all. This completes the regulatory capture of education. What was once considered a site of challenge to received ideas and bad



Democracy depends on a population of engaged, critical thinkers who have general humane knowledge of history, politics, culture, economics, and science, who are citizens and not consumers and who can see that there exist shared interests beyond their own desires.

argument, even to entrenched power and pooled wealth, is now not very successful adjunct to the pursuit of that power and wealth.

Unfortunately the facts do not bear this out, and this is where the entire arrangement collapses.

While the number of jobs asking for a degree has increased over the past two decades, the fact is that, since 1990 or so, the North American job market has not been characterized by a smooth rise in demand for cognitive skills to match growth in technology. Instead, there has been a hollowing out of the market’s middle, such that top-level jobs (creating technologies, playing markets, scoring touchdowns) have risen in overall wealth but not numbers, while low-end jobs (fixing pipes, driving semi-trailers, pouring lattes) have remained steady or grown slightly. In between, there is a significant depression of the very middle-class occupations that most university graduates imagine will be their return on investment.

The consequences of this economic reality are twofold. First, it explodes the assessment of education in terms of economic reality. There is no prospect of the competitive “knowledge economy” future to underwrite a decision to go to university. The soft option is gone.

Second, and more profoundly, the standard position now exhibits its

full contradictions. If you cannot value education in terms of money, then education has no value. That means that, if you decide to pursue such an education, it has to be for reasons other than value. But that would mean doing something that has no use, and surely that is silly.

There is an ironic benefit to this collapse. Sure, some people will conclude that university is not for them: it doesn’t confer the market benefit it used to, so to hell with it. For others, though, the land beyond use might continue to beckon, a place where there is no easy decline into the disengagement of merely personal interests.

The standard position was founded on a paradox: university graduates are overqualified for the jobs they do, but you should still go because there is a statistical link between a degree and higher income. This is now replaced with a

new paradox, the paradox of philosophy in the general sense: there is no use in pursuing a university education, but you should pursue it anyway because it's the only way to see any use beyond what is everywhere assumed.

What does any of this have to do with democracy? Again, a twofold conclusion. First, wider university admission isn't going to result in prosperity for everyone. If we want to have more equitable distributions of wealth and opportunity, we can't rely on markets to do it, even or especially markets flooded with dazed graduates looking for work in a depression created, in part, by high flyers gaming the abstract markets. And, no, more business schools are not the answer.

Second, though, we actually need graduates more than ever precisely because democracy depends on a population of engaged, critical thinkers who have general humane knowledge of history, politics, culture, economics, and science, who are citizens and not consumers and who can see that there exist shared interests beyond their own desires. Once the link between higher education and work has been broken, the value of the humanities and non-applied sciences become clear. Education is not there to be converted into market value; it is there to make us better and more engaged citizens, maybe even better and more virtuous people. There, I said it! The entailed benefit is that these citizens are ones who will challenge the reduction of all consideration to the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Aristotle again: usefulness is not virtue. He meant to ask us each to consider how and why we come to value things, to consider them relevant, to think them worth doing. "What are you going to do with that?" asks the concerned fellow diner or transit passenger.

But as Socrates said, philosophy concerns no small thing, just the tricky matter of *wondering how best to live*. So the answer is: I'm already doing it. And you should be too. **AM**

*Mark Kingwell is a professor of philosophy at the University of Toronto; he is at work on a book about the future of democracy.*

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# MAKING A CASE FOR MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Shari Graydon

Scholars seeking influence should consider the opportunities afforded by the mainstream news media. The voices of academic women are particularly needed.

*Les érudits à la recherche d'une influence devraient envisager les possibilités que leur offrent les médias d'information de grande diffusion, selon Shari Graydon. Nous avons particulièrement besoin des voix des femmes du milieu universitaire.*

For three years in the mid-1990s, I had the privilege of sending a weekly memo to thousands of readers of the *Vancouver Sun* on whatever topic most concerned me. Although only a small fraction of them replied (often, it must be admitted, in language that made clear their profound disagreement with my position, syntax, or gender), it was such a deeply satisfying exercise that I occasionally still seek to re-live the experience.

Last September, in a fit of pique I confessed via the comment page of the *Globe and Mail* that like most Canadians, I don't have a PhD in criminology, statistics, or environmental studies, and I'm not remotely qualified to judge the validity of scientific research relating to the efficacy of mandatory minimum sentences, or the effect of mining development on the health and sustainability of natural resources.

As a result, I appreciate living in a country where education is a right, university research is well-funded, and world-class scientists boast in-depth expertise about everything from the impact of early childhood education on crime prevention to the relationship between greenhouse gases and climate change. And then I asked: What is the point of funding

such research and supporting institutes of higher learning if the knowledge they produce is so often disregarded?

The reader response to my commentary outstripped even the biggest barrage of hate mail I had ever received as a weekly columnist (writing about the high suicide rate among gay teens prompted a deluge and, yes, much of the mail *was* accompanied by religious tracts). Last fall, my rhetorical question was aimed primarily at politicians who appeared to have abandoned all pretence at making decisions based on actual evidence in favour of partisan expediency. But it's my proposed remedy that I'm now hoping the readers of this publication will take to heart.

## CHALLENGING SCHOLARS

Every week, dozens of news stories make clear the pressing need—in an age of Facebook, Youtube, Wikipedia, and Twitter—of serious scholarship. Public relations spin on the safety of a new drug begs scientific interpretation; mendacious campaign promises demand objective context; volatile international events scream out for informed analysis. And on the day I write this, the *Globe's* front page is profiling the effort of a prestigious medical institution to counter a social media misinformation campaign about the recovery prognosis of one of its patients.

Disinterested perspectives offering genuine insight are often in short supply. And there's no good reason for that. Canada boasts thousands of highly educated, extremely articulate and civic-minded scholars. Although many are listed in their institutions' expert databases, even some of those academics routinely decline to respond to media interview requests. And relatively few have ever attempted to craft and submit commentary of their own, providing informed context to the news of the day in a concise and accessibly written op-ed (placed "opposite the editorial" page) despite the fact that doing so permits writers both to control the message and enlighten potentially hundreds of thousands of people. There are lots of good reasons why university faculty members should overcome the resistance many feel about doing this. Reading the online chatter—on blogs, university-related sites, and the feedback trail on online news sources—it becomes clear why some scholars have a dim view of journalism. To cite one prominent example, readers of Margaret Wenté's column in the *Globe and Mail* operating without mitigating experience or alternative insight, might be forgiven for believing that today's university professors are lazy, overpaid irrelevancies who sip sherry, neglect students, and have no right to complain about an annual four-month holiday.

While it's true that the online chatter referred to above offers some articulate and persuasive counter arguments to Ms. Wenté's column, scholars could do more to challenge such views. But first and foremost, they'd have to stop abdicating the field of engagement as beneath them.

## RELUCTANCE TO ENGAGE

Unfamiliarity with the form and process are key practical considerations, but there's invariably more at stake. Many scholars anticipate that providing commentary to the news media—either in written op eds, or through broadcast and print interviews—will lead to them being judged and condemned: for wasting their time on unimportant activity; for abandoning serious scholarship in favour of crass self-promotion; and for daring to speak outside the narrow field of research in which they can legitimately call themselves "expert."

This last hesitancy is apparently chromosomally influenced. Speaking to a group of producers and researchers at CBC Radio's *The Current* last year, I was recounting the difficulty I had in the mid 1990s recruiting women who are expert in their fields to be listed in a directory for journalists. I thought I was relating a quaint historical anecdote, but they all sat there nodding their heads. Even in this supposedly post-feminist age, it turns out the most highly educated women in our society are still much more inclined than their male counterparts to say, upon being invited by

a reporter to provide context, "I'm really not the best person..."

I'm told these words rarely issue from men's mouths—not necessarily because all men think they *are* the best person but because they don't automatically call to mind the three other scholars in the

country who know slightly more. This may sometimes be evidence of lingering "chilly climate" experiences, and the feeling some women scholars have that they must be, as the late Ottawa mayor Charlotte Whitton once famously advised, twice as good as men to be taken half as seriously.

But it's also clear that time is a factor—for both female and male scholars. Notwithstanding the unfortunate picture painted by Ms. Wenté and others, one online respondent noted, "Studies from Canada, the US, the UK, New Zealand, and Australia are consistent in the finding that professors work between 50 and 60 hours per week." It's not surprising



At a time when many faculty members believe they have little influence over the governance of their institutions, the public discourse offers a bigger playing field for those wishing to make a difference.



that squeezing in unpaid media interviews or the time necessary to craft an accessible 700-word newspaper commentary that may never get published, aren't top priorities.

For women in particular, who still typically shoulder more of the burden of child and elder care than their male counterparts, the idea of taking an hour or more away from existing responsibilities to give context to a news story feels like just one more burden the rewards for which remain elusive.

And then there's the questionable appeal of trying to pack one's comprehensive expertise into jargon-free, 10-second sound bites or appear on TV without the benefit of the hair, make-up, and wardrobe attention that's been lavished on the host doing the interview. On this front, too, women remain slightly disadvantaged, at least on TV. (I don't know if CBC TV's *The National* fields emails about Peter Mansbridge's follicly-challenged state, but Wendy Mesley told me before she cropped her locks that her un-anchor-like fly-away hair always generated much more mail than her journalism credentials or the stories she covered.)

## OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPACT

Understandably, when tenure is awarded on the basis of scholarly publications in peer-reviewed journals, there must be other incentives to invest time in writing for the popular press. Two years ago in these pages, University of Toronto philosophy professor Mark Kingwell suggested one of these when he observed that "most academic work, especially in the humanities, is published for an audience smaller than a successful cocktail party, and the rest falls still-born from the press, ignored by citizen and colleague alike."

Popular print, broadcast, and online media offer scholars the opportunity to share their research-gleaned insights and analysis with thousands—if not millions—of people. At a time when many faculty members believe they have little influence over the governance of their institutions, the public discourse offers a bigger playing field for those wishing to

make a difference. And scholars like Kingwell, University of Ottawa's Michael Geist, and Janice Gross Stein of the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs, who regularly share their expertise with a broader audience by writing op eds, providing broadcast commentary, or blogging about emerging issues, experience significantly expanded opportunities as a result of doing so.

Impressively bilingual University of Ottawa sociologist Diane Pacom is a case in point. A past recipient of the university's President's Award for Media Relations, Pacom regularly provides commentary to CBC, Radio Canada, and other media. She describes this activity as "liberating"—a way to ensure that her work doesn't stagnate in a small world of abstraction but remains connected to the broader community. She enjoys the writing and presenting she does in academic journals and at scientific conferences, but she sees the popular commentary as a complementary means of disseminating knowledge. And although she's doing so in the context of an age of ubiquitous accessibility, she cites Marcel Rioux, her thesis supervisor at the Université de Montréal 30 years ago, as an inspiration.

"He was himself a public intellectual, and he modeled media engagement, not just as a legitimate avenue of intellectual discourse, but as a civic responsibility. Europe has much more a tradition of this," she says, arguing that for Europeans it's an accepted activity, not frowned upon or dismissed. Nor is it a remotely recent phenomenon. "Plato," she points out, "was walking around the marketplace in ancient Greece speaking to people every day."

Allowing that the life of an academic can be lonely, and the feedback cold and scientific, Pacom expresses appreciation for the instant and often warm reception that's greeted her public engagement, encouraging her to explore questions that she wouldn't have pursued in the context of her own more focused research. A sought-after speaker, she recently presented the President's Lecture at the University of Ottawa, described as intended to share the institution's "rich and varied research interests and expertise on issues affecting all of us."

At a time when the post-secondary education funding environment remains challenging, it's in universities' best interests to be investing in such outreach, demonstrating more actively the contribution they make to the community, and the relevance of their research to the society

supporting them. And funding councils like SSHRC have recently emphasized their desire to support research that explicitly “improves and enriches the daily lives of individuals, groups and communities”, and encompasses “outcomes which help to change thinking and behaviour in everyday life.” The news media offer many opportunities to exert such influence.

Moreover, given the complexity of the issues we currently face—from the global financial crisis and the growing unrest erupting across the Middle East to world food shortages and antibiotic-resistant bacteria—we need more than ever to be hearing from those who are conducting research into the causes and consequences of our most pressing concerns.

This is particularly so, given the ubiquitous availability of frequently unreliable—if not deliberately misleading—commentary on the internet. In a Wikipedia world, where information is available at the click of a mouse, the academy’s relevance will continue to decline if university scholars don’t work harder to engage beyond their institutions or specialized fields. And although the web may appear to have diluted the power of expert commentary available in traditional media sources, Deputy Editorial Page Editor of the *New York Times* David Shipley recently argued that there remains “a desire for quality and fact-based opinion,” differentiating between knee jerk blog posts and reasoned and fact-checked argument.

### WOMEN’S VOICES ESPECIALLY NEEDED

The perspectives of female scholars are especially important, because even though women now make up more than sixty percent of university graduates and work in virtually all fields, their voices remain chronically under-represented in many of our culture’s most influential institutions and communication vehicles. Recent Canadian research documents that on the op-ed pages of major daily newspapers and on prominent broadcast programs dealing with public affairs, female pundits and pontificators are outnumbered by their male counterparts by as much as five to one. Sarah Marinelli and Philip Savage of McMaster University analyzed a random sample of eighty op-eds in 2009 from the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*, examining not only the gender of op-ed authorship but also the issues addressed and the authors’ professions. The 80-20 per cent gender split was consistent in both papers and similar to the findings of a recent American study conducted by the Op-Ed Project.

Additional analyses of both these papers and other major dailies (*National Post*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Victoria Times Colonist*) and several national broadcast programs

(CBC’s *The Current* and *Power & Politics*, and CTV’s *Power Play*) conducted in May and November of 2010 and the first two months of this year by Media Action have found similar trends.

But women experience many aspects of life very differently than men do and have unique insights that, if shared, could benefit us all in numerous ways. As a growing body of research makes clear, incorporating a diversity of perspectives into decision-making results in better decisions. Corporations that employ women at the executive and board levels are more competitive, and countries that not only educate women but also make the best use of their contributions enjoy a higher quality of life.

In a global economy, Canada can’t afford for knowledgeable women to confine their expert analysis to scholarly journals and conferences. The voices that inform public debate through prominent news media have an enormous impact on shaping public opinion and influencing public policies and priorities. Given the unprecedented economic,

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environmental, and social challenges we face, we need to be drawing on the expertise of the best and the brightest, many of whom are women. It's never made sense to access the intelligence and ideas of only half the population; it makes even less sense now.



aggregated research, and the benefits of multi-disciplinary approaches to assessing problems. And I closed with a plea:

... for scientists of all stripes to step onto the information highway in all its forms a little more often: to challenge governments and voters alike to demand that policies and spending be backed up by reliable and independent data.

On some level, it comes back to the falling tree in the forest dilemma. If a scholar's knowledge isn't shared beyond the confines of the academy, if she has something brilliant and insightful to say about a current event or pressing problem, but no one beyond the readers of the scholarly journals in which she publishes reads it, how can we justify such a profound waste of talent and opportunity? ■■

*Shari Graydon is an award-winning author and the catalyst for Informed Opinions, which partners with universities to deliver workshops for scholars on how to write op eds. Proceeds from her most recent book, I Feel Great About My Hands, support this non-profit initiative.*

### A PLEA TO RESEARCHERS

My own experiences as a columnist, occasional op-ed writer, and broadcast commentator have permitted me to provide context, challenge prejudice, shift attitudes, and help change policies. In my commentary last fall, I made a case for the value of disinterested investigation, the power of

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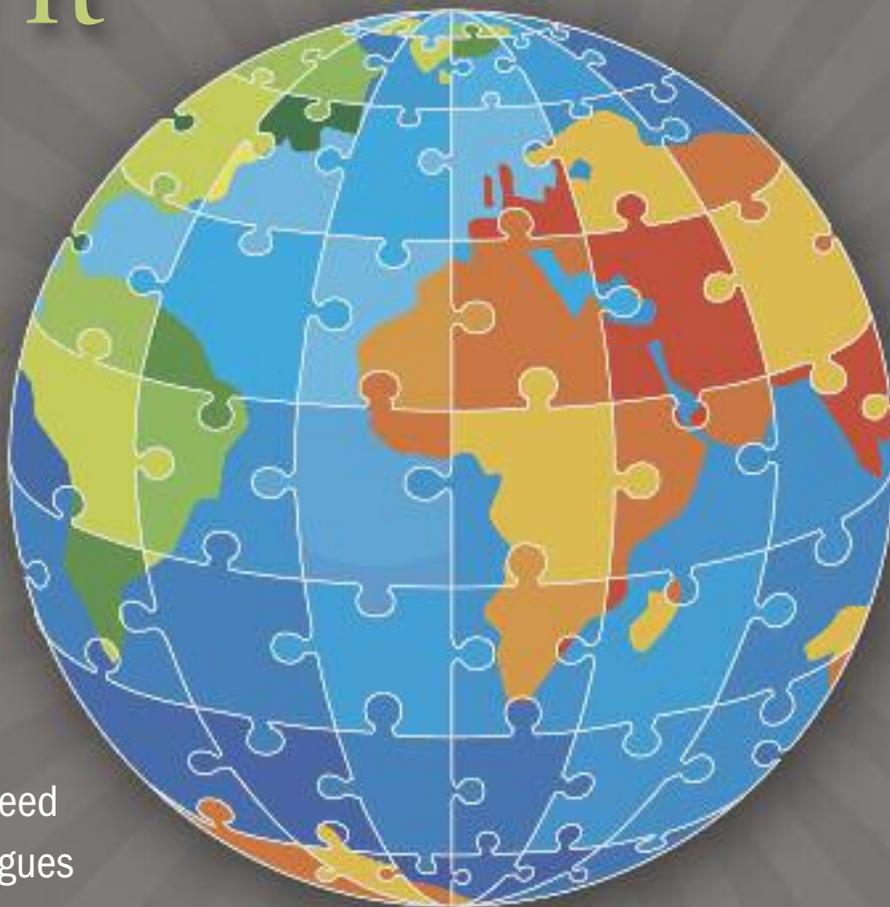
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# THE GLOBALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION MEDIA:

## Where Is It Headed?

**Karen MacGregor**



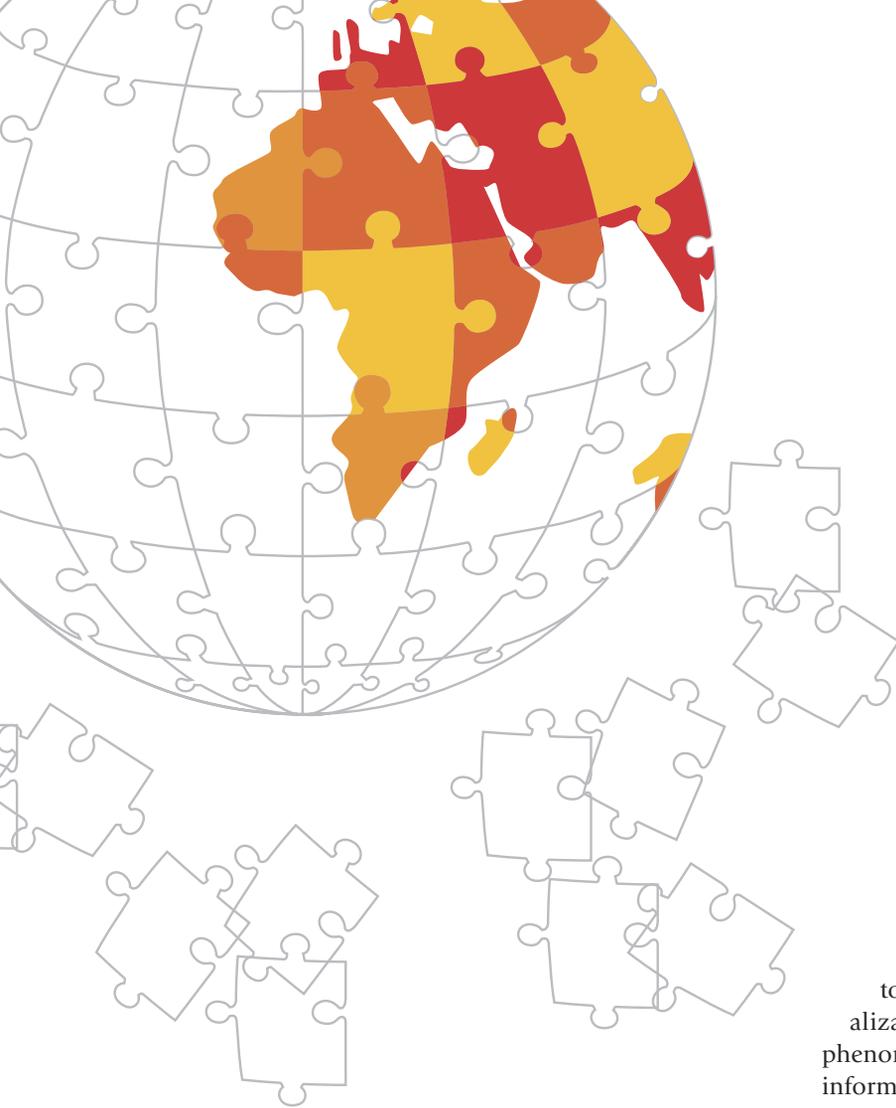
In an era of globalization, we need to improve global reporting, argues *University World News* Editor Karen MacGregor. Will this require more collaboration between higher education and higher education media?

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*À l'époque de la mondialisation, nous devons améliorer notre couverture médiatique mondiale, maintient Karen MacGregor, rédactrice en chef de l'University World News. Est-ce que s'impose pour cela une plus grande collaboration entre l'enseignement supérieur et les médias de l'enseignement supérieur?*

**T**here are interesting comparisons that can be drawn between higher education and the media. Both deal in information and ideas, and both are cutting-edge: universities in research and analysis, the media in reporting on unfolding events. And both resist changing themselves. This, along with the imperatives of business, could be why the higher education media found itself in the contradictory position of being at the forefront of globalization, through vast communication networks, while being slow to respond to the globalization of higher education itself.

For decades, universities and colleges have forged ahead with internationalization, described by Australian academic Brian Denman as the “conduit” for the globalization of



*International Higher Education*, the quarterly newsletter of the Boston College Center for International Higher Education.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The role of news media in disseminating information are well established and understood. In higher education, national media complement formal channels of communication within the sector and between higher education, stakeholders, and policy-makers. The mass media does this by linking higher education to the public (and thus to stakeholders and policy-makers), while niche higher education newspapers do it by connecting people working or interested in the sector to information about each other and to new developments and debates.

This role also exists at the international level, whether the sector is higher education or commerce, tourism, or sport. Indeed, the increasing internationalization of commerce drove the “one world” phenomenon of globalization, which combined with an information and communication revolution to globalize the media. Reporting on the global political economy is understood by media to be important to national companies and governments. Reporting on global higher education is important to universities and colleges and education departments. Reporting on soccer does not end when a national team jets off to play abroad.

The news media views its roles as reporting on events, issues, and current affairs, stimulating debate, and serving the “public interest” in various ways, such as disseminating information it sees as important to people (disease outbreaks, election results, and so on) and “speaking truth to power”, the enticing concept that allows media to demand accountability from the rich and powerful.

Through these activities, the media influences agendas in most fields of human activity. In terms of higher education, former U.S. university president Thomas Ehrlich has pointed to shared responsibilities: “Like higher education, journalism is in the business of shaping its public as well as responding to it. Both institutions play crucial roles in making democratic societies viable: their activities are critical if public deliberation is to work at all under modern conditions.”

In the developing world, the importance of disseminating information about higher education was recognized by an expert group, the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA). It argued in one of its foundation documents that linking research to “advocacy”

higher education, which he sees as a convergence of educational systems and ideals designed to meet the needs of world knowledge and societal advancement. The media trailed and flailed in higher education’s wake, understanding the immense changes and challenges afoot but largely failing to react effectively to them.

Is this really the case? Does it matter? It is instructive to look at why it is important to report on higher education at the global level, how higher education coverage has been globalizing—or internationalizing or denationalizing—and what the future might hold.

The observations here are confined to English-language niche higher education media interested in an international audience, rather than the mass media or national specialist media. This is because only English publications so far have targeted a global audience, English being the *lingua franca* of global higher education. The publications are *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed* in the United States, *Times Higher Education* in Britain, the international *University World News* (of which I am the editor), and

was one way to solve the problem of policy decision-making based on “strong convictions, weak evidence.” Limited research is “ignored as policy-makers are made aware, through various distribution channels, of the latest developments in Europe and the United States, while there is little or no sharing of, or debate about, what can be learnt from policies and practices in Africa.” It saw the media as having a strong role in the dissemination of evidence and forged a partnership with the *University World News Africa* edition.

The importance of the media to higher education was highlighted in the 2008 OECD report, *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society*, which described the dissemination and use of knowledge as one of four major missions of tertiary education in contributing to socio-economic development. It argued that access to information and evidence encourages rational debate and consensus-building on reforms and policies. International comparisons in media reports could raise public awareness of the need for change, and ideas generally perceived as reasonable gained the support of public opinion, especially when ideas are promoted by the media, and can “be used as a basis for policy change and educational reform.”

At the very least the media recognizes that its coverage should contribute to an understanding of higher education worldwide for readers in a sector that has 2.5 million international students (a number expected to rise to 7.2 million by 2025), hundreds of thousands of academics involved in international research and networks, and thousands of universities with partners abroad. However, as Thomas Ehrlich warned, with increasingly commercialized universities, public responsibility sits uneasily alongside the business mission of most newspapers.

## THE INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION MEDIA

In July 2010, Kris Olds, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and author of the *GlobalHigherEd* blog, published an article titled “Are We Witnessing the Denationalization of the Higher Education Media?” He wrote that the denationalization of higher education—“the process whereby developmental logics, frames and practices are increasingly associated with what is happening at a larger (beyond the nation) scale”—was continuing apace.

But it was only recently, “at a relatively late stage in the game, that the higher education media is starting to take more systematic note of the contours of denationalization...From a quantitative and qualitative perspective,

we are seeing rapid growth in the ostensibly ‘global’ coverage of the English-language higher education media from the mid-2000s on,” Olds wrote.

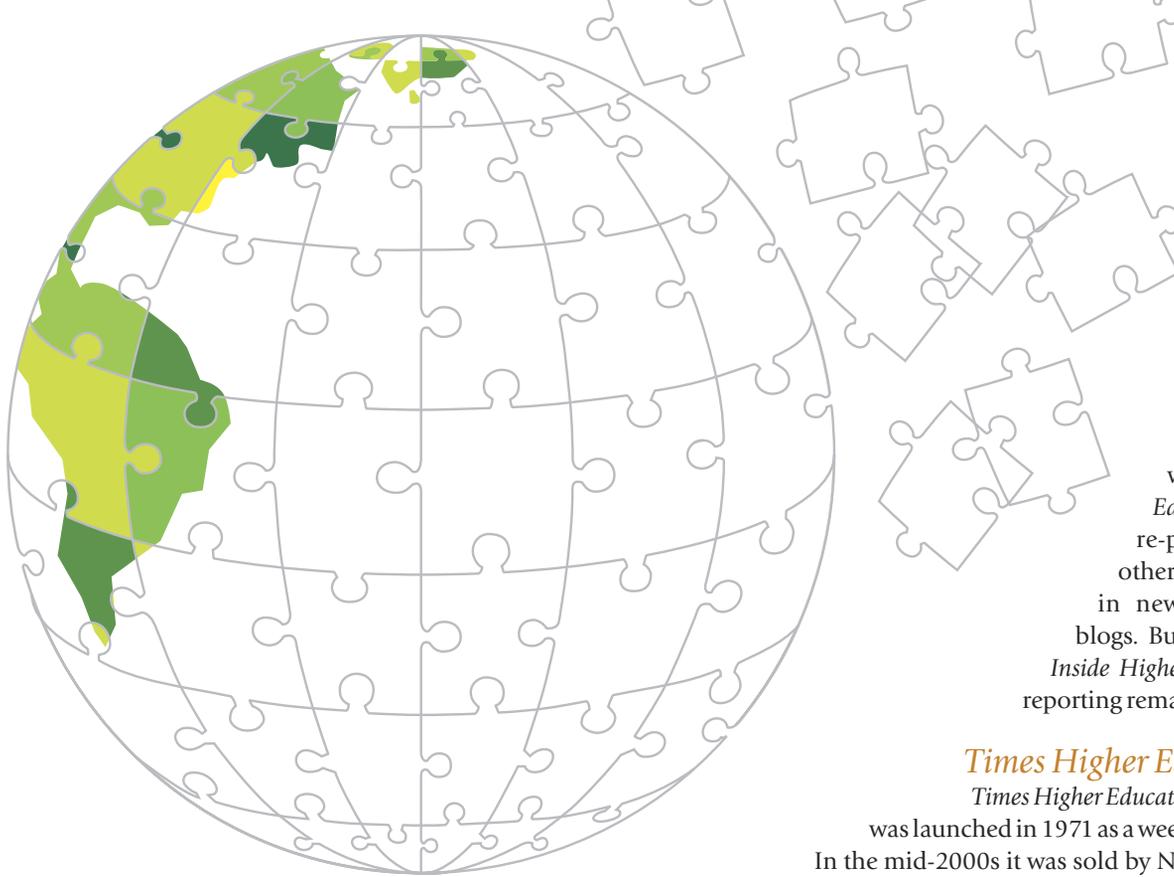
One of the technical contributors to this expanded reporting was the shift from print to digital publishing, which enabled higher education newspapers to reach a potentially far bigger and more geographically distributed audience at low cost. This advance was behind the launching of *Inside Higher Ed* in 2005 and of *University World News* in 2007.

## The Chronicle of Higher Education

*The Chronicle*, America’s largest higher education newspaper, was founded in 1966 as a weekly. By last year, the Washington D.C.-based paper had 325,000 readers of the print edition and 1.5 million unique visitors a month to its website. The paper launched an international news section in 1979 and since then has produced quality reporting on higher education around the world, although these stories were relegated to a back section “ghetto” of two to three pages.

In 2008 the paper decided to “seek out global opportunities,” International Editor David L. Wheeler wrote. It pumped US\$2 million into launching a web-based





global edition in June 2010, which offered some free and some pay-for reporting on “the increasingly internationally interconnected world of higher education.” *The Chronicle* has expanded its network of correspondents and its reporting of higher education abroad and introduced a “WorldWise” blog written by “globe-trotting” academic leaders.

As with most specialist higher education newspapers, *The Chronicle* is preoccupied with its own country, which is appropriate, since the overwhelming majority of its print readers are in the United States. Its international coverage has grown but remains U.S.-oriented, often written by American journalists abroad and often quoting U.S. academics and involving U.S. institutions. Still, *The Chronicle* is a strong example of growing global coverage.

### *Inside Higher Ed*

*Inside Higher Ed* was launched in January 2005 by former editors of *The Chronicle*. The first major, fully digital, English-language higher education newspaper, it is free and publishes an emailed *Daily News Update* with 90,000 opt-in subscribers and an active news website that attracts more than three million page views per month.

The paper started off with an overwhelmingly U.S. focus, but by 2008, Scott Jaschik, the editor and a co-founder of *Inside Higher Ed*, told me, international reader numbers were expanding rapidly. Overseas readers appeared primarily interested in finding out about American higher education and having their advertising reach “American eyeballs,” as Jaschik put it.

This meant there was little pressure on *Inside Higher Ed* to expand its reporting on higher education internationally,

but the paper decided to go this route, and in 2010 began reporting more on global higher education issues. It forged a partnership with *Times Higher Education* that allows re-publication of each other’s articles and pulled in new globally-oriented blogs. But like *The Chronicle*, *Inside Higher Ed*’s international reporting remains U.S.-oriented.

### *Times Higher Education*

*Times Higher Education (THE)* in the U.K. was launched in 1971 as a weekly print newspaper.

In the mid-2000s it was sold by News International to investors and, in 2008, it was re-launched as a magazine. Last year *THE* had a print circulation of 28,000 and a readership of around 60,000, according to the Higher Education Policy Institute. It claims more than 100,000 online unique users a month.

*THE* had a strong international section, but against the backdrop of higher education’s internationalization, it made the astonishing decision in 2007 to shrink global reporting and fired all but a few of its international correspondents, focusing its international news on the U.S. and Brussels, with some global snippets gleaned from the internet and a column about global issues written by guest academics abroad. There is also some international reach through its feature and books sections.

Probably in response to *The Chronicle*’s international upscaling, *THE International* was launched in July 2010, offering free access to many articles on its website and a subscription to the weekly emailed international edition.

### *University World News*

*University World News*, a weekly, international, online higher education newspaper, was launched in October 2007 by specialist education journalists based in a dozen countries. Most of them were former correspondents of *Times Higher Education* who found themselves without an outlet when that newspaper ditched its correspondents. The reporters were convinced there would be interest among academia worldwide in a truly international newspaper, written by journalists who came from the countries and regions they covered and understood, with no national or regional “filter” to skew articles towards particular interests.

Two dozen (mostly) journalist founders set up a company in the U.K., investing their own money and offering

their work for free. The newspaper is fully virtual, with no bricks-and-mortar offices, and now comprises a network of four dozen journalists in more than two dozen countries in all regions. *University World News* decided to be free, in order to facilitate easy access to anybody interested in higher education. Today, the paper has around 30,000 registered readers and, in the six months to the end of February 2011, it attracted a monthly average of 83,700 visitors to its website and 710,000 page views.

The newspaper provides news reports, features, links to articles from other newspapers, and a commentary section in which academics and professionals worldwide debate key higher education developments and issues. *University World News* reports on the whole spectrum of higher education, from world-ranking universities to institutions in more marginalized parts of the world, the aim being to enhance higher education communication and understanding globally. It runs international-comparison reports, which feature articles from different countries on various issues. Another focus is the internationalization of higher education, including the recruitment and retention of international students, international research, and institutional partnerships.

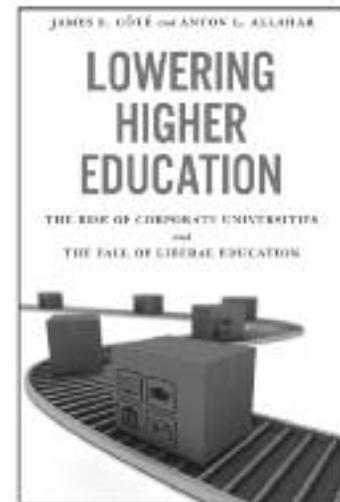
### *International Higher Education*

*International Higher Education (IHE)* is a quarterly publication of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College in the U.S. Launched in 1995, it aims to provide critical analysis of key issues and improve understanding of tertiary education developments around the globe. The publication comprises short analytical reports by academics from all regions and sits between the news media and journals. "We are concerned about the world and do not see ourselves as an 'American' publication," says CIHE director Philip Altbach.

*IHE* has a print circulation of around 4,000 and an electronic circulation of about 2,000. In recent years, Altbach has worked to grow the newsletter's reach and influence by publishing in different languages and regions. *IHE* is now published electronically and in print in Chinese, by the Graduate School of Education at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and appears electronically in Russian, published by the Independent Kazakhstan Quality Assurance Agency and available across the Russian-speaking area. The English edition is distributed by *Deutsche Universitätszeitung* in Germany, which has a circulation of 25,000. This has made *IHE* the only higher education publication to appear in multiple languages on a regular basis at a global level.

Altbach is currently in negotiations to produce a Spanish edition. "The idea is that publishing in other languages will foster more cross-pollination of ideas, since reading in one's own language makes information, especially technical or academic jargon, easier to digest. We feel that people will want to read us in their own language if at all possible," he says.

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## GLOBALIZATION OF THE MEDIA?

English-language higher education media were slow in responding to the globalization of higher education because, as businesses, they saw financial risk and because of their slowness to change—an ironic tendency, given the media's obsession with reporting on change. Since globalization has been a major development in higher education in the past decades, the media's lack of response represents an editorial "silence." However, the internet has made newspaper dissemination cheaper and easier and has opened up potential worldwide readership markets that were difficult to reach before.

In recent years, higher education newspapers have expanded their international coverage and placed it higher on their strategic agendas. *University World News* was launched with the specific aim of responding to higher education's globalization, and *International Higher Education* has been extending its coverage through translation. In Germany and other non-English countries, such as Mexico, higher education publications are also taking a growing interest in international higher education.

But does this picture represent the globalization of higher education?

Kris Olds indicated that the higher education media has been denationalizing, "ramping up their capacity to disseminate digital content, facilitate and/or shape debates, market themselves and build relevant multi-scalar networks," taking approaches reflecting their different structures, resources, and audiences.

I would argue that publications have followed two very different approaches. *The Chronicle*, *Inside Higher Ed* and *THE* have "denationalized" their coverage, increasingly reporting beyond the nation, as Olds pointed out. They have "responded to core readerships that are increasingly interested in what is happening worldwide," Altbach said. *University World News* and *International Higher Education* are global in their basic missions and represent globalization of the higher education media.

In the coming years, reporting globally on higher education is likely to increase, in tandem with the global convergence of higher education systems. It is possible that the niche media has bitten off more than it can chew and that truly global publications will prove to be only marginally commercial or even unsustainable, hindering international growth and coverage. But there is no turning back for a media sector that must respond to the needs of its readers, even if belatedly and inadequately; otherwise even domestic readerships will be at risk.

Olds pointed to problems such as the linguistic bias towards English, the need for more analysis, and possible conflicts of interest in, for instance, a newspaper running university rankings. He questioned the possibility of doing

justice to the global: "For we are all situated observers of the unfolding of the global higher education landscape...grappling with how to make sense of the denationalizing systems we know best, not to mention the emerging systems of regional and global governance that are being constructed. All that can be done, perhaps, is to enhance analytical capabilities, encourage the emergence of new voices, and go for it while being open and transparent about biases and agendas, blind spots and limitations."

But maybe we can do more. Both the media and higher education have public responsibility roles, but they do not work together systematically in ways that could help to better fulfill these roles. A case could be made for increased collaboration between the specialist media and higher education—particularly researchers of higher education—to improve global reporting and information dissemination in ways that could benefit both. ■■

*Karen MacGregor is the global editor of University World News. She is a former foreign editor of Times Higher Education in London and has written regularly for international news publications such as Newsweek, the Sunday Times, the Independent, and the Globe and Mail.*

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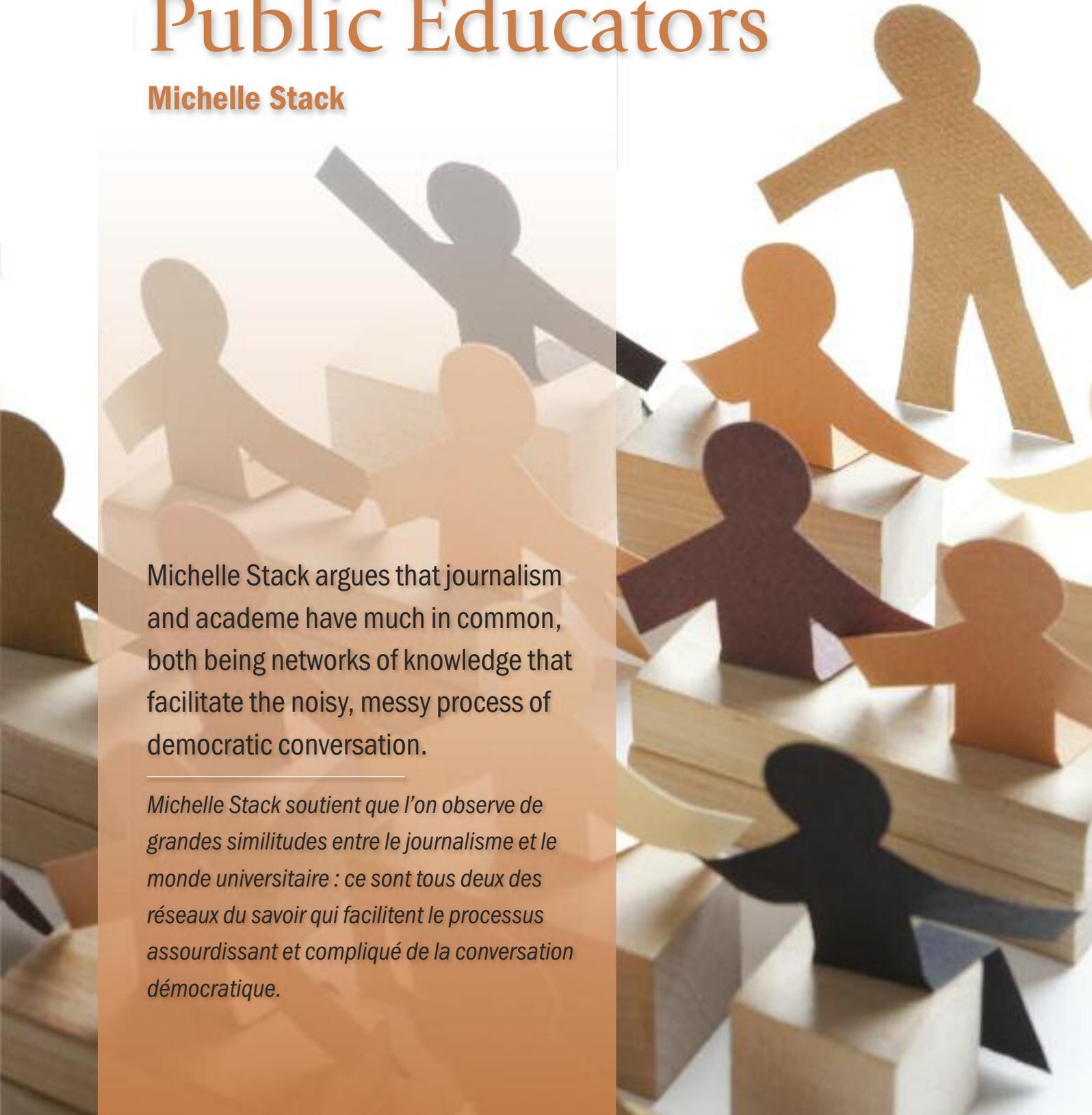
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# Journalists and Academics as Public Educators

**Michelle Stack**

Michelle Stack argues that journalism and academe have much in common, both being networks of knowledge that facilitate the noisy, messy process of democratic conversation.

*Michelle Stack soutient que l'on observe de grandes similitudes entre le journalisme et le monde universitaire : ce sont tous deux des réseaux du savoir qui facilitent le processus assourdissant et compliqué de la conversation démocratique.*



## WHERE IS MEDIA IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY RESEARCH?

Journalistic accounts of education influence the public's perception of it and policy makers' decisions about it.

Since higher education faces massive cuts and privatization throughout much of the world, academics have a responsibility to engage with many different audiences. Keeping publicly funded universities alive means academics need to be seen and heard in a variety of places.

There are many forms of public engagement available to academics, but I focus on academic-media engagement because it is a dominant player in portraying what is a "good" education and a "bad" education and what are "good" and "bad" education policy options.

And policy makers are sensitive to this. A former Ministry of Education communications director told me that while the media are never in the room when policy is discussed, they are nonetheless present because the people who are in the room have to consider how the media might report an educational policy, and these predictions influence how a policy is communicated and when it is made public. A provincial premier informed me that Mondays were his worst days because that's when his caucus returned from their constituencies after a weekend of reading provincial and local newspapers, which had inspired demands from them for new policies and initiatives to bolster support—or dampen criticism.

Journalists and politicians have a complex relationship of mutual influence, albeit often an acrimonious one. Many journalists work with limited resources and time, so government press releases and go-to sources are essential for meeting deadlines. Government has vast resources but a small audience for its own websites and other PR material. Politicians know voters depend on media to learn what government poli-

cies mean to their lives. And while social media provide people new ways to challenge government messaging (as global events this year show), mainstream media, whether the CBC, Al Jazeera, or CNN, still have a central role as translators of blogs and tweets for their large, broad-based audiences.

So how do journalists judge the claims made by government and others about what makes for a good post-secondary education and what tax dollars should fund or not fund? What sources do journalists use to form their opinions?

Back in 2003, as a newly minted PhD, I wanted to know how journalists viewed academics as sources. The journalists I interviewed had mixed views. An editor-in-chief for a major newspaper, takes a "no prisoners" approach: "Let me talk about academics. They're terrible to deal with! I used to run the editorial pages, and...I failed at getting academics to write op-ed pieces because they never met their deadlines."

Some journalists I spoke with said they would like to talk more often to academics but because of lack of time they can't. Others, on the other hand, have one or two sources they can talk to about any education story and who are easy to quote and who respond quickly to media requests.

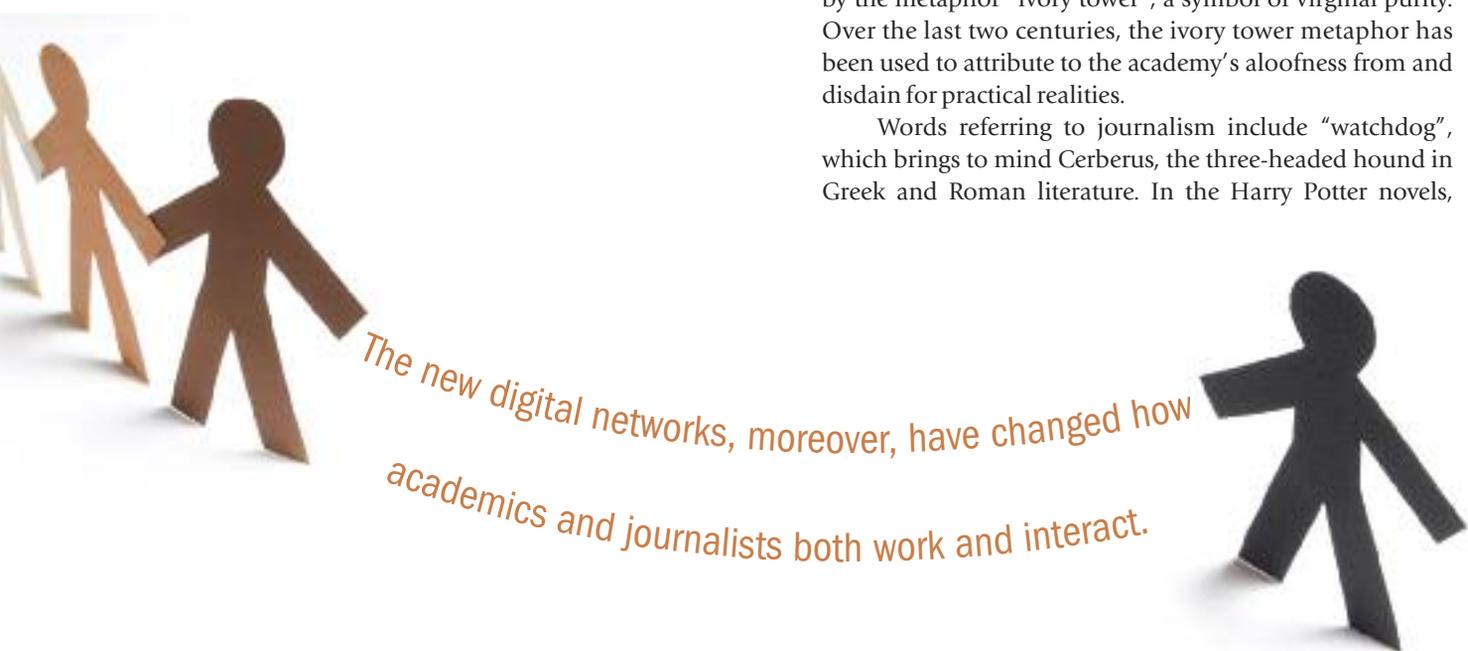
Academics also differ in their interactions with journalists. Some have frequent contact with journalists, while others shy away. There are gendered and racialized dimensions about whom the media call as an expert source and who promote themselves as legitimate expert sources for media.

## FRAMES OF REFERENCE

The word "journalist" comes from the French word "jour", meaning journalism is the "today".

Accordingly, the job of journalism is to provide a useful account on a more or less daily basis; conversely, the job of the academy is work that is often seen as abstract and even impractical. Indeed, the term "academic" is often described by the metaphor "ivory tower", a symbol of virginal purity. Over the last two centuries, the ivory tower metaphor has been used to attribute to the academy's aloofness from and disdain for practical realities.

Words referring to journalism include "watchdog", which brings to mind Cerberus, the three-headed hound in Greek and Roman literature. In the Harry Potter novels,



The new digital networks, moreover, have changed how academics and journalists both work and interact.

a Cerberus look-alike, Fluffy,”—was bought by Hagrid from a “Greek chappie” who, like Cerberus, was the guardian of the underworld. This fierce guardian watchdog metaphor speaks to journalists’ investigating the wrongdoings of people in power and not letting such miscreants escape accountability. A lapdog journalist, on the other hand, is like the pug, friendly and obedient to its masters—government and business—who provide rapid and regular meals (news), access, and money (advertising and favorable tax systems).

These metaphors are testimony to how much the two professions—academia and journalism—are constructed as opposites. The academic contemplates and is aloof, if not hostile, to the real world. An academic can also steal the stories and knowledge of others for gain. The journalist, conversely is not contemplating but, rather, is constantly doing, filing stories and reporting to the public what is important that present moment. These metaphors, however, are misleading in that they disregard important links between the two professions. Many academics engage in issues pertaining to the daily life of people and are often involved in advocacy work. Many journalists are painstaking in their research and deeply reflective about what they do. The new digital networks, moreover, have changed how academics and journalists both work and interact. A daily deadline is a thing of the past for many journalists, who must now file stories many times on many separate media. Academics, too, are under more pressure to be internationally known and funded, which requires understanding new networks of scholarly recognition and collaboration, as well as using search engines and media outlet to communicate their work.

Seeing academics and journalists as opposites creates the illusion of two distinct fields, each with its own set norms and standards of what is good journalism or good research. In reality, the boundaries between these two fields have been radically transformed over the last decade or so. The pressure for self-promotion in both academe and journalism creates a new dynamic that links one’s online presence with networks of power, such as media, politics, business, or higher education. For example, when I ask journalists how they conduct research, they usually say they start by looking at other journalists and then use Google. In this way, journalists find academics who might not be known in academic circles but are highly ranked on search engines, especially Google.

Sometimes journalistic research can be stronger than academic research, even academic research published in prestigious journals. For example, Professor Andrew Wakefield connected the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine to autism. His discovery gained massive



credibility by its publication in the well-respected medical journal, the *Lancet*, which provided Wakefield with the launching pad he needed to use the media to publicize his claims among the broader public. Even though the *Lancet* disputed some of the claims Wakefield later made to the media, by publishing him it had, unfortunately, given Wakefield credibility that allowed him to become a medical star. It was a journalist, Brian Deer, who brought to light the fraud, financial conflict of interest, and unethical treatment of children involved in the work that Wakefield had published in the *Lancet*. This is an example where a reporter did journalistic research to challenge flimsy academic research.

### ACADEMICS AS PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS

The making of a public intellectual can happen in many ways. Noam Chomsky, for example, started off as a linguist. In 1967, he wrote an article for the *New York Review of Books* in which he attacked academic culture in the United States. He argued that academics were part of the status quo because they were legitimizing American actions in Vietnam. Chomsky could have continued to write only for other academics, but for him to do so would have been counter to his desire to critique the academy. Such critiquing meant he had to engage political questions publicly. He challenged media and academic “objectivity” by asking what values and ideology they promulgated and how they affected how we understand the world and act within it. Even those who disagree with Chomsky would acknowledge that he used his academic research to create opportunities for understanding the values inherent in knowledge production.

Barbara Ehrenreich, a former academic, has used ethnographic techniques to expose the conditions, for example, endured by low-waged female workers. Ehrenreich had earned a PhD in cell biology, but she experienced a “personal transformation” when receiving prenatal care and realized



that “PhDs were not immune from the vilest forms of sexism”. She quit her teaching job and became a full-time journalist.

Both are public intellectuals—using different genres/registers to be public intellectuals. While they trained as academics, Ehrenreich became a journalist and Chomsky became a media figure. Both are dealing with the daunting political issues of the day. They found ways to transcend the narrow definitions of journalism and academe in order to raise questions about knowledge and the public good. Their experience demonstrates that asking whether one is doing research as a journalist or academic is the wrong question to start with. A more fruitful way to generate insights into the multifaceted aspects of these fields is to ask what the values are that underpin them.

#### ACADEMICS AND JOURNALISTS AS PUBLIC EDUCATORS

Often, academics and journalists see themselves as having special roles to play in enlightening society.

The act of enlightening—whether it comes with terms such as knowledge production/mobilization/dissemination/exchange and transfer—is a powerful social and political act, so much so that journalists and academics can make people mere sidebars in their own lives as journalists and academics act as expert interpreters and informal policy advisors on public issues. Should banks be allowed to charge interest on student loans? Should low-income students be seen as “at-risk” of failure? Should institutions be responsible for changing structures that discriminate against indigenous people’s knowledge? Decisions by academics and journalists about how to interpret or advocate on behalf of social issues can have profound effects on people’s thinking about them.

Academics and journalists perform key public educator roles by determining what knowledge is meaningful and worth sharing. Through their work, they also influence which individuals and which constituencies get to participate in

decision-making and which do not. Clay Shirky in a recent essay contends: “Access to information is far less important, politically, than access to conversation”. Shirky draws on Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld’s classic study to remind us that media is not the only game in town. We do not consume media passively. We are social creatures. We talk to our family, friends, and colleagues about media, and these conversations, combined with our background experiences, form our opinions.

I propose we think about journalism and academe as being networks of knowledge that can provide spaces for public education, spaces where journalists and academics facilitate the messy and contested process of conversation and debate as part of a process of political, educational, social, and policy inclusion. This process is what helps us figure out what values are implicit in current debates and how we might want either to maintain or change those values. ■■

*Michelle Stack is an associate professor in the University of British Columbia’s Department of Educational Studies, and a faculty associate for the UBC Graduate School of Journalism.*

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# Cut and Paste Research



Kane X. Faucher

Research and shopping seem to be converging, as students go to their machines to do “research” at the web’s many info-malls.

*La recherche et les emplettes semblent converger alors que les étudiants se rendent à leurs machines pour faire des « recherches » à l'un des nombreux infocentres virtuels.*



T axiing through the orchestral lull of the internet and its many flash-powered ads and as many sub-screen distractions crammed into one, I know there are a few students with a paw on their laptop trackpads, maneuvering in a desperate sweat to finish the term paper and grab-dragging all they can from Wikipedia.

We know the fate of such pilfered and clipboarded items. These bits and bobs of “information” will be unceremoniously dumped into an open Word file only later to be tortured for anything remotely usable or flagrantly rewritten in the hideous idiom only students of the worst kind can master. The bibliography, I know, will be very thin. If it has any books at all, that would suggest the unthinkable: that the student had mustered up courage to break the ogle marathon with the machines of convenience to make a trip to that foreboding Dracula’s castle known as the library (insert spooky music, thunder, and a cloud of bats ping-pong across a bloody moon here).

Some students, in their gross self-entitlement and intransigence on what constitutes proper research, will not

make the pilgrimage to that grand archive of collected knowledge any more than a non-Muslim would elect on a whim to circle the Ka’ba. Instant, freeze-dried knowledge in 140 character bursts is all they want and, in their view, all they need. The requirement that proper research be done is an alien concept to many of the 21st century student cohort, and they simply cannot fathom what purpose it could serve to develop a good research question, form a good thesis, and substantiate this with carefully selected sources by way of conducting research. Sleuthing through a dusty old building and poring over dusty old books seems almost repugnant to this bunch who may actually believe *if it isn’t on the internet, it simply doesn’t exist*.

To my own discredit, I’ve seen my own research shift more to the online marketplace, pulled there by the immense magnetic attraction of instantaneity and my own indolence. Yet, there upon my walls stands mighty shelving, holding a mosaic of variegated book spines, each one the promise of being either a trove of wisdom or a compendium of irrelevance. As a committed bibliophile who spends so

It is not as though I am staunchly opposed to the web and its many possibilities, but I am foolish enough to believe that the internet should be a supplement and not a replacement for books.



lavishly—and recklessly—on books, I could be pardoned for getting a bit shirty about students who manage to sail through their entire educational lives with only a cursory rub of the nose in the occasional book, usually only by some grade-related coercion.

I harp on this far too often to the point that it exasperates even those who share my opinion. In what must be the early onset of old age, I am becoming quite crusty and crotchety about the young. The fact that I have been able to make such an us-and-them division speaks volumes—volumes the young will never read unless it is abridged in digital format—on how outmoded I have become, relying as I do on the archly divisive binaries I usually rail against. The equation seems to make perfect sense, even if the outcome is ironic: mass literacy has resulted in increasing illiteracy. Of course, I anticipate the objections immediately by the more sober-minded and inclusive media theorists of the day: the definition of literacy must be expanded to include *digital* literacy. Yes, of course, and my spam folder is constantly refreshed with the new avant-garde poetry and prose of some of our new digital literates: eloquently Ciceronian appeals to provide my banking information, worldly yet quaintly misspelled sonnets to male member extension, erudite notices of winning foreign lotteries, and vigorous quatrains on how my PayPal account has been compromised. I even developed a course on digital literature, partially to appease the younger generation's appetite for all things virtual and as a means of trying to find solace in the new literary medium. It is not as though I am staunchly opposed to the web and its many possibilities, but I am foolish enough to believe that the internet should be a supplement and not a replacement for books.

My current compromise is a faint whisper compared to the thumping bibliophile railing in my extempore sermons whenever the subject comes up. I ask that at least half of the bibliography contain physical specimens of text, i.e., books and journal articles. The other half can be the usual litany of web citations with their download dates and URL gobbledygook. Try as I might, when opportunity allows, to extoll all the secret delights and technological superiority of the book, I can tell that the students wish I were a window that could be minimized. My saturnine Mencken-esque reflections receive their rebuffs by means of the blank stare

of an audience that finds what I have to say quaint, perplexing, and of arrant nonsense.

How could anyone keep a straight face to hear yet another codger giving vent to his woeful lament about the current state of education and the depths to which the once noble book has fallen? A trip through history—available even on that biblioclastic medium of the internet—charts the long and fascinating history of the book from the monastic middle ages, when a vellum book of 400 pages took about eight cows to manufacture, to the revolutionary Gutenberg press circa 1450, to the creation of the first public lending libraries during populist educational reforms in the 19th century, right up to the cheap mass-trade paperbacks that can only be read once before their spines split and that usually end their lives in church bazaars, Salvation Army thrift stores, and estate sales. Books have been responsible for the dissemination of ideas and the flaring of controversies. They have been faithful companion to the rise of science, changing the world with revolutionary ideas that precipitate actual revolutions. Arguably, the internet has taken on that role and has made the book largely redundant. Not even a small acknowledgement or dirge for the printed word, giving the impression—perhaps now espoused by the young—that books never held any importance beyond being a quaint object consigned to sit among other useless antiques like pomade, butter churners, and Betamax machines.

My main contention is not to praise or bury books and their illustrious legacy but to signal the icy toboggan descent for what passes for student scholarship in research. I do not mean all students, either but rather a growing ersatz majority of them. Their alarming click-cut-paste numbers continue to swell and press themselves against the doors of higher education, eventually making it through the tuition turnstile by sheer force. Research and shopping seem to converge ever more, and I cannot but evince the terrifying thought of students going to their machines to do “research” at the web's many info-malls. Here, one can find anything one wants, especially all the free facile renderings, chop-shop book reports, false reportage, and bogus opinions one needs. Worse still is the contemporary student's tendency toward extreme literalism in research. A student at the portal of the info-mall needs to become orientated and so will plug a search term such as “abortion” into the engine. The server



crunches and grinds the results and splatters them in an algorithm-based hierarchical list in a matter of milliseconds, returning 22.5 million entries for “abortion.” The gullible info-shopper will assume that the most relevant entry (the first one in the list) means that it is the most relevant in terms of being a credible research source. Hence, I may see the following in a student paper:

Abortion rates have skyrocketed in recent years, prompting Paula Pundit to declare this a state of emergency. According to Paula Pundit’s unbiased research on KillTheBabyKillers.com, “abortion is vile murder, period. Abortionists will all be roasted on Lucifer’s spit!

Indeed. Credible and unbiased, the two most popular flavours of the internet’s worldwide warren of critical thought. Perhaps I am being a bit of a Luddite prude. It seems to me the modern student does all that is possible to dodge traditional research as if it were something very messy and unpalatable. And, indeed, this has expanded to several areas of our lives; joining the military is fine if it can be done via a video game, and being an activist is swell if clicking on the occasional “agree” button on a petition counts as being politically informed. Research is messy business, a kind of altercation with the past via a dust-up with challenging language in difficult to click books. There are no rollovers in the book, no hyperlinking to summaries. The book sits there, an inert, immovable text that has no Flash capabilities and no comment pit where anonymous screen-named persons can flex their opinionated witticisms and fan flame wars, trading off in the narcissist game of “quip pro quo”. No, comparatively the book is an arid terrain of words and concepts with no helpful search toolbar on the heading of every one of its pages. Unless one has recently indulged in illicit substances, one will wait a very long time indeed for a chat window to pop up at the bottom of the page where “2Much4U” is dinging you with his “wazzup?” What a book demands is attention and patience—difficult to acquire commodities for the modern psyche, much like trying to track down a box of condoms in the Sahara and as seemingly practical as a solar powered submarine.

Pardon the segue, but I cannot leave this aside for how much it irritates me. I may be considered an unreasonable

tyrant, but I forbid emoticons in student essays. I have made similar moves to ban the exclamation point, as well as a growing list of words such as “totally”, “like”, and phrases such as “in my experience” and “I believe....” Any instance of “like” is usually a clumsy attempt at a simile or metaphor that cannot find its appropriate term. “Like” is a filler word, like, y’know, like, yeah.

I’ve tossed around the option of banning semicolons as well, since most people—young and old—have no clue how to use them. There is a popular yet wrong-headed idea that peppering an essay at random with the little barbed things makes the writing more “academic.” Incessant semicolon usage, especially when not one of them is even by chance employed correctly, only serves to make a research paper look like a punctuation fire-fight. The young do use them perhaps far more frequently in those besotted emoticons, the typographical standardized currency of all human emotion. In such cases, I tell them that to be winked at while reading is rather distracting, if not lewd. There is positively no web-speak allowed, which includes the now worn smooth and meaningless LOL, LMAO, ROTFLMAO, and any other acronym that vaguely resemble sub-committees invented by the Soviet Gosplan or awkwardly named probes launched by NASA. If anything, these prohibitions on what cannot be included in the research essay allow me a clear and unobstructed view of their vicious crimes against spelling and grammar and the brutal atrocities they commit against the rules of reasoning.

Truth is the first casualty of war—thus spake Wikipedia (after Aeschylus). In the age of internet research, substance is the first casualty of info-mining. Info-mining leads to info-dumping. The factoid and the tidbit are the sickly dauphins of knowledge and argumentation, and the personal anecdote is the usurper of vetted sources. What we are left with is a vast, disconnected constellation of orphaned quotations in the sequence that Google has arranged them, making a research paper look one part riddle and another part trivia. These web-harvests contain content connected only by virtue of sharing a few keywords. Nothing new is developed—just the perpetual act of reshuffling the same things in different order. Of course, I should not be so harsh: there may be plenty of respected academics out there who have made their names on just this practice alone. Reorganization is important, too.

Whither depth and engagement with the research enterprise? I do not mean to paint a completely bleak portrait of



today's student, for I still have exceptionally talented and equally old-fashioned research-savvy students coming through my courses. And, when Google completes its own Borgesian task of digitizing every book ever known, my complaints about web research will seem quaint and irrelevant. However, you will still find my obnoxious finger wagging when the grand optimists speak of the new virtual utopia made of text. Does digitizing everything really mean people will read more, or will we continue in our lazy habit of reading only what contains the explicit keyword to copy-paste? If it were preached to me that the web will make us better thinkers, it would be a strain on my credulity. Really what such blind optimists mean—or hope—is that universal access to information will precipitate a digital renaissance. But that reasoning is sloppy and wishful at best: access to healthier foods has not made us all magically thinner; nor did the opening of the first lending libraries make us all proficient in mathematics or connoisseurs of Latin poetry. The web is ungovernable, despite what the Chinese government believes, and the amount of frivolous garbage poured into it has made it an unthinkable vast psychological landfill. Sure, there's plenty of knowledge if one knows where to sift for it, but it is so much easier to let the search engine decide what has value.

There is no doubt that I will continue to be served with student essays that read more like a random cull of websites. This will be exacerbated in the same proportion to what I call the second law of *info*-dynamics; namely, the entropic effects of "information" in its raw and vulgar import. Lacking any framework or context, research will more resemble Dadaist *vers libre*, leaving it to the reader to do all the work of connecting isolated, orphaned fragments. These banal aphorisms masquerading as sustained research will be as perplexing and interpretively broad as the pre-Socratic fragments so sparingly bequeathed to history. These exploded bits, yanked from sources critical and dubious, show the modern web-based essayist to be the intrepid garbologist of the virtual, eager to reorganize content that has been repeated and reorganized according to several arrangement schemes already. This is not to say that there are not legitimate works on the internet that are worthy of inclusion in a research paper, but the method of acquisition (keyword searches) and no concerted program of teaching web-content-discrimination

techniques to say what is valid and what is dross, hobble these efforts. Books, too, are more legion than ever, with a new book being published every 20 seconds.

Perhaps I have it all wrong. The days of poring over stacks of books and compiling meticulous records and synthesizing this information into a coherent articulation based on a well-formed research question, with an appeal to credible sources, belong to a slower, more patient time that was not being buzzed, dinged, or jolted by devices of distraction. ■■

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Steve Penfold

# The dangers of LPS (Long-term Professor Syndrome)

I **KNEW** I was in trouble when I considered becoming a public intellectual. Maybe it was all those university seminars on media outreach, filled with useful tips on simplifying your ideas, staying on message, and targeting relevant audiences. Or, maybe it was the e-mails I receive, surprisingly frequently, from people across the country asking me obscure questions about Canadian history – wanting me to settle bar bets, peruse documents on family history, or suggest leads on anachronistic municipal policies in small towns more than 1,000 kilometres from my office on St. George Street. Or, maybe all the institutional buzz about knowledge production just rubbed off somehow, seeping into my mental bones like a cold rain in late fall.

And—no joking for one paragraph—there is that little matter of the moral obligations of privilege. I have the best job in the world, after all, with ample time to think, write, study, and engage in deep contemplation about issues I find interesting and important. Most of the time, no one tells me what that means—I just follow my intellectual nose where it takes me, and even the occasional gatekeepers I meet share my desire to probe the obscure.

So I'm hardly in a position to complain if I have to occasionally reach out to share my, er, expertise. The days of the ivory tower are over (if they ever existed), so we can't just lean back in our desk chairs and churn out dense articles for submission to *the Journal*

of *Scholarly Studies that Four People Will Read*. These are the days of shared authority, community outreach, and scholarly engagement with the public sphere.

But the utopian dreams of the public intellectual are bolder and broader. As an in-demand thinker, it's not like I'd confine myself to subjects I know something about—not much public hay in that, after all, given my rather narrow and idiosyncratic interests in snackfood and Santa Claus. I know a lot about a small number of things but almost nothing about everything else, so I'll need to convince myself that I have brilliant ideas on a wide range of subjects.

This perceptual leap, it turns out, is all too easy for anyone suffering Long-time Professor Syndrome (LPS), a condition characterized by an overwhelming sense that people would follow your every word even if you lacked the power to set final exams. I mean, my eight years of teaching adds up to well over 1,000 hours in front of a lecture hall. Think of it: a metric ton of time spent watching people write down what I say. Any psychologist will tell you—unless they have an academic job—that this is just not normal. Can anyone, under the same conditions, resist the idea that their thoughts are really, truly, and completely interesting?

By far the worst symptom of LPS is topic creep. I mean, it's not like I stand in front of a class and talk about my area of expertise. I lecture on dozens of topics that I know almost nothing about, like Cold War diplomacy, the

18<sup>th</sup> century, or anything west of Hamilton. Everyone has the experience of that unanswerable student question, where you respond with the evasive, "Well, scholars still debate the answer to that one" or the elusive, "What do other people think of that?" when really the truthful answer would be, "Sadly, everything that I know about the War of 1812 is already in this lecture." And this kind of teaching from ignorance, I assure you, is no occasional matter.

Yet students still write it down, write it down, and write it down. Heck, some even ask to *record* my lectures—surely a sign they want to hang off my every word, needing not just the content but my witty panache and clever turns of phrase and expression? Perhaps they will upload it to their Facebook page, spreading my special wisdom to their wide circle of e-friends and displaying their pride in being privy to some special knowledge that needs to be shared? Yes? No? Yes?

Well, no. How often I forget that my "audience" could care less what I think of pretty much everything, except insofar as I will test them on it. I live in constant denial of my co-dependent relationship with final exams. My thoughts are not really, truly, and completely interesting. LPS is an insidious master. I'm starting a support group. Any joiners? **AM**

*Steve Penfold is Academic Matters' humour columnist. He moonlights as an associate professor of history at the University of Toronto.*





## The University as Network News

**MEDIA AND HIGHER EDUCATION** do not inhabit two solitudes. As underscored in this issue, media and academia co-exist, albeit somewhat uncomfortably. They are both public educators: analyzing, interpreting, and broadcasting ideas about the world.

They part company, however, over how that is done. Mainstream media reject intricacy, conveying “certainty” and easily digestible depictions of events and ideas. Sound bites and two-line quotes are what’s required now for mainstream media news coverage.

Complexity and nuance characterize most academic research. When engaging with the mainstream media, academics chafe at seeing their research oversimplified and sensationalized, or rejected out of hand by a media that is increasingly conservative in its ideological orientation.

Both face unique pressures that affect the way they interact. Commercial imperatives—the need to attract advertisers and readers—drive the mainstream media. In an era of corporate consolidation, mass layoffs of journalists, and definitions of “newsworthiness” based on target audiences, the possibilities for expansive mainstream media coverage of higher education is limited.

For academics, the university as a haven for contemplation and research, detached from the “outside world,” is no longer a reality, if it ever were. Universities face political and financial pressures to make research more accessible to the public and to engage the mainstream media: witness the creation of university media offices and contact lists of

expert academic commentators.

Mainstream media is not the only venue through which academia can reach a broader public—or academic—audience. Higher education “niche” media is an outlet for coverage, commentary, and analysis. As Karen MacGregor notes in this issue, web-based publications such as *University World News* and *Inside Higher Ed* are part of an expanding universe of higher education coverage, providing greater visibility to the academic world.

And universities themselves have a long tradition of creating their own media outlets: campus-based public radio stations, as well as newspapers and journals. But these have been largely inwardly focused.

The internet and social media have created enormous possibilities for expanding the media sphere of higher education. Already there is a proliferation of bloggers and citizen journalists, university and discipline-specific websites, YouTube channels, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts devoted to academic issues.

Is this now the moment for universities to go beyond these often disparate and uncoordinated initiatives to become news centres in their own right? Certainly it is an idea that is increasingly entertained.

Two years ago, in an *Inside Higher Ed* article, David Scobey mused about a national network of campus-based news sites that could cover local, state/provincial and national issues. This year, University of British Columbia science blogger Nassif Ghossoub envisioned a similar undertaking in a blog-post, “The

University as New Media Superpower.”

The concept is not as far-fetched as it initially may appear. Campus-based daily news sites in various forms currently exist. “Futurity,” a website hosted at the University of Rochester, has for a number of years aggregated research news and analysis from universities in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. The intent is to broaden awareness of university research in the context of declining research coverage by traditional media. The Academic Minute, a partnership between public radio and academia in the U.S., provides daily broadcasts featuring commentaries by leading academic researchers.

And in March 2011, a consortium of Australia’s leading universities, working with experienced journalists, launched “The Conversation,” an online academic news publication. The intent is to encourage academics to provide commentary on the economy, energy, the environment, politics, science, technology and health.

Are such initiatives economically sustainable in the long run? Will they reflect a genuine diversity of viewpoints? Can they reach beyond an academic audience and become the public’s “go to” place for information, analysis, and informed debate.

It is too early to know. However, the promise of campus-based news sites is to go beyond merely expanding the public reach of higher education. They speak to the democratic promise of higher education envisioned by Mark Kingwell in his article here. And, as David Scobey has observed, they have “transformative implications for both the press and the academy... They might serve as a much-needed laboratory for the civic journalism movement...energize the civic engagement movement within higher education, grounding our sometimes grandiose commitment to public work in the frictional, daily encounter with our communities and their stories.” **AM**

*Mark Rosenfeld is Editor-in-Chief of Academic Matters and Associate Executive Director of OCUFA.*

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