

Ignor Rinse is as dumb as a bag of hammers and proud of it. He is determined not to be sucked in by that "PC-nonsense". His favourite saying is: "Thaz waaaaay too intellectual bru." Despite Di's attempts to get him to read a book Ignor remains an immovable force.



by Fanie Groenewald



At the Department of Journalism, Technikon Pretoria, Rekord West News, the training/community newspaper published by the department in partnership with Capital Media, plays a key role in the training of students.

In 2002 the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) commissioned a **skills audit**. As a very impressionistic evaluation of what Steyn and De Beer found in their interviews with the editors and news editors regarding the question: "From which tertiary institutions do you get your best beginner-reporters?" They state that one technikon department and two university departments stood out nationally: Technikon Pretoria, Rhodes University and the University of Stellenbosch. According to the report (available at www.scribe.co.za), most have at least one of the following aspects in common: **regular interaction with the media; internship plans; advisory boards and students who can "fall in and start producing right away"** or at least find their feet within a month or three.

The partnership between our department and Capital Media is now in its sixth year. The weekly community newspaper, Rekord West News, serves the dual purpose, also being a training newspaper for the

department's students. Capital Media, as proprietor, is responsible for all the running costs, including advertising, printing and distribution. The department is responsible for the editorial content and layout.

Journalism schools traditionally have a very hands-on, practice-orientated approach.

Journalism education in most countries around the world covers the ground of

practical skills and standards training on the one hand and general contextual education and liberal courses on the other hand. **The delicate balance between practical and contextual knowledge** has always been the main area of attention within journalism programmes worldwide.

The Department of Journalism started with West News in August 1994 as a fortnightly knock-and-drop training/community newspaper, distributed in the western suburbs of Pretoria, including the township of Atteridgeville. This was to further enhance the practical training of the journalism students in the print media field.

Prior to West News, the department's students were involved with the campus newspaper, The Student, distributed only on campus.

While the academic benefits of West News were obvious, the department **struggled to make it financially viable**. The advertising income seldom covered the running of the fortnightly editions. The department spent thousands of rands from their reserve funds and received special grants from the technikon to keep West News running.

In 1997 the department approached Capital Media, the publishers of Rekord, the knock-and-drop community newspapers in Pretoria. In 1997 they had launched their seventh newspaper, Rekord West, distributing in approximately the same area as West News.

After successful discussions, an agreement was reached. From February 1998

Power packing



partnership

West News would merge with Rekord West to become Rekord West News, with a circulation of 18 000. The department would have **the benefit of a community newspaper as a training newspaper, without the burden of any of the direct costs.** (In 2002 the printing and distribution costs of Rekord West News amounted to approximately R800 000.)

It has always been the policy of technikons to have close links with industry. However, the partnership between the Technikon Pretoria's Department of Journalism and Capital Media is unique.

It is important for the department that the students, from diverse backgrounds, be exposed to all sections of our society. Rekord West News' target readership is a good cross-section of society in the new South Africa.

The news content of Rekord West News is closely monitored, aiming for balance between English and Afrikaans stories, campus news and stories from Atteridgeville. This often leads to lively debate between students working on the newspaper. Discussions between the department's editorial manager and Rekord's editor and news editor in this regard, are also relayed to the students. **This is a valuable input into their practical training.**

In their report, Steyn and De Beer state that editors and news editors expressed the need that **students should also be taught the role of media within society, and especially issues such as media policy.** Serious concern should be given to those subjects that reporters now obviously lack knowledge about. These would include language skills, general knowledge skills, media law and media ethics. It is important that reporters should not be taught these skills in a vacuum but within the context of news policy and news management. South Africa has a unique role to play as a developing country with a free market media. This inevitably causes **tension between different factions on what news is and what type of journalism tertiary institutions should teach.** This would include insight into the problems related to typical/traditional Western knowledge for journalism training vis-à-vis indigenous knowledge.

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They mention that news editors and editors alike expressed a strong view that reporters should be trained with life skills equipping them with the mindset of being credible, fair, responsible and committed in reporting not only major, but all news issues.

The need for typical journalism skills not necessarily being taught in content-based courses was also emphasised. **This would include reaching deadlines on time, basic courtesy, arriving at appointments on time, adhering to a dress code, having respect for others and conducting oneself professionally.**

The whole purpose of having Rekord West News as a training/community newspaper is to address exactly these issues. The students, working in editorial teams, are expected to utilise all their knowledge gained from their formal journalism classes.

The timetable of the second-year students makes ample provision for hands-on training. They are divided into two groups, working for two periods of eight weeks each in the radio studio and at Rekord West News. The production schedule is arranged in such a way that the students' work is monitored by the full-time staff members of Rekord West News – the editorial manager and the editorial co-ordinator who is a Capital Media journalist appointed to do only this – and two third-year students doing their experiential training as student editor and student news editor. The language lecturers (English and Afrikaans) are also involved with the final editing.

This is indeed **"a process of mentoring, guidance and osmosis"**. It prepares the students to take full advantage of the period of experiential training during their third year of study.

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