

## RHODES JOURNALISM REVIEW

ASKED A BATCH OF WORKING JOURNALISTS – SOME FRESH OUT OF J-SCHOOL, SOME WITH MANY YEARS BEHIND THEM – THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- WHEN DID YOU GRADUATE?
- HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN JOURNALISM?
- WHAT IS YOUR JOB NOW?
- IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD DO/HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?
- WHAT DO YOU KNOW NOW THAT YOU WISH YOU'D KNOWN THEN?
- WHAT IS MISSING FROM JOURNALISM EDUCATION?



*Dibussi Tande*

I work as an instructional designer at Accenture, one of the leading global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing companies. I have a bachelor's degree in public law from the University of Yaounde in Cameroon (1989), an MA in political science from Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago (1996), and an MEd in instructional technology from Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, US (2005). Although I did not attend journalism school, I have been in the field since 1990 when I began writing for a variety of English- and French-language newspapers in Cameroon, among them *Cameroon Post*, *Cameroon Life*, *Le Messenger* and *Challenge Hebdo*. Since moving to the United States, I have served in a variety of roles for a variety of Cameroonian/African newspapers and magazines. I am currently the North American Bureau Chief for *Summit Magazine*, Cameroon's leading English language magazine (<http://www.summitmagazine.net/>). Since 2004, I have also become an advocate of citizen journalism and I have been blogging (*Scribbles from the Den* – <http://dibussi.com>). On the one hand, I am proof that all roads lead to journalism and on the other, my story is a refutation of the widely held belief that mainstream journalism and citizen journalism are antithetical.

All roads lead to journalism

On very rare occasions, I wonder whether I should have read journalism at university. However, law, political science and instructional technology degrees have given me a much broader and relevant perspective on the world and on the major socio-political challenges in this age of globalisation.

This has helped me immensely in my activities as a citizen journalist and as a mainstream journalist. This of course does not mean that journalism studies are not necessary. On the contrary! It simply implies that for journalism education to be truly relevant in today's world and beneficial to the modern journalist, it must go beyond "pure" journalism to fully embrace other subjects such as law, economics, sociology, information technology, etc.

One of the missing components in journalism today is a truly multi-disciplinary approach to journalism studies. The world is a much different place than it was 50 years ago but many journalism programmes still reflect methods and content an age far removed from today's information age.

# WE NEED TO TAKE OUR PROFESSION

Take the profession seriously



*Trevor Ncube*

I did a Bachelor of Arts Honours in economic history in 1985. I have been in journalism for just over 20 years having started in November 1989. I am the Executive Chairman of *Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Standard* and the newly-formed *NewsDay* and controlling shareholder in Zimbabwe, and Executive Deputy Chairman of the *Mail&Guardian* and majority shareholder in South Africa.

I would have done a management degree, such as an MBA, soon after my first degree, to better prepare me for my current roles.

A lot of people dislike and some are contemptuous of journalism and our conduct is not helping. We need to take our profession seriously for the public to take us seriously.

Life has become complex and a qualification in journalism alone does not stand us in good stead for the challenges of writing for an informed public.

I think journalism education should be offered to people with a first degree in politics, science, medicine, engineering, etc. We need to be experts in what we write about.

So we should pick a discipline and study it and then be taught how to write. Then society will take us seriously.



*Ferial Haffajee*

I was accepted to study journalism at Rhodes University, but my parents didn't have means to send me. They were both clothing workers and we got by month to month, so I went to Wits instead. I read for a BA degree with an intention to add law onto it. But I only wanted to be a journalist so did not apply myself to the legal texts. I started an honours in African literature but abandoned it when I was accepted as a trainee at the old *Weekly Mail*.

I'm now editor-in-chief of *City Press*. Previously I held the same position at the *Mail&Guardian*. I am on Facebook, I tweet, I have a column on News24 – I know my universe is changing and I know I am in the slow lane so I'm trying to catch up but I still derive true satisfaction from going out to report a story properly, usually about people for whom social networking means asking for a cup of sugar until the next wage packet comes around and who think tweeting is what the birds do.

I want to have a journalism degree and I will study towards it. I would like to be more technically proficient and be able to cut a decent podcast as well as produce a quick and entertaining piece of video. I would have liked to have travelled more widely as a journalist and reported from different places.

As an editor, you learn to quickly work out what is extraneous and unnecessary – I might have saved my own editors a few grey hairs if I'd known it then. I turn over a news story much better than I did when I was a reporter. I think my road as a journalist is still long, so ask me the question in 10 years time?

The young people I work with know so much more than we do. I'd like to teach them that what analysts say is really not that exciting compared to the views of ordinary people.



I have a BA in journalism and graduated in 2005, although I have moved out of the journalism industry and in to new media and technology development in the mobile industry. I work at Vodacom in the social media division. I am the Product Manager on The Grid and a newly launched product called Legends of Echo. My job is very mobile-centric and focuses on location-based technology, social networking and new media.

I don't think there is anything I would have done differently. I chose to focus my studies on writing and photography. This gave me a solid basis from which to grow my area of interest. I happened to choose to shift my focus from old media in to new media formats. I think if I had to single out a specific path that I would rather have followed it would be a business degree instead of journalism.

Today, with the technology that exists (blogging, Internet, mobile web and others) it's easy to be a published author and have the world read your writing. It's not as easy to pick up a contract and understand it, to get a loan and not blow it.

I have a better grip on what real journalism is, means and aspires to be and it isn't the ideals that we were taught in lecture theatres. Those ideals are imperative to gain a good basis but they often don't exist in the real world of media production. I know now how important the bottom line is, the profit margins, the cost cutting, the advertising and the overheads. These are real and important parts of media production and the practice of journalism. I wish I'd learned more about that aspect when I was starting out.

A firm and holistic grasp of the realities of journalism is missing. Students learn the theory, learn how to write or take a photograph and think that they can walk in to the world of media and make it when the reality is much more harsh and cutthroat.

I also think that an innovative angle on media is missing. Things have changed in the past six months, never mind the past five years of media and journalism. There are new tools popping up all over the world that can help journalists in their research, transparency and communication but no one is teaching these and students are not being exposed to them.

The number of students and journalists that I know who cannot tell me what Twitter is astounds me. Recognising cutting-edge and innovative technology is absolutely imperative in today's media landscape.

## I publish myself

*Brenda Zulu*

Twenty years ago when I was recruited at the *Daily Express* in Zambia, I used a typewriter for my stories. The coming of computers, which were later connected to the Internet, changed the face of journalism.

I now publish online and practise what is now called new media using multimedia web 2.0 tools. I am a freelance journalist and I have also set up a loose African new media team to provide e-media solutions to whoever is in need of the service. We've worked with the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, the Media for Development conference in Brussels, the Africa Rice Congress in Mali and the Web 2 for Development conference in Italy.

The coming of the computer and later the Internet has changed the way I do my journalism. Because of the Web 2.0 tools I don't depend on other people to publish me. I can create publishing platforms and publish whoever I want to publish.

Also the reason why it has worked for me, I think, is the fact that I have branded my name in online spaces and when I approach a customer they are confident that I will deliver the work. There is a need for journalists to learn how to brand themselves.

Personal branding of journalists should be taught at journalism school. There are very few role models for this new millennium journalism. We also need to set up mentorship programmes online. We should start by thinking: how can one be a journalist without using traditional media?



Looking back, I wish I had known how to write project proposals earlier and also I wish I had self confidence and entrepreneur skills.

# SERIOUSLY FOR THE PUBLIC TO TAKE US SERIOUSLY

*Verashni Pillay*

'Getting it' is half the battle

I'm not at all interested in competitive sports, but the day I graduated in 2007 I knew I'd won. Being a student at Rhodes University is being part marathon runner and part Monopoly player. Think stamina and endurance combined with a good dose of ruthless ambition.



I worked for News24 for about two years as a general reporter and am now the managing editor of the Mail&Guardian Online – which is a catch-all term for a host of exciting and challenging work. I manage the online team, write a weekly column, deal with the business side of operations from time to time and squeeze in as much reporting as I can around that, including multimedia.

The new media direction my career took is all the more surprising given I specialised in writing and editing. There are so many things I would have liked to have been done differently, and I'm sure the department heads are still nurturing the headaches I gave them about it.

Furthermore, the emphasis increasingly needs to be on students getting as many skills as possible. But don't be too stressed about being majorly multi-skilled. I found focusing on writing and politics got me where I wanted to be. But with the world heading increasingly online, what you definitely need to be is comfortable in that online space. "Getting it" is half the battle – the other skills can be taught.

In the end it turned out that the things I did for fun – keeping a blog for instance – is what served me most in the long term.

Create your own start-up

*Matthew Buckland*

I graduated in 1996. I've been in the media in various capacities for the past 14 years. Although I write and blog frequently, I've been involved as a journalist, in the formal sense of the word, for only one of those years.

I'm CEO of Creative Spark, a web agency which I own. I previously founded and ran 20FourLabs@24.com and headed up the M&G Online for seven years. Before that I worked for the BBC in London for their web division.

What I would have done differently? I would have gone on my own much earlier. What I wish I'd known? That I *could* have gone on my own much earlier.

Journalism degrees, like most other degrees, generally train and encourage graduates to join corporates and companies. While this is a good option, I think graduates should be exposed to another option: creating their own start-up.

An education at a first-class institution could assist by giving students the confidence, encouragement and the entrepreneurial skills to create and run their own companies.

This may not apply equally to all sectors, but it certainly applies to web and digital industries.





**Lukanyo Mnyanda**

I graduated in 1995 and started working at *Business Day* in January 1996 and have been in journalism since then... *Business Day*, *Sunday Independent*, *Business Report*, *Business Times*.

I've now been at Bloomberg for five years. I started in Johannesburg covering South African bonds and foreign exchange markets. I've been doing the

same job from London since April 2007. I write news and features on the dollar, yen and euro as well as the UK pound. I also cover bond markets in the UK and mainland Europe.

As a student? I would have spent a lot more time in the library. Like most people I think it was only after I left university that I began to realise what a privilege having access to all those books (and time) and I wish I had more use of both.

The Internet and all the new technology was relatively new and exotic when I was a student and if I'd known how big and transformative it was going to be I could have done things differently but I'm not sure how.

I hope the necessary focus on new and innovative ways of delivering news does not mean students focus less on the basics... writing well.



**Alex Dodd**

I graduated with a Bachelor of Journalism from Rhodes University at the end of 1991.

Always torn between the poetics of literature and the immediate pop cultural terrain of journalism, I returned (thanks to a Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship) to my studies in 2001, to complete my masters in English literature at Concordia University in Montreal. And I have just embarked on a PhD in the English Department at the University of Cape Town in association with the Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative.

Throughout my studies, I have always continued my work as a writer and editor, so as to stay attuned to fresh

currents in the public terrain and hone my writing.

I describe myself as an "independent writer and editor". Each of these words is carefully chosen. I decided to adopt the moniker "independent" because my independence is more of an ethic than a label – something I seek to embody in all aspects of my life and thinking. I find the word "freelance" demeaning and an excuse to treat writers like hired guns, ever ready to turn a quick trick for the right fee.

Although I work in the journalistic terrain, I choose to describe myself as a "writer" because my bent has always been towards literary non-fiction, being less concerned with the headline urgencies of currency, than with original ways in which the immediate facts are received and processed by human beings.

I'm a great believer in learning from my mistakes. Coming a cropper sharpens my craving for evolution.

What seems like hellish/sublime procrastination is often a meaningful journey towards what you're trying to say. I still wish I could trust that process more and allow myself to surf the waves of sense that lead to a line of argument. But a deadline is a deadline is a deadline – hello darkness my old friend, I've come to talk with you again...

A crash course in philosophy that tracks the evolution of theoretical trajectories across the ages is missing from journalism education. For this, I recommend the writings of Alain de Botton and AC Grayling. Ethics are at the heart of everything.



**Charmain Naidoo**

I graduated with majors in journalism and speech and drama from Rhodes University in 1979, then stayed on to do honours in drama in 1980. I'll have been a journalist, or in journalism, for 30 years in January 2011! I'm the acting-editor of Port Elizabeth's daily paper, *The Herald* (also the oldest paper in the country). However, I am moving

back to Johannesburg to take up an editorial position at Avusa head office.

I have had the most remarkable life in journalism – travelled the world, met world leaders, princes, paupers, politicians and commoners, all linked by a single humanity. It's a useful thing to learn early on – that people, in the end, are just people. It helps to remove the awe and the fear when you're reporting on big stories or covering supposedly important events. It also makes sure you keep perspective: something I think is the most crucial weapon in the journalist's arsenal.

I know now that a healthy detachment from The Story is not only critical, but also helpful in that it provides the kind of perspective I talked about earlier. Otherwise, you lose credibility. I say to idealistic young crusading journalists who see themselves on a mission: If you want to save the planet, join Greenpeace. If you want to write about the effects of climate change, listen to all sides, including the sceptics, and report them all. Let your readers be the judge.

I know now that:

Governments change, politicians don't.

You will cover the same story several times in a career – just the names of the people and the extent of the joy or grief will change.

People have an astonishing capacity for love and kindness, and an equal capacity for hatred, violence and malice. So check motives and individual agendas before you publish anything.

What's missing from journalism education? I think it's more a case of what's missing from young, would-be journalists. You need to have an innate curiosity, a hunger for information and the news, and a doggedness that ensures that you stick with something till you've got to the bottom of it and a good dose of scepticism so you question everything.

Can this be taught? Journalists need to be specialists in hundreds of fields which is why they need to read widely, and pay attention to everything that is going on around them. A tall order? Not really. Basic requirements for a journalist.



**I am a blogger**

**Sokari Ekrine**

In 1991 I graduated with a BSc in new technology and education and in 1996 a masters in human rights. I am a blogger and have never considered myself a journalist. There has been much discussion on whether bloggers are journalists and the two are becoming increasingly

integrated. Many bloggers don't wish to be seen as journalists – blogging has its own style and approach to writing and non-journalist bloggers have an independence which gives them far more freedom of expression and opinion. So, no, I don't see myself as a journalist in the traditional sense of the profession but I do think bloggers need to have recognition from the media industry rather than disparagement, which is often the case.

Apart from blogging, I work freelance across disciplines as a writer and researcher/workshop facilitator.

I probably would have studied philosophy with a masters in creative writing. I feel I missed out by not focusing on writing and critical thought.

I wished I'd known that there are so many options in life and one does not have to follow the "traditional" and "set" plan laid out for you by your parents or community.

I don't know much about journalism education but one criticism I do have is about what I call "lazy journalism". The journalists I respect are the ones that take the time to really understand a story and to give historical, political and social context. So often you read a piece in the newspaper and you can tell the writer really knows nothing of the topic and is too lazy to find out.

**GIVE STUDENTS CONFID ENCO**



*Gary Oberholzer*

I graduated from Rhodes Journalism Department in 1996 – I THINK that makes about 14 years in journalism! I produce the mid-afternoon *Jenny Crwys-Williams Show* on Talk Radio 702 and also the weekly *Maggs on Media* programme on the eNews Channel. I also consult for Media

Invest time online

Monitoring Africa.

At the time that I studied, the opportunities to gain skills for radio were a lot less structured than they are now. Rhodes Music Radio was separate from the journalism department so the skills gained and the time invested were almost wholly philanthropic! While RMR made for a powerful, creative and independent student voice – and guaranteed great social spinoffs – I would have liked it to count towards my degree credits.

I also wish I paid more attention in my media law class. In today's news environment an understanding of things like child privacy rights with regards to the media can be VERY handy in how you cover a story!

And then the lecturers of our TV class arranged a field trip to Joburg to expose the class to some of the big programming producers in the local industry. Knowing how important that first foot in the door is, I would use the opportunity in a very different way now. To have been exposed to where their businesses are going and what their new media needs might be in years to come – I should have crafted my skills set to appeal to those market trends. That way I would have been a more attractive employee proposition.

The Internet is a massively powerful medium for inspiring creativity, so make sure you invest time online – you will know if you are looking in the right place by the inspiration you feel at the end of it.

If you want to be a content producer across a number of media you should probably prepare to be an entrepreneur. It is scary but at the same time it can be massively rewarding! Some of my most rewarding work has involved the process of taking content – making the most of it with one presenter on one format and then reformatting and reworking it to appeal to another presenter and another format.



*Hamilton Wende*

I came to journalism through a love for writing and filmmaking as I studied English and drama and film at Wits, graduating in 1984. I started that very year as a tape runner and then freelance soundman for the BBC, Visnews and NBC working during the terrible years of township violence that started as what was known then as "unrest" and soon became a virtual revolution.

I was still finishing my degree when I started working for the networks, and would often have to rush out from a tut on Wordsworth to get on a plane and fly to Cape Town or Durban or even southern Angola. It was an exciting but also frightening time, but it was an incredible introduction to journalism – working on



*Frank Keany*

I graduated from the University of Canberra in 2004 with a Bachelor of Communications (Journalism). It's been just over five years that I've been paid as a journalist, about double that trying to become one. I'm editor of the National Rural News, operating out of Radio 2UE in Sydney. I write, research and present a daily 30-minute news bulletin that's broadcast to 35 stations around rural and regional Australia.

I started off reading the news at Radio 2XL in the Snowy Mountains, then migrated back to my home city of Canberra for about three years with stints in talkback radio and TV. I was also a tutor at the University of Canberra. I'm now working in Sydney, in talkback as well.

The three-year course I did at UC was great for me to get into the mindset of a journalist. There was the writing skills necessary to survive, and prac

work to hone our skills. Of course, nothing beats hands-on experience, but that foundation was vital.

More voice training, would have been helpful. A lot of smaller radio stations, for instance, are less worried about the writing skills of their newsreaders and more about how they sound on-air. While we were taught the "ABC way" of writing and reporting, the reality is that most graduates will start off in commercial radio. While thinking as an ABC reporter in a commercial environment does no harm, reading the news like one on an FM station won't go down so well.

What's missing is an emphasis on practical experience. When I was a tutor, I was worried to find many students didn't know what the reality was for the industry outside of the classroom. Build up their appetite for news. Encourage them to consume as much as possible, in any form they can, and the ones that succeed will have a hunger for news which will serve them for the rest of their career. Get them to start up blogs, to use Twitter to discuss the news with journalists and encourage them to be critical of what they see, hear and read. Make them feel like they're a part of the news cycle.

## Nothing beats hands-on

*Thabo Leshilo*



Revisit language teaching

I graduated from the University of the North in 1989 and have a Bachelor of Administration, majoring in politics and public administration. I have been a journalist for the past 21 years.

I'm now Public Editor of Avusa Media.

If I could do things differently I would have studied journalism at university because that's what I had always wanted to do but did not do so as it was not provided at my university.

I knew that I wanted to be a journalist even before I had finished matric.

What is missing from journalism education? I think there's a need to revisit the teaching of languages given the poor standards of English among university entrants.

I'd also recommend that all students be required to have proficiency in a language other than their mother tongue.

## 'Get that degree'

the biggest stories in the world with some of the most experienced international journalists in the business.

So I've been working as a journalist for 26 years now, and imagine I still have about that many or more still to go!

I lived in New York for a time as a freelance writer and I studied journalism and non-fiction writing classes at NYU's night school which were incredibly useful to me, and, again, I was privileged to be taught by some of the toughest "old-school" journalists in New York and I have never forgotten their advice and how we had always to get more than one source for any fact.

Sadly, in the world of 24-hour news that doesn't always apply any more as things simply happen too fast to wait for a second source, but to me it is a major weakness in modern journalism.

Today I am based in Johannesburg and am a freelance writer and television producer for the big international networks. I am also an author of both

fiction and non-fiction – my latest novel is a thriller based in northern Afghanistan called *House of War*. I like doing both fiction and non-fiction. Fiction gives you the opportunity to probe deeper into human emotion, whereas non-fiction's appeal to the reader is that they are sharing in an experience of what really happened.

I think it is very important in non-fiction never to lose faith with the reader. They must know that what you write about really happened.

I don't really have any career regrets. I have worked all over Africa, the US, the Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan and it's been a wonderful series of journeys.

I'm very, very glad that when I was a student I started working as a soundman for the networks, I still had the determination to finish my degree. I always say to young people "get that degree" because you are unlikely to have the chance to do so again as life begins to take over.

# ENCE URAGEMENT AND ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS