



SIYABONGA MTHEMBU – GRAAFF-REINET: from the series Life under Democracy – Dale Yudelma

Nearly 10 years ago, I presented a conference paper at Rhodes on what UCT was and wasn't doing in journalism education and this was subsequently published in *Ecquid Novi*. I re-read the piece to prepare an update and was struck both by how perceptive and on the money it was but also by how much had changed.

By Ian Glenn

ON (not) TEACHING JOURNALISM

Part 2

To repeat the major point: we decided strategically not to go into journalism as we saw print journalism as an over-traded market, opting rather to give students a hybrid of media studies and journalism, hoping to make them strategically astute media practitioners. When we did (do) journalism, we insist, as in our re-shaped second year course, more on multi-media journalism, and more on feature writing and creative non-fiction than hard news.

But before launching into Advertisements for Ourselves, part 2, perhaps it would be good to say what we have got and probably still get wrong or what we might have done differently. First, hires. Had the Centre for Film and Media Studies hired differently, it could be argued we would have had a different, perhaps much better, more effective department. We have turned down, for a mix of reasons, some of the best journalists, media critics and public intellectuals in the country. I don't want to 'out' people as unsuccessful candidates but to wonder whether UCT (and these were very much agonised-over and committee decisions in all cases) got it wrong. In particular, have we been or become too academic, losing distinguished creative people and practitioners (for a mix of reasons) like Emma van der Vliet, Andre Wiesner, Mary Watson and Meg Rickards? Could we have hired people who were more in the public fray, people without PhDs and the normal academic track records?

Should we have pushed harder for adjunct professors or lecturers as many North American universities have – people from industry who bring their expertise and get acknowledged for their creative output and role as public intellectuals and perhaps even as journalists? The pressure from faculty, to which I think we bowed, for strategic and other reasons, was to hire people who fit the conventional academic mould, who publish accredited journal articles, are easier to judge in conventional ways for tenure and promotion. In Weberian terms, the charisma of our early days, with the heady mix of external practitioners and endless innovation, with students complaining they were guinea pigs, has given, and gives way to academic rationality and bureaucracy. Which has its good points, of course. Almost everybody on the media side has been promoted, our publication rates are very healthy, and we have a flourishing number of honours, master and PhD students. And that's not all...

Since I wrote the first article, the department has become far more diverse. There is a current joke that goes: "An Irishman, a South African, a Zimbabwean and an Englishman go into a bar. Oh, that's not a joke, that's the England cricket team." Here, we could say, "An American, a Frenchman, an Egyptian, a Zimbabwean, a

woman married to a Kenyan and some South Africans are in a room. Oh, that's the CFMS staff meeting..."

Since the first article, Philippe Salazar and the Centre for Rhetoric Studies have become part of the Centre for Film and Media Studies. Thanks to Philippe's offerings in Rhetoric, we have developed an interdisciplinary Hons and MA programme in Political Communication, which includes modules in Rhetoric, in Political Studies, with Bob Mattes the major contributor, and courses from within our department, with other contributors such as Ibrahim Saleh, Wallace Chuma and Musa Ndlovu. Among the graduates from this and closely related programmes were three of the candidates on the top 20 of the DA list for Parliament – and now only one since Lindiwe Mazibuko has decided to go to Harvard and Tim Harris to join the City of Cape Town finance team.

Going to Harvard seems to be a rite of passage for CFMS staff. When Wallace Chuma goes as the Mandela fellow in 2015, he will be the fourth member of the department to receive this exciting mid-career opportunity – there are advantages to academic rationality. Another advantage is the growing presence of CFMS in international forums and organisations like IAMCR, where Ibrahim Saleh has been an important presence. He is also co-editor of *Journal of Applied Journalism and Media Studies*.

One of the strengths of UCT, as the previous article noted, was being in good company of other creative and critical departments. The Drama Department plays a key role in our honours in television drama, while our new MA in documentary arts draws on the expertise of history and anthropology. This new, highly successful development, owes a lot to the presence of Paul Weinberg, maven and networker of note, who from his position in the Visual Archive in the UCT Library, has attracted many mid-career and distinguished practitioners who have turned out award-winning films and arranged photographic exhibitions.

But the documentary arts has also stimulated the development of masters level non-fiction courses, such as the creative non-fiction course. Here we are able to draw on the expertise of top local practitioners such as Justin Fox, Antony Albekker and Andre Wiesner.

As I was writing this article, Martha Evans, who has taken over the main responsibility for teaching print journalism, was purring with pleasure at the excellent honours projects her narrative literary journalism students had produced. The problem she and the budding journalists face is that there seem to be very few outlets for serious, longer pieces of 'deep' or investigative journalism.

And yet, surely, like the character in the Philip Larkin poem *Church Going* who "will

forever be surprising / A hunger in himself to be more serious", South Africans need more than Pistorius and sport and celebrity gossip and righteous anger about Nkandla. Why did the very well paid and trained managers and HR people get Marikana and mining strikes so catastrophically wrong? What did AIDS do to the psyche of a generation? Why are there so many more women than men in tertiary education? Where and why did the ANC lose the plot? Why did the DA think it could get 30% of the vote? Who are the brains in the EFF? How does it feel to be a *tendpreneur*? Why is our schooling not yielding a decent return on investment? Yes, these are worthy academic topics, but good journalists with time and resources could start opening the country to important conversations with itself.

Perhaps we need a university-based online magazine that would try to be the local *Atlantic* or *New Yorker* or *New Republic* and strengthen other local initiatives like *The Daily Maverick* and *mampoor.co.za*. As newspapers like the *Cape Times* slip desperately towards tabloidism, with bigger and more sensational headlines and front page pictures (yesterday, half the front page a picture of a mugger staring into the GoPro camera of the cyclist he has attacked), it seems clear that much of the mainstream English press has failed and that the takeover of the Independent Group will not be the salvation of local journalism. They will parasitise any smart journalism from elsewhere but they aren't going to produce or pay for it.



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