

Journalism Education Association of NZ (JEANZ) Conference
Whitireia Community Polytechnic
November 28-29, 2002

CYBERSPACE NEWS ON CAMPUS

The pedagogy of Pacific Journalism Online (USP)

www.usp.ac.fj/journ/

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A first-year journalism student's photo of Fiji coup frontman George Speight's brother. [Pacific Journalism Online \(USP\)](http://www.usp.ac.fj/journ/)

Abstract: In five years from 1998, **Pacific Journalism Online** training website at the University of the South Pacific provided an innovative and problem-based approach to internet news gathering and production based on real and major news events. Among recent events that have been used as integrated journalism training exercises for first, second and third-year regional journalists have been the George Speight putsch (May 2000), the barracks mutiny (November 2000), Fiji General Election (August 2001), treason trials and court martial (2002) and several international conferences based at Nadi and Suva. In addition, the students have covered major events on campus such as investigating alleged corruption by the student administration. In this paper, the author will give an outline of the course methodology and also show two 10-minute documentaries made by the students about their training:

1. **Pasifik Nius Beat** (1999)
2. **Frontline Reporters: How Student Reporters covered a Coup** (2000)

MARTIAL LAW DECLARED:

PJO NOW OFFLINE

Further updates:

[UTS Journalism Department hosting USP students](#)

[A Wansolwara reporter was threatened at Parliament this afternoon](#) and ordered out of the parliamentary complex. He described the scene as tense. A 48-hour military curfew was imposed from 6pm tonight. This was followed by a declaration of martial law. The Pacific Journalism Online website communications have been temporarily suspended by university authorities. (Pacific Journalism Online, 2000)

Introduction

Arguments over whether journalism education should be more theory based with the ideal of “reflective practitioners” (Reese, 1999: 13) or grounded mostly in sound practice have long been a feature of contemporary professional pedagogy debates. The contrasting views are not necessarily contradictory. According to Deuze (2000, 8), debate on journalism education goals should “not be informed by a dichotomy between theory and practice, but by the need for self-critical reflection and excellent didactics and teaching methodology”. Deuze, who elsewhere (2001) argues for “open sourced” media, says the internet “blurs the boundaries of what we may see as journalism — but one can argue that this would be a top-down definition of journalism”. The case for a more practice-based journalism education was persuasively presented by the Freedom Forum’s *Winds of Change* report advocating more commitment to producing “cutting edge” journalists, graduates “ready to infuse new energy and new ideas into the newsrooms” (Medsker, 1996: 68). In the case of the South Pacific, there is an acute shortage of trained and educated journalists (Masterton, 1989; Layton, 1993; Robie, 1999) and there is little or no community newspaper, television, online or radio “cushion” before fledgling reporters are plunged into the tough challenges of national newsrooms.

Ironically, six copies of Betty Medsker’s *Winds of Change* report bound for the University of the South Pacific (USP)¹ Journalism Programme were hijacked by rebel gunmen at the height of the political upheaval in the Fiji Islands in May 2000 (*see* Robie, 2002a:147) while student journalists were involved in an intense cyberspace training project covering rogue businessman George Speight’s attempted coup. The books were later recovered by police investigators after the rebels abandoned their occupation of Parliament. The “baptism of fire” challenge for Pacific journalists presents the region’s three university based journalism schools — USP, University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and Divine Word University (Madang, PNG) — with unique and difficult problems. While seeking to produce critically reflective journalists, they must all ensure that graduates can be effective political and economic reporters and analysts from day one of their careers. Following earlier development by UPNG, one university, USP, has adopted online journalism and media convergence (delivery not content) as a major educational tool and strategy comparable to some Australian journalism schools.

In five years from 1998, *Pacific Journalism Online* training website at USP provided an innovative and problem-based learning (PBL) approach to internet news gathering and production based on real and major news events (*see* Sheridan-Burns, 1997). Among recent events that have been used as integrated journalism training exercises for first, second and third-year regional journalists have been Speight's putsch, the barracks mutiny (November 2000), Fiji General Election (August 2001), treason trials and a court martial (2002) and several international conferences based at Nadi and Suva. In addition, students have covered major events on campus such investigating alleged corruption by the student administration. In this paper, the author will give an outline of the course methodology and in addition will also present two ten-minute documentaries made by students about their training.

Australian and New Zealand regional context

Communiqué Online (QUT):

While New Zealand has been rather under-represented in online journalism training development², several Australian university journalism schools have used internet publications as a major training tool for several years — notably Sydney University of Technology's *Reportage Online* and Queensland University of Technology's *Communiqué Online*. According to Nisar Keshvani (2000), *Communique Online* <www.communique.qut.edu.au> was developed from 1996 to address the “growing importance” of the online medium: “A ‘real-world’ online newsroom was set up to provide students with a practical, hands-on working environment, equipping them with necessary skills to function and operate an online newsroom.” The publication objective was two-fold: to develop a web presence, and to give students an opportunity to work on an online newspaper.

The online publication was introduced as part of an existing course, KJB303 News Production for third-year students. Students filed reports for QUT's in-house programmes on the multi-cultural radio broadcaster, 4EB, QUT News on community television station, Bris31, and in-house publications *Communiqué* and *Communiqué Online*. Pioneered by lecturers Suellen Tapsall and Carolyn Varley with a group of students and support staff, the website used a masthead, template design and content from the print edition of *Communiqué*. It won the Journalism Education Association's Best Publication (Any Medium) Ossie Award that year. In 1998, it was redeveloped by a student and staff group coordinated by Keshvani, a Singaporean student, and online audio and video streaming were introduced. Four editions with about 40 percent original content were produced with the team winning the inaugural Dr Charles Stuart Ossie Award for Best Student Publication. In 1999, *Communiqué Online* was formally incorporated into the course structure as a fourth medium with staff contact time and workshops.

According to course coordinator Roger Patching (2002), News Production is intended to introduce final-semester journalism students to the organisation of news operations in both print and broadcast: “It should help journalists at the workplace to better understand the operation and should prepare graduates to work in news teams ethically, thoughtfully, interactively, efficiently and effectively”. The assessment criteria for *Communiqué*

Online is team production of one edition of the ezine (news judgement deadlines, 45 percent), and individual input to production (quality of editing and HTML authoring, 55 percent). Together, they constitute 60 percent of the production. Explains Keshvani:

With *CommuniQu Online*, the students are given a quick refresher with HTML-ing etc, and how to adapt their journalism skills to online. That is the individual component. The group component to assessment is basically the cohesiveness of the team skills as a team to put the online edition to bed ... [Also] their news judgement team, subbing each other's sections [is assessed] (2002).

Reportage Online (UTS):

Reportage Online <www.reportage.uts.edu.au> evolved out of a quarterly investigative and media news magazine, *Reportage*, and is dedicated to high quality independent journalism. According to its editor Sue Joseph (2002), the online edition has a “broader agenda” than its predecessor:

Like the ACIJ [its host, the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism], *Reportage Online* is committed to the idea that the media can play a role in making those in power accountable to the public. No topic or question is beyond the boundaries of *Reportage Online*. Those with power include media companies, which should also be critiqued and questioned. (*ibid.*)

Reportage Online publishes features, news items, in-depth analysis, photojournalism, essays and ongoing reportage of issues. The editorial team believes the website tries to involve the public in open forums and encourages feedback, saying they “aim to fill some gaps in the media agenda and to give a voice to groups who struggle to be heard” in the mainstream media: While noting that “our journalism is guided by the journalists’ professional ethics,” the editors say they are constrained by the “defamation and contempt laws of Australia — which we regard as too restrictive”. *Reportage Online* is primarily produced by UTS journalism students (some of whom are professional journalists), with two masters level online producers, and staff. However, the website also welcomes contributions from outside UTS, including journalists, academics and other journalism students.

The Department of Writing, Journalism and Social Inquiry at UTS also offers two online journalism courses, 50303 Online Journalism 1 and 50304 Online Journalism 2, with the second semester’s more advanced module including audio streaming (video streaming is being introduced in 2003). Undergraduate and postgraduate students participating in the courses are capped at a total of 24. All students undertake major investigative style reports and then publish them on the internet as online design packages <[www.journalism.uts.edu.au/subjects/oj1/index](http://www.journalism.uts.edu.au/subjects/oj1/index.htm)>. The reports remain hosted on the university server for as at least two years. According to course lecturer Chris Conlon (2002), who pioneered the *Signposts* journalism online research website and archive resource in 1996, “we are going to up the ante on convergence” . Conlon contrasts the dual approaches at UTS by saying:

Reportage is published [mainly by print journalists] via a database template whereas OJ student projects are created and produced from scratch by students — therefore OJ students are much more engaged with the production and concepts of the internet (*ibid.*)

The South Pacific experience: 1 *Uni Tavur* (UPNG)

The University of Papua New Guinea's training publication *Uni Tavur* played an important role in the formation of Pacific journalists for more than two decades. *Tavur* means "conch shell" in the Tolai language of the Gazelle peninsula. The shell was the paper's masthead logo and the original version was designed by journalism student Robert Elowo, who died in a tragic car accident in 1976 while working for NBC's Radio Kundiawa. *Uni* is derived from the university.

Uni Tavur was launched on 24 July 1975 by the late New Zealand journalist and educator Ross Stevens (*see Table 1*). The first edition carried news items, including social and sports events. It comprised four A4 size pages and had a circulation of 200 copies. Over the following years, *Uni Tavur* was witness to many political and social changes (*see Robie, 1995*). Student reporters were assigned rounds and they needed to cover anything of news value for their readers. Recalls former Vice-Chancellor Joseph Sukwianomb (2001):

Uni Tavur came ... to play a significant role in the university scene in terms of changing ideas ... generally about that period from independence ... the campus was very vibrant, very active. The students were well aware of what was happening. This was the time of student demonstrations and strikes. They were all reported from student angles by student journalists.

The newspaper characterised the integrated learning journalism programme adopted at UPNG. The "liberal-professional" philosophy underpinning the school included a core programme, which supported a balance between theoretical and practical (Robie, 1997: 122). In February 1995, on the initiative of the author and with support from a national daily newspaper, the *Post-Courier*, *Uni Tavur* made a transition to publishing as a tabloid. Twelve editions were produced that year using four-colour with half-webs on the *Post-Courier's* Goss Urbanite presses. *Uni Tavur* won the 1995 Ossie Award for Best Overall Newspaper, the first time a South Pacific publication had won such an award. During the author's five years at UPNG, student journalists working on *Uni Tavur* covered several major stories, including the 1997 Sandline mercenary crisis, several national political protests and riots (including one clash on campus that left several students wounded from tear gas canisters), five campus-based murder cases, a bank robbery in which a security guard was shot and wounded, environmental crises and corruption.

In 1996-97, *Uni Tavur's* emphasis shifted to producing an online newspaper as well as the print edition. In January 1996, it became the first newspaper in the South Pacific to produce a web edition, *Uni Tavur Online*, hosted by the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism (ACIJ) at UTS <www.journalism.uts.edu.au/acij/old_acij/JOURNUPNG/UniTavur/UniT_index.html>.

UPNG Journalism Studies also began publishing an interactive email listserve news service, *Papua Niugini Nius* <www.pactok.net/docs/nius/> in cooperation with Pactok, a Pacific non-government and educational cooperative that encouraged low-cost communications. It was routine practice for all UPNG first, second and third-year students to cover daily news for print or online as part of their training for the two-year Diploma of Media Studies (DIMS) and four-year Bachelor of Journalism (BJourn) degree.

Table 1: Training publications in Papua New Guinea, 1975-2002

University	Publication	Online edition	Format; frequency	Printer; print run	Webserver	Donor
UPNG (Port Moresby)	<i>Uni Tavor</i> ,* 1975, (founded by Ross Stevens)	<i>Uni Tavor Online</i> , 1995 (founded by David Robie)	Tabloid, 16-24 pp 12 issues	<i>Post-Courier</i> (from 1995); 2000 copies	UPNG, UTS (Sydney)	Communication Foundation (Netherlands)
DWU (Madang)	<i>Diwai</i> , 1982, (founded by Fr Frank Mihalic)	None	Tabloid, 12 pp 4 issues	<i>Post-Courier</i> (from 1998); 1000 copies	None	Pacific Islands News Assn (PINA)

* Winner of the JEA Ossie Award for best publication, 1995.

The South Pacific experience: 2 Wansolwara (USP)

Fiji has a highly developed media industry compared with most other Pacific countries, rivalled only by Papua New Guinea. Until 2000, it possessed four major monthly or bimonthly news magazine groups, Islands Business International, *Pacific Islands Monthly* (Murdoch-owned), *The Review* and *Fiji First* (both locally owned). However, *Fiji First* closed in early 2000 and *PIM*, the region's oldest and for many years the most influential magazine, announced its closure a month after the putsch. *Islands Business* was relaunched as the southern edition of *Pacific Magazine* in January 2001 after a merger with the Hawai'i-based publisher, Pacific Basin Communications. The three daily newspapers are the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Fiji Times* (circulation reportedly up to 55,000 during the Fiji crisis but usually around 32,000 week days) and the struggling Fiji government-owned *Daily Post*, with a third daily, *The Sun*, which was launched in September 1999. (*The Sun* is owned by a consortium of Indo-Fijian importers, C J Patel and Co Ltd and Vinod Patel and Co Ltd, and the flagship company of Fiji's caretaker régime, Fijian Holdings Ltd.) The two smaller dailies do not have independently audited sales, but the *Sun* is believed to sell around 6000 copies a day while the *Daily Post* has a growing circulation close to 9000. Broadcasters are Fiji Television Ltd, which has one free-to-air channel and two pay channels; the private Communications Fiji Ltd (FM96) radio group; and the state-owned Fiji Broadcasting Corporation. *The Daily Post* and *The Review* news magazine share a website, FijiLive.com, while *The Fiji Times* is hosted at FM96's Fiji Village.com website. Two military coups staged in 1987 by the third-ranked military officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, followed by Speight's putsch in May 2000 have caused serious political pressure on the media already weakened by limited training.

The regional Pacific Journalism Programme was founded at the University of the South Pacific in 1994 in the post-coup era³. It was initially funded by the French Government as an aid project for four years, including the funding of a coordinator (a former head of the French-language BBC service, François Turmel) and a print lecturer, Philip Cass. The USP flagship training publication *Wansolwara* was created by first-year students with the encouragement of Wewak-born Cass because there was “no real outlet for journalism students’ work or any way for them to show what they could do, short of actually working for the media or finding a rare work experience slot” (2001). Cass had started *Felix Culpa*, a successful journalism student newspaper at Central Queensland University in Australia, and he decided that his students could publish in a similar way at USP.

Now, common sense would have dictated that I start the paper with a second or third year group of students who were familiar with desktop publishing, but I felt that what was needed was a group of [first-year] students who would stay with the paper for a few years and grow with it (*ibid.*).

The Solomons pidgin title *Wansolwara* — “one ocean, one people” — was adopted, expressing the idea that all those who were born in or live in the Pacific were bound together by the ocean (Cass, 1999). Cass found that publishing the first edition was not easy. The students were being thrown in at the deep end with everything — writing the stories, taking photos, scanning images, selling ads and organising the printing. However, the students were enthusiastic and determined to get the paper out with the first edition being published in November 1996. By 1997, *Wansolwara* was in a stronger financial footing, although as usual with many Pacific newspapers, advertising payments were a long time coming in. Also the newspaper was starting to gain a reputation for breaking stories.

We had a better handle on the technology and had begun to tackle some big issues such as the civil war on Bougainville, the role of *fa'fine* in Samoa and the rise in the number of suicides in Fiji.

We had also begun to be noticed by the student community. Our coverage of some very questionable goings on at student functions and financial irregularities in the USP Students Association led to one of our staff, Mithleshni Gurdal [who later became a senior political reporter on the *Daily Post*], being threatened — always a sign that our reporting was not only true, but causing embarrassment (*ibid.*).

The USP programme, as at UPNG, was always under-resourced. At the time that French Government funding ended by the close of 1997, the programme had produced its first six graduates, all double major degree holders. However, only two of these graduates entered the news media. Since then, with core funding by USP’s School of Humanities, the programme had produced fifty-three graduates by 2001 — forty-five double major three-year BA degree holders and eight with the new two-year Diploma in Pacific Journalism (DipPJ). Most work in the media. The programme has steadily moved toward media convergence with equal weight given on courses to print/online, radio and television journalism.

Developing cohesiveness and a sense of media identity for Pacific Islands students is a challenge and essential as they are drawn from a wide variety of language, cultural and educational backgrounds, mostly from the 14 member countries of USP. Some, as in Fiji and Papua New Guinea, come from countries with well-established concepts of the role of the media in democracies while others come from nations where the political elite and the establishment see journalists as a threat. In the first semester, 2002, only one student out of some 45 students, an exchange environmental media exchange scholar from Australia, used English as a first language. Two other non-Pacific Islander students — from Germany and from Nigeria — speak and write English as a second language. This creates challenging difficulties as students wrestle with grammar and syntax to work for predominantly English language media.

The university provided little or no funding for actual journalism news production so this meant pressure on the programme staff to develop creative ways of funding for *Wansolwara*; a companion daily newspaper, *Spicol Daily* (see Robie, 2000), published annually for a week each September; and *Pacific Journalism Online*'s internet training news. Radio Pasifik, the FM88.8 station owned and run on campus in Suva by the USP Students' Association since 1996, which relied heavily on the journalism programme for daily news and current affairs and was threatened with closure on several occasions, and a new television news magazine programme, *WansolVisin* (started in 2002), also depended on funding initiatives (see Table 2).

Wansolwara (Print)

Wansolwara is a 16-page (usually) newspaper published twice a semester in both online and 80 gm bond paper editions with four-colour editorial and advertising on the wrap around cover pages. Since it was founded, it has relied on advertising revenue (raised by the students) to fund the production costs. As this provided the springboard for the online news role of *Pacific Journalism Online*, the operation of this paper will be analysed first. At the start of 1998, after the author arrived at USP, the paper was reorganised from a voluntary unassessed publication by the students to a structured compulsory component of the journalism courses to address student demands for assessment. As the newspaper was in the red at the time, a formal rate card and financial structure was set up for selling advertising space. A special purpose account was set up for the newspaper within the university bursar's office. A seeding grant for one year was also provided in 1998 by the British aid agency DFID, which covered the purchase of an Apple Macintosh 8600 laser printer with A3 printing capacity for page proofs. The grant also paid for four editions of the paper in 1998/9, enabling it to become sustainable.

Table 2: Training publications in Fiji, 1996-2002

University	Publication	Online editions	Format; frequency	Printer; print run	Webserver	Donor
USP (Laucala Bay, Suva)	<i>Wansolwara</i> , 1996, (founded by	<i>Wansolwara</i> <i>Print</i> , 1998 <i>Online</i> , 2001	Tabloid, 16-20 pp 4 issues	Star printery (from 1996); 2000 copies	USP, SIDSnet 'mirror', UTS	British Aid (DFID), French

	Philip Cass, Stan Simpson)	(founded by David Robie)			(Sydney)	Embassy
USP	—	<i>Pacific Journalism Online</i> *, 1998 (founded by David Robie)	Continuous online, multiple updates daily during major stories	---	USP, SIDSnet 'mirror', UTS (Sydney)	UNESCO (Apia)
USP	<i>Spicol Daily</i> **, 1996 (founded by Pat Craddock)	1999 (founded by David Robie)	Tabloid insert into paper, daily for 4 days, September	<i>Daily Post</i> , 1999 8000 copies	USP	---

* Winner of the JEA Dr Charles Stuart Prize for best overall publication (Fiji coup coverage) in Ossia Awards, 2000;

** Winner of the JEA Ossia Awards best occasional publication, 1999;

f Highly commended best regular publication, 1999; highly commended best regular publication, 2000, JEA Ossia Awards.

Average printing cost of one edition of *Wansolwara* (16pp, four colour front and back, 2000 copies): F\$1300

Photographic and other production costs: up to F\$200

Advertising revenue target: Approx. F\$1500

Rate: F\$500 for a full page four colour advertisement on back page; halfpage black and white, F\$200, 10 percent discount on contract for multiple advertising over more than one edition.

Currently the newspaper involves elements from seven of the programme's nine dedicated journalism courses (in a 20-module BA degree or 10-module diploma). The print edition is integrated with the programme website, *Pacific Journalism Online*, *PJO* was founded by the author in 1998, with both an online edition and archive and a parallel *Wansolwara Online* publication with separate news and current affairs stories filed daily <<http://www.usp.ac.fj/journ/docs/news/index.html>>. UNESCO provided a smallseed grant to fund software and to establish the website. First year students in JN101 Introduction to Journalism and JN103 Media Law and Ethics become the reporters for the both the newspaper and online daily news, filing 20 news stories each semester for 20 percent of their course assessment. Second year students in the JN201 Print and Online Journalism course become the subeditors, photographers and cartoonists (and often the key reporters for splash and lead stories) for 40 percent assessment while the editor is usually drawn from specialist final year courses, JN303 Journalism Production (equivalent to QUT's News Production) or JN305 Special Topics in Journalism: Advanced Print and Online Media (*see Table 3*). A liftout "Insight Report" thematic in-depth section is produced by the JN301 International Journalism and JN302 Journalism Research courses (40 percent assessment for two 1500 word news features).

According to the course outline for JN201, teaching is based on "three instructional formats": formal lectures, practical workshops and current affairs news forums and tests for a total of seven contact hours a week (in real time, it actually involves evenings and some weekend work totalling about 20 hours a week). "Topics include desktop publishing [Adobe PageMaker 6.5 software] and layout; photography, photo-editing and

captioning, internet publishing; and work on publication projects. Lecture topics include texts and images, the history and development of press photography, photography as information, composing and cropping the photograph, image processing [Photoshop software], computing, internet publishing, media and government, media and public trust, propaganda and the media, press councils and trade unions, and subediting work on *Wansolwara* and *PJO*” (*USP Calendar*, 2002: 174). JN305 Special Topics in Journalism in the second semester is an “advanced third-year elective journalism course designed to provide flexibility to the journalism programme” (*ibid*: 180). While this module envisaged specialist topics such as Business and Economic Journalism, Environmental Journalism and Political Journalism, for example, in fact over the past three years JN305 has been taught as an advanced print and online journalism course using Adobe GoLive Cyberstudio3 professional website design and management software, along with Macromedia Flash and Adobe Photoshop software.

Journalism production students working on the newspaper and online hold a weekly main editorial planning conference every Monday morning at 10am and develop editorial strategies that are often more cooperative based than the usual hierarchical systems of mainstream newspapers. Editorial meeting attendance is compulsory for all JN201 students and others involved in news production. Other journalism students are also encouraged to attend, but it is not compulsory for them. Supplementary editorial meetings are also held at the discretion of the student editor. While they have clearly defined staff job descriptions and course outline objectives to fulfill, the editorial teams have a large degree of project autonomy and flexibility (characteristic of the campus press) while also maintaining their independence from both the student representative body and university authorities, providing they meet assessment criteria. The objective is to publish a newspaper to professional standards but with a news agenda clearly independent of mainstream media. In other words, *Wansolwara* is free to explore issues ignored or not covered adequately by the daily press. Indeed, it is encouraged to have an independent editorial stance.

During briefings with students, conducted in the first week of JN201 and JN303, the newsroom production process, the news-gathering roster, and newsroom task roles are explained and assigned. This follows the advertising of the key posts of *Wansolwara* editor, *Wansolwara Online/Pacific Journalism Online* editor, *Spicol Daily* editor and Radio Pasifik news director, and newsroom lab assistant (the latter is a part-time paid position comparable to other university labs operated by the IT Services). Applicants must make a written statement of intent with an attached CV and other material supporting their bid — just like any professional job application. All applicants are then interviewed by journalism staff and selections are made for the key positions. Once the editor has been named for the semester, she or he holds the first editorial meeting during class time with the assistance of the lecturer-adviser to appoint all editorial positions from the enrolled students. Students who do not volunteer or are not selected for a specific editorial task automatically become subeditors. All students are assessed for the newspaper production component of the course JN201 against formal job descriptions listed in the Online Classroom web resource (*see Appendix*).

Assessment for JN201 Print and Online Journalism (subeditors):

1. Reporting and editing for two editions of *Wansolwara* — group project (20 percent each for a total of 40%, individually assessed against job descriptions)
2. Design and edit one four-page prototype tabloid publication with own stories — individual project (20 percent)
3. Design and publish online news ezine, incorporating own news and current affairs reports — individual project (20 percent)
4. Print/online theory test — individual project (20 percent)
5. Attendance and news tests — 10 percent. **Total:** 100 percent

Assessment for JN303 Journalism Production (editor):

- Part 1: Major project: Equivalent to four weeks fulltime on major publication or broadcast assignment, eg editor of *Wansolwara* (50 percent)
- Part 2: Attachment: Spend six weeks fulltime as a reporter or subeditor on major daily newspaper, new online site, TV or radio station (50 percent) **Total:** 100 percent

Table 3: Integrated USP courses involved in *Wansolwara/Wansolwara Online*, 2002

Course	Year	Semester	Editorial roles	Assignment	Course assessment	Number of students
JN101 Introduction to Journalism	Year One	One	Reporters, four assistants, inc.-chief-of-staff	10 news stories	20%	20 (cap)
JN103 Media Law and Ethics	Year One	Two	Reporters, four assistants, inc.-chief-of-staff	10 news stories	20%	20
JN201 Print/Online Journalism	Year Two	One	Subeditors, chief-of-staff, chief subeditor, sports editor etc	Two editions of <i>Wansolwara</i> (teamwork); one four-page individual newspaper; one ind. news website	40% 20% 20%	12 (cap)
JN301 International Journalism	Year Three	One	Feature writers (Insight report)	2 x 1500 wd news features	40%	25
JN302 Journalism Research	Year Three	Two	Feature writers ("Insight Report")	2 x 1500 wd news features	40%	25
JN303 Journalism Production	Year Three	One and Two	Editor, deputy editor	Two editions of <i>Wansolwara</i>	50%	2 (others on 6 wk industry attachment)
JN305 Special Topics in	Year Three	Two	Editor, subeditors,	Two editions of <i>Wansolwara</i>	50%	4 or 5 (cap)

Journalism: Advanced Print/Online Media		chief-of-staff, sports editor etc	(teamwork); Maintaining <i>W.</i> <i>Online</i> daily editions; Seminar & reflective media analysis	30%	
				20%	

Key Wansolwara roles:

Editor — takes on full overall responsibility for organising the editorial team, desktop publishing based on a *Wansolwara* template, print production arrangements, and writes the editorial; usually a final-year student drawn from JN303 News Production.

Chief-of-staff — key organiser of news coverage diary and assignment of reporters and photographers; a second-year student drawn from JN201 Print/Online Journalism.

Pictures editor — coordinator of all photographs and graphics; assigns photographers or liaises with other media or sources for pictures, and maintains a picture library; second-year student drawn from JN201 Print/Online Journalism.

Regional editor — coordinates all coverage outside of Fiji and ensures that there is a balanced mix of regional Pacific stories within the overall content of *Wansolwara*; a second-year student drawn from JN201 Print/Online Journalism.

Distribution coordinator — responsible for maintaining and updating *Wansolwara* mailing list data base (Apple Claris Works 5), and supervising distribution of newspaper on publication date; a second-year student drawn from JN201 Print/Online Journalism, assisted by a first-year student drawn from JN101 Introduction to Journalism or JN103 Media Law and Ethics.

Advertising coordinator — responsible for organising and selling advertising space to cover the cost of the printing bill for each edition, mail out invoices (paperwork is then handed on to the university administration for collection); a second-year student drawn from JN201 Print/Online Journalism, assisted by a first-year student drawn from JN101 Introduction to Journalism or JN103 Media Law and Ethics.

Pacific Journalism Online and Wansolwara Online:

Pacific Journalism Online was created in May 1998 and developed by the author to provide an internet publishing training arena and to provide interactive teaching resources (*Online Classroom*) for Pacific students. Eventually, by 2001 *Online Classroom* included course outlines for all nine journalism courses and core teaching materials. The idea of the website was to provide daily news deadline pressure (not provided by the newspaper) and a lasting news archive (not provided by the campus radio). The *PJO* home page was treated as a news front page with links to *Online Classroom* sections such as as Ethics

and Media Law and student websites. Understandable, given that few Pacific students have home computers, *PJO* rapidly became a popular and well-used site by most students at the university. The “open house” interactive sections such as the Talanoa (external) and Journalism Workshop (internal) message boards have been especially popular.

PJO is used as a tool to teach students the benefits of news media convergence in island states. An online editor (and often also an online pictures editor) is selected at the same time as the print editor, usually a student enrolled in JN303 Journalism Production. Both roles are given equal weighting, but the online editor often finds it more demanding because there is usually no team to support him or her in coverage, except during major news event coverage such as the Speight coup or the Fiji general election. In the first three years of *PJO*, the online editor’s main role was to also upload the online edition of the *Wansolwara* newspaper and to upload almost daily news updates filed by student reporters. Students are not normally permitted direct access to the university website so it is imperative that journalism staff check and supervise the uploading process by ftp (file transfer protocol) to *PJO* server. The online editor is also required to check daily missing links and images and monitor *PJO* website email.

The saga of the controversial two-month-long temporary shutdown of *PJO* website has been well documented elsewhere (Cass, 2002; Revington, 2000; Robie, 2001b, 2001c; Rose, 2000). *PJO* covered the 2000 Fiji coup intensely for ten days until it was closed by USP administrators on 29 May 2000, the day of declaration of martial law, after Speight supporters had trashed Fiji Television offices the night before. What emerged during this controversy was a surprise expectation expressed by then Vice-Chancellor Esekia Solofa (2000) that journalism students should be doing “simulated” journalism whereas the focus of the journalism programme had been training through “real” journalism. The latter approach was endorsed by New Zealand High Commissioner Tia Barrett when he remarked at the 2001 USP Journalism awards presentation:

The past six months have seen a major upheaval in Fiji, twice in fact, and of such stuff are the dreams of journalists made. What an opportunity to practise the theory and exercise the training from the classroom! You students will no doubt have stories of what you did during the crisis, and that was perhaps the best training possible (Barrett, 2000).

Almost two months following the closure, on July 25, the 40-strong academic staff of the School of Humanities’ Board of Studies passed an unanimous resolution condemning the administration over the shutdown of the website. Two letters dealing with the political crisis and the role of the university were later forwarded officially to the Academic Committee. One important justification the academics gave was that the existence of the journalism website provided important information for staff and student security. A statement also said academic staff considered the closure “unsound pedagogically” and the journalism website “provided outstanding and excellent training for the students in that it involved reporting and commenting on real issues” (quoted by Robie, 2001b: 54).

As a result of the closure, the website policy was modified to provide clearer separation between the news training functions of *PJO* and the *Online Classroom* curriculum

resource. This development was taken a stage further in July 2001 when the website was relaunched with a redesigned home page, and *Wansolwara Online* became the main news section with *Online Classroom* displaying a new logo separating the education resources. These changes were made in preparation for coverage of the Fiji General Election.

The Pacific news ‘reality’ experience

Pacific Journalism Online’s vigorous coverage of major news events (*see Table 4*) has been well-rewarded by the annual Journalism Education Association (JEA) Ossie Awards. It began regular news coverage more than a year before Fiji had its first major print news website, FijiLive.com in the lead-up to the May 1999 General Election, the followed with well-regarded and insightful coverage of the Speight putsch, the post-coup election in August 2001. *PJO* won the Dr Charles Stuart Prize for best overall publication for the coup coverage after winning the Ossie for best occasional publication the previous year. Print edition of *Wansolwara* was highly recommended for best regular publication in both 1999 and 2000 (*PANPA Bulletin*, 2001). Over a three-year period (1999-2001), the students won a total of ten JEA awards or highly commended citations.

Wansolwara and *Wansolwara Online* have more clearly defined editorial policies than the mainstream news media. For example, they are the only South Pacific print newspapers or websites that actually have an editorial charter (adopted in 1998). The charter, displayed publicly online, and the United Nations student journalist code are used as the newspaper's ethical framework (*Wansolwara*, 1998). Some of charter objectives parallel *City Voice*, a now defunct New Zealand community newspaper that has spearheaded local public journalism (*see Venables*, 2001).

As a free campus-based and Pacific regional community newspaper with an online edition published by the USP journalism programme, *Wansolwara* declared that it was “committed to freedom of information and expression” through quality independent news reports, feature articles and analysis in the South Pacific region. It also seeks to “promote good governance”, “ensure coverage of the activities and concerns of the relatively poor”, and to contribute to “debate of ethical and media issues’. The United Nations Student Press Rights Charter declares that the student press “should be free from regulations by any organ of the government, or by university authorities” and “free from regulations by other student organisations” (Ramirez, 1989; Robie, 1998: 22). It also states:

The student press also bears responsibilities to students by virtue of its power to influence student opinion, the press should be mindful of these responsibilities and continually strive to keep above partisan considerations and should endeavour at all times to act in conformity with all the principles of cooperation.

To cover the 2001 Fiji General Election, *Wansolwara* and *Wansolwara Online* adapted a code used for the East Timor General Election, which included such universal values as “USP student journalists shall not be part of any political party structure” and “shall report in a balanced manner — without fear or favour for any political party” (Robie, 2002c: 8).

The Speight scoop 2000

Within minutes of the news of the hostage taking by attempted coup front man George Speight being flashed on Radio Fiji news on the 10 am bulletin on 19 May 2000 — scooped by Tamani Nair, one of the final-year students on JN303 Journalism Production attachment — the USP journalism programme began its coverage of the political crisis.

We already had a team of reporters down at the protest march in downtown Suva that morning (which later erupted into rioting); the news editors set up our radio and television monitors; reporters were dispatched to Parliament; the television class was cancelled and a crew sent downtown to Suva where they filmed footage of the riots and arson in the capital (Robie, 2001b: 48).

As reporters returned with their stories and digital pictures, the journalism programme posted everything it could onto *Pacific Journalism Online* <http://www.usp.ac.fj/journ/docs/news/coup74.html> [coup archive] By the time martial law was declared ten days later, on May 29, the students had posted 109 stories, dozens of soundbites and scores of digital photographs. In addition, journalism staff and other academics, such as in the History/Politics Department, wrote analysis pieces.

But for the first day, the team “stumbled through the hours, in some cases overcome with shock and the trauma over what was unfolding”.

One talented 20-year-old student was so traumatised that he couldn't write about what he saw. He went home shaking. However, he recovered by the next day and took a leading role in the coverage for the next three months, finally winning an award for his coup efforts (*ibid*: 50).

The university eventually closed and sent its 5000 students home. But a small core group of journalism students managed to see through the first weekend of political mayhem. On Monday morning, May 22, three rostered shifts were organised among the student reporters and editors to cope with the curfew — morning and afternoon shifts, and an overnigher comprising students who actually lived on campus. Sometimes reporters slept in the newsroom.

At one stage, a group of us worked 36 hours in one hop, barricaded in the newsroom area to complete the editorial production of a special coup edition of *Wansolwara* (*ibid*.).

As student online editor Christine Gounder wrote at the time:

Student journalists chose to be on the job. But it hasn't been easy. They survived threats, bureaucratic attempts to gag their website and newspaper, and a shutdown of the university to deliver the news (Gounder, 2000: 7).

Fiji General Election 2001

Forty-five students were involved in coverage of the Fiji General Election, representing eight countries, at least a dozen languages, and three main religions — Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Naturally, the largest group of student journalists was from Fiji, twenty-five, or almost half. The next largest group was from Samoa, seven; five came from the Solomon Islands, three from Tuvalu, two from Tonga, and one each from Kiribati, Marshall Islands and the Indian Ocean republic of the Maldives — she was the only international student from outside the regional country members (Robie, 2002c: 6).

The students were organised into three rostered shifts with two overall online chief editors, one from Fiji responsible for the overall news selection and emphasis on *Wansolwara Online*, and the other, from Samoa, primarily responsible for the electorate candidates and election updates for all 71-seats. They had some assistance from about five student subeditors. The chief-of-staff was a 29-year-old former radio sports journalist from Fiji who had never covered news previously. The shifts were in groups of five or six students working seven days a week in three time slots, 8am-12noon, 12pm-4pm, and 4pm-8pm. One of each team of students checked the three morning dailies for potential follow-ups and monitored news on the national Radio Fiji and private station FM96, and also a daily talkback programme hosted by “Radio Tevita” Momoedonu, which featured political and civil society personalities (Ali, 2001). One more experienced student acted as a rewrite “anchor” while three were assigned for *Wansolwara Online*’s own coverage. The final shift reporters of the day also monitored the half-hour evening news bulletin of the country’s only television station, *Fiji One News*, and frequently followed up on stories not picked up by the mainstream dailies.

Daily news conferences were held at 12 noon and 5.45 pm for post mortems on the previous day’s coverage and discuss handling of the day’s developing stories. Between July 21 and September 11 (the day of the Twin Towers terrorism tragedy in the United States), *Wansolwara Online* published 178 news stories and features on the election.

Other coverage

Treason trials and a military court martial (2002), and several international conferences based at Nadi and Suva have also been used for the students’ training venues on both online and print assignments. Usually this sort of coverage involves short bursts of three or four days of intensive reporting and editing with multiple deadlines and updates during each day. Among events covered this year have been a symposium on land conflict in the Pacific and a media freedom conference at USP in Suva and a UNICEF international youth conference in the tourist town of Nadi, a three-hour drive from Suva. The latter conference coverage involved eleven students supervised by a senior student (who had previously been deputy chief-of-staff of a local daily newspaper) and the filing of stories and pictures by email.

Table 4: News training coverage highlights by *Pacific Journalism Online/Wansolwara (USP)*, 1996-2002

Year	Newsevent	Wansolwara Online	Wansolwara print edition	Radio Pasifik	Coverage team (online)	Main competition

1999	Fiji General Election (Fiji)	---	One edition 12 issues	Post-Courier (from 1995); 2000 copies	20 students	FijiLive (Associated Media), Fiji press
2000	George Speight coup, Suva (May/July)	109 news stories posted in 10-day coup period	Cover story (May/June edition)	Online news sound bites, but station closed	30 students in 3 shifts	FijiLive (Associated Media), Fiji press
2001	Fiji General Election, Suva (July/Sept)	178 news stories posted	Cover story (Sept edition)	Daily on-air coverage, but no online sound bites	45 students in 3 shifts	FijiLive (Associated Media)
2001	Twin Towers terrorism, Suva (Sept)	26 news stories posted (Pacific angles)	---	Daily on-air coverage, but no online sound bites	12 students plus post- election coverage	FijiLive (Associated Media), Fiji press
2002	The Land Conflict Conference Suva (April)	15 news stories posted	One page special Land report summary	Daily on-air coverage, but no online sound bites	20 first-year students	FijiLive (Associated Media), Fiji press
2002	UNICEF Pacific Youth conference, Nadi (August)	16 news stories posted	One page special UNICEF report summary	---	5 first-year students; one final year student (UNICEF fund)	---

Conclusion

Pacific student journalists at USP are frequently assigned to cover national and regional news events as part of their training, sometimes arguably before they are at a “prepared” stage in terms of their journalism education. However, the reality in the South Pacific is that once students graduate they are expected to take their place in the newsroom, often reporting on big stories from the start. A 1999 survey of Fiji’s newsrooms has shown that 47 percent of journalists (mostly school leavers) are untrained and thus graduates face a far higher expectation of their abilities than they would usually face immediately in Australia or New Zealand (Robie, 1999:181). For example, while on attachment in their final-year, student journalists often cover Parliament and the courts. So it is essential that they learn in a challenging “pressure cooker” training context, facing the “reality” of deadlines and news production stresses from semester one and starting with their very first journalism module. They also experience public accountability and ethical dilemmas at an early stage.

Most students respond to these challenges in creative and engaging ways. While the pedagogy of South Pacific journalism programmes, especially at USP, has developed uniquely, there are important parallels with the praxis displayed with some Australian university journalism schools, notably Queensland University of Technology and the University of Technology, Sydney.

The value of this “real world” approach to teaching, as Keshvani describes it, was observed by Professor Mark Pearson in his review of the USP programme (2002). He noted that journalism was one of the first programmes (along with the Law School) to

pioneer online teaching at USP — in fact, throughout the Pacific region. Pearson also found that the extent to which the programme had developed an online journalism teaching resource, including extensive curriculum materials and interactive teaching devices, was “admirable”:

The publications and productions created by the students in the online and print fields are of a world standard ... Staff and students are to be commended for this marvellous performance. Clearly, the mix of theory and practice is paying dividends (*ibid.*: 6).

Notes:

¹ The University of the South Pacific is one of just two regional universities in the world (the other is the University of the West Indies). Member countries are: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

² Auckland University of Technology has developed arguably the most advanced course in this area, aimed at a balance between analysis of internet media issues and practice, but it has not as yet developed an actual publication online.

³ An earlier extension studies based Certificate in Journalism programme during the 1980s funded by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) at USP is sometimes confused with the later degree programme (initiated as a French Government aid programme in 1994). There was no connection between the programmes, or any overlap or link in courses, although both have been situated in the university's Department of Literature and Language.

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www.usp.ac.fj/journ/docs/wansol.html

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