Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media studies

Convergence Statement

Passed by Academic Forum on Tuesday, 22 September 2009

The Rhodes Journalism and Media Studies School recognises the following developments in the journalism and media sector:

1. The rapidly advancing digital era and the significant related shifts in media and journalism practices internationally and also locally;
2. The convergence of media industries, ICTs, media formats and genres and regulation and policy governing the same;
3. The range of new ways that media producers and audiences engage with each other and with media production, distribution and use;
4. The reality of the digital divide and the different degrees of access to technological capital among different demographic groups;
5. The prevalence of contested concepts and trends; and debates about the merits and possibilities around these new technologies and practices;
6. The challenges arising from convergence and other factors impacting on the media industry and on journalism practice

Therefore we as a School accept that in line with our vision to foster 'self-reflexive, critical, analytical graduates and media workers, whose practice is probing, imaginative, civic-minded and outspoken' we need to adopt the following guidelines for our practice:

1. All journalism and media studies students need to be equipped to engage with conceptual frameworks and production skills around 'new media' practices and technologies;
2. Journalism and media studies courses should include critical reflection on discourses and practices of digital media consumption and production, and 'new media' technologies.
3. Practices and technologies should be interrogated and the adoption, adaptation and creation of technology and 'new media' practices best suited to the environment, particularly those relevant to an African context should be encouraged.
4. Students should experiment with approaches that actively broaden participation and promote the development of vibrant and civic-minded public spheres.
5. Journalism and media production skills should be expanded to reflect new practices in story gathering, story crafting and collaborative and participatory journalism and media production.
6. Recognising the need for sustainable media institutions and services, curriculum content should integrate entrepreneurial competences where appropriate

7. Despite the increased diversification of knowledge and skills, this should not jeopardise a solid grounding in core journalistic competences like writing and interviewing, specialised media production skills, or the central critical skills needed to analyse and critique the circuit of media production and use.

8. JMS should provide critical leadership by integrating 'new media' in courses targeted at external stakeholders in the journalism and media sector. It should also promote the possible introduction of new courses.

To implement the guidelines we suggest the following strategies:

1. All staff should be expected to expand their knowledge and skills into these new areas, and their continuous learning into these areas should be supported by the JMS School and Department and the New Media Lab.

2. The curriculum forum should look at ways to integrate and scaffold these guidelines into different levels of the curriculum so that there is clear progression and consistency across the years.

3. Students should work together across specialisations on joint digital platforms

4. The school's media platforms, for example Grocott's Mail and its projects, for example Cue and Iindaba Ziyafika that already engage with these new practices, should be fully exploited and integrated into student experiential learning programmes and research.

5. Student media products need to be digitised, published and archived on a central digital platform and possibly also subsidiary platforms. The resulting electronic publication(s) should reflect a critical engagement with 'new media' conventions and be consistent with the school's vision statement.

6. The implementation of these guidelines and strategies should be continuously evaluated and should be a standing item on year board and curriculum forum meetings