

Can journalism graduates get jobs?

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It usually begins mid-way through their university career.

My office begins to fill with panicked journalism students who have seen the dismal job vacancies in their field and are starting to think their degree might have prepared them for a career in burger flipping.

A look at the industry might suggest they're right.

Where have the journalism jobs gone?

Traditional cadetship programs are no longer the entry point for most graduate journalists. The [Herald Sun](#) offered six cadetships last year.

[Fairfax](#) suspended traineeships altogether in 2008, though they now offer around 20 positions across five publications.

There's no doubt that newsrooms in traditional media are shrinking. Morale of journalists within those newsrooms appears strained at best, internal politics and union battles seem rife. And the pay? It makes burger flipping look attractive.

And yet, the thirst for qualifications in journalism and media-related disciplines continues to grow. At Swinburne University, where I teach, the [new journalism degree](#) attracted over 100 students in its first year.

The great paradox

We have a situation where young people are still interested in communicating for a living but the industry seems incapable of supporting this interest with suitable employment.

So how do journalism educators prepare students to work in a rapidly changing industry?

One of the first things I do when beginning a new semester of teaching journalism is ask how many students want to pursue news reporting as a career. You'd assume the majority, right? In fact, it's usually just over a third of the class that raises their hand.

This is indicative of the changing understanding of the role of journalism in a convergent media age. Students have a much broader view of the industry itself and journalism skills are seen as important for an array of potential media careers.

It means the last thing I would suggest to a graduate is to look under "journalist" in job ads. Instead I encourage students to make their own jobs.

Digital creation

I do this because young graduates actually have a distinct advantage over experienced applicants. They live in the digitised, networked social media environs that media practitioners so desperately want to understand.

More importantly they are already using a mix of traditional, online and social media to research and disseminate journalistic work.

Our journalism students maintain blogs, work for the university magazine, collaborate with not-for-profit organisations to write civic journalism, produce television programs for [Channel 31](#), shoot video stories and

record audio for our faculty website, and research government reports to write investigative pieces for [Crikey](#).

From copy to content creation

In an age of rapid technological change, it is the journalists capable of producing compelling journalism across mediums and audiences who will find jobs.

The industry itself is already recognising this. The Herald Sun appointed its first “social media editor” this year.

Similarly, our graduates have made in-roads in a tough industry as content creators for online companies. Many others have started their successful small businesses in online magazine publishing, sponsored blogging and even social media strategy.

These are all jobs that students have developed for themselves, by innovating across new frameworks for understanding journalistic work.

The new journalism

These are students that haven't come to university to be taught how to “do” journalism; university education is about teaching journalists how to think.

We teach that journalistic work still requires graduates who can communicate effectively while negotiating ethical, legal and editorial responsibilities.

And that there are still more than enough jobs to support graduates who understand the relationship between the journalist and the audience has changed; where journalists were once the privileged arbiters of news, audiences now demand equality.

As The Guardian's former online editor [Kevin Anderson](#) has suggested, journalistic work now comprises much more transparent and personalised online engagements.

The best placed graduates in journalism will know how to have “conversations” with the audience; to involve them in reporting and build a community around their journalistic practice.