

Fear or favor: Student views on embedding authentic assessments in journalism education

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Work-integrated learning (WIL) is becoming increasingly important in university education and research demonstrates work experience increases graduate employability. At the University of Newcastle, WIL is a critical component in the journalism major offered in the Communication program and one strategy to increase employability is to embed authentic assessments throughout the journalism courses. Formal student feedback at University of Newcastle typically demonstrates that authentic assessments are appreciated by journalism students but that may not be the entire story. Opportunities for publication of their work in national student outlets such as *The Junction* have demonstrated many of the students lack confidence to seek that opportunity. This article is reporting on a survey of students undertaking the journalism major at University of Newcastle and their attitudes to, and experiences with, authentic assessments. The research examines and analyses the students' attitudes to WIL and how academic staff might enhance the learning experience and employability prospects for students.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, work related projects/competitions, authentic assessments, journalism education, WIL

The growth of work-integrated learning (WIL) for students enrolled in higher education programs has received significant attention from scholars in the past two decades (Janesick, 2006; Mueller, 2005; Universities Australia, 2019; Rowe, 2017). This is not surprising, given international engagement with WIL in higher education institutions, and by employer organizations and industry groups (Universities Australia, 2019). One of the key ongoing challenges in developing and implementing WIL has been assessment because universities have "been reluctant to move beyond commonly accepted notions of objectivity and reliability that govern on-campus assessments" (Orrell, 2011, p. 9). Stenström et al. (2006) see assessment strategy in WIL as integral to an assurance of the quality of learning outcomes. Zegwaard (2015) argues that there is a need for strategies and approaches that "develop truly authentic, robust, reliable and defensible assessment practices that measure and inform student learning whilst participating in WIL" (p. 94).

The journalism academics at the University of Newcastle (UON) have been implementing WIL in journalism education for over a decade with an aim of providing students with knowledge and skills designed to enhance employability prospects through effective practice and assessment design, including a suite of authentic assessments embedded throughout the journalism courses where assessments are designed "that most appropriately relate the realism of the . . . discipline for students" (Irwin, 2015, p. 397). As part of that process, the researchers have been investigating the most effective way to implement WIL strategies that will provide students with an enhanced educational experience. The aims of the research informing this paper include an understanding of how WIL fits into the education aspirations of journalism students, how it affects their work and their attitude to that work, and what specific factors impede or facilitate student involvement. One of the drivers for this study is

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that the researchers have experienced a reluctance from many students to publish to an audience beyond the teaching staff who mark their assessments, despite opportunity and invitation to do so. To try and understand student reticence, the researchers conducted a survey of students who are enrolled in UON journalism courses to ascertain their understanding of authentic assessments, what they thought about this type of assessment, whether this type of assessment is valuable to their career aspirations and prospects, and why there may be reluctance to publish to a broad external audience.

The education of journalism students in Australian universities has long involved the teaching of a range of skills and knowledge necessary for students to work as a contemporary and future-oriented news journalist across a variety of platforms. Most Australian universities offer some form of journalism education that provides students with skills and knowledge relevant to employment as a journalist. A recent scoping of WIL approaches in journalism education noted traditional models such as internships, the hospital model, international WIL and capstone courses, through to emerging models such as pop-up newsrooms, online simulations, event WIL, purpose WIL and flipped WIL (Valencia-Forrester, 2020). De Burgh (2003) argues that effective journalism education demonstrates characteristics that include simulations of real working experience engagement with the world and a high degree of transferability of skills.

Embedding authentic assessments as part of a WIL strategy, which could also include internships, formal placements and work experience within a journalism program, is a clear way for students to develop professional, work-ready skills (Valencia-Forrester, 2020). Research into the effectiveness of this type of embedded work experience has shown that graduate employability is enhanced if the strategies are rooted in sound pedagogical design (Bates & Hayes, 2017). However, at UON, it has proven to be a challenge to the academics teaching journalism to encourage students to publish work produced for assessment outside the classroom. This could be partly due to students' aspirations in journalism programs. A 2015 study that examined Australian students' attitudes to journalism and journalism education (Hanusch et al., 2015, 2016), found that a percentage of students studying journalism were not interested in pursuing a career in journalism. Raw data from that research project undertaken at UON demonstrated that approximately 30% of participants showed no inclination to pursue journalism as a career. A second reason for a reluctance of students to publish work beyond the classroom could be the demographic makeup of the student body: UON has a higher than national average of low socio-economic (SES) students with approximately 24% of students (University of Newcastle, 2020, p. 14) compared to the national average of 17.1% (National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, 2017). While Devlin and McKay (2018) found that low SES students have financial challenges that often preclude them from pursuing WIL opportunities such as internships and work placement, this does not explain why students are reluctant to publish work completed as part of an assessment framework within an individual course to a broader audience.

The discussion in this paper extrapolates the survey findings to assess students' perspectives on authentic assessments. Findings from the survey include: students appreciate authentic assessments within courses but may experience personal diffidence to engage independently; students can lack confidence to take publishing initiatives on their own but also lack confidence to publish coursework; students appreciate the opportunity to publish but are wary of a compulsory publishing element in a course; using an external national publishing platform such as *The Junction* to showcase student work needs to be introduced into the journalism major, initially as a reward for "best work" and culminating in the capstone journalism course as a compulsory component of assessment; and, academics should provide further opportunities for students to publish as part of their ongoing education but also

encourage other external publication. This article reports on these findings and the student experience and expectations of authentic assessments in educating these students.

Background - Journalism at University of Newcastle

The University of Newcastle is a regional university in Australia, situated in the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales. Newcastle is situated approximately 160 kilometers north of Sydney and is the major city of the Hunter Valley region. UON is the only university in the region and, as per the last annual report, has a student body of almost 38,000 students (University of Newcastle, 2020, p. 7). Students at UON may pursue a journalism major as part of a Communication bachelor's degree program that takes three years to complete full-time or equivalent part-time. In that program, students are expected to complete eight core (compulsory) courses, which provide a grounding in communication theories and context, media production and digital media skills, entrepreneurial skills, and the global media and communication environment, eight courses from a major, in this case journalism, and eight courses as electives. Those electives can be from anywhere in the University that permit entry to students from other disciplinary studies. Students choosing a journalism major receive an education in skills including writing, audio, video and online production and are encouraged from early in their program to gain publishing experience from outside the program. Academics teaching in the journalism major also provide students with the opportunity to publish coursework as part of the assessment framework, as authentic assessments are embedded throughout each journalism course. This strategy provides students with the opportunity to create a portfolio that demonstrates their knowledge and skills, builds self-confidence and enhances employment prospects.

A key argument for the inclusion of authentic assessments in a journalism program is the issue of equity where students may not be able to engage in external WIL experiences such as internships, work experience and placement opportunities due to financial hardship (Grant-Smith et al., 2017; Lloyd et al., 2019). While the issue is one for all universities to consider and address, it is of particular importance at UON, because of its comparatively high number of low SES students. Orrell (2011), for example, emphasizes the importance of equity and access in WIL programs and points out that very few projects were identified as encouraging marginalized or disadvantaged students to participate in external WIL. Given that engagement with WIL can enhance employment prospects, recognizing and addressing equity barriers is both desirable and necessary. Authentic assessments can assist in addressing some of the issues that Orrell has identified as inhibiting or constricting student participation in WIL.

Authentic Assessments

Much of the academic literature regarding authentic assessment argues that such assessment replicates challenges found beyond the university learning environment and requires students to apply the knowledge and skills they have been developing in-and-through learning activities. Additionally, a significant amount of literature surrounding authentic assessment finds that such assessment simulates and assists in preparing students to carry out tasks that they may encounter beyond the university learning environment and in their working lives. While it has been noted that there is little consensus as to what types of activities constitute WIL across academic institutions (Patrick et al., 2008), there are several approaches that can be included under the WIL umbrella: placements, project work, simulating the work environment, and virtual WIL (Patrick et al., 2008). Authentic assessments in the context of this paper include simulating the work environment but also work-related projects. Both are designed for students to engage in authentic and meaningful work-related tasks.

There is support in the literature to establish a case that authenticity in learning relates to real world experience (Irwin, 2015; Patrick et al., 2008; Welch et al., 2012). Bosco and Ferns (2014) argue that to develop graduates that are both work ready and engaged, curriculum must be focused “on the introduction and development of authentic assessment tasks which reflect WIL in the education sector” (p. 284). Those authors developed the *Authentic Assessment Framework* (AAF) to assist in the evolution of WIL within university programs. The AAF outlines four criteria:

1. the student is actively engaged in a workplace setting or with an authentic audience
2. the student is required to demonstrate high-quality intellectual engagement (i.e., analyzing, evaluating, creating, performance enactment)
3. the student reflexively evaluates performance
4. the industry/professional partner contributes to assessment (e.g., establishment of marking criteria, direct marking) (Bosco and Ferns, 2014, p. 283).

Mueller (2005) sees a fundamental difference between traditional university assessments and authentic assessments. Traditional assessments such as multiple-choice tests encapsulate an approach that views education as being concerned with students developing knowledge and skills that contribute to their development as productive citizens. An authentic assessment approach, on the other hand, what Mueller calls “performance assessment” (2005, p. 2), is underpinned by an approach that sees benefit in students learning how to perform the “meaningful tasks they will encounter as citizens, workers, etc.” (2005, p. 2). Mueller’s finding positions authentic assessment as having an identifiable characteristic that emphasizes “students’ need to learn and subsequently demonstrate the ability to apply the knowledge and skills in real-world or authentic contexts” (2005, p. 1).

Janesick shares a similar view to Mueller around defining authentic assessment and sees authentic tasks as those that “showcase student ability” (2006, p. 1). Janesick also argues that authentic assessments require that students utilize not only their learned knowledge and skills to complete a task, but also contextual judgement and innovation. This argument is reiterated by Cooper et al. (2010) who state that the purpose of WIL activities is also to ensure the synthesis of work and learning, where work informs and critiques learning and vice versa.

Authentic Assessments at University of Newcastle

The journalism academics at UON are strong advocates of providing assessments that will enable students to gain valuable professional experience (Scott & Fulton, 2015; Fulton et al., 2017; Fulton et al., 2019). This experience includes external opportunities such as 2016’s *Unipollwatch*, where university students from around Australia reported on the 2016 Australian Federal election (Davies et al., 2017; Dodd et al., 2018; Fulton et al., 2019) and published on a dedicated online platform for a broad audience. *Unipollwatch* developed into *The Junction*, a national publishing platform that showcases student journalism across a number of beats, thus expanding on the political focus of *Unipollwatch*. *The Junction* online journalism platform was developed as a collaboration of Australian journalism programs and academics and is:

a publication that showcases the best university student journalism from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific and allows universities to work together to produce impactful and creative reportage. It takes students’ work to wider audiences. It improves the experience of learning the craft of journalism and serves a public good by producing and publishing public interest reporting. The Junction builds on everything we’ve learnt from producing journalism at

universities and from working together. (Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia, 2020, About section)

As one part of a suite of WIL and authentic assessments, *The Junction* is an opportunity for students to show their best work on a national publishing platform. An underlying objective of this opportunity is to ensure students have published work to include in a portfolio.

Further external authentic assessments include producing audio journalism for public broadcaster the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), and written submissions on behalf of non-profit organizations to both government and non-government inquiries. For these assessments, students are expected to engage with advocacy agencies and organizations such as Salvation Army Australia, Drug Free Australia and NORML Australia on the legalization of cannabis and Drug Free Australia and Harm Reduction Australia on pill testing at music festivals in NSW. These assessments, with academic assistance, produce work in a learning environment that reflects professional practice. Internally, all assessments in the journalism major reflect elements of replicable journalism practice through feature articles, hard news stories, entertainment journalism and news developed for multiple platforms distribution. Students engage with real clients to produce media releases, interview people for news stories, profiles and features, develop news broadcasts for distribution via television and social media, and produce audio stories. It is from these internal assessments that the academics choose the best work for publication via *The Junction*. This work, which has already been assessed and marked by a staff member, is revised by the student, then sent to the campus editor for suggested amendments and further revision if necessary, in consultation with the student, before submission to *The Junction* for publication.

METHODOLOGY

This study is one part of a larger WIL project that is examining work-integrated learning in journalism at UON. This part of the project received approval from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. It is focused on the student experience and employing a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2014) with a quantitative survey and a focus group. The researchers commenced the project with an anonymous survey of students in the journalism major so as to develop an overall picture of student perception surrounding the efficacy of including authentic assessments throughout the journalism major. The survey used the SurveyMonkey platform and students were assured anonymity. The survey script was structured with 20 quantitative questions using a Likert scale. Eight of those questions also included an area where the students could provide a voluntary written response (for example, a "Why/Why not" response was invited). A qualitative question at the end of the survey asked the students for a final comment: *This is where you can let us know any other thoughts you have on publishing your work. Some discussion points could include: How can we encourage students to publish their assessments beyond the University? Is it important that we do so? Why?* One of the questions specifically asked about students publishing via *The Junction*.

The survey was self-selecting. Each journalism course included a notice on the student learning platform Blackboard, with information about the project and a link to the SurveyMonkey site. Students anonymously took part in the survey. Out of the 155 students enrolled in the journalism major, 39 responses were received (n=39), giving a participation rate of 25%. The participants were spread across different educational levels of the program: first year (n=14), second year (n=12), third year (n=11) and others (n=2: 1x fourth year and 1 x seventh year).

This article reports on results from that survey, including an analysis of the qualitative comments included in the survey. While the number of journalism students who took part in the survey is a percentage of the cohort at UON and should not be used to generalize the whole cohort or all journalism students, it does provide an indication of what these students think about authentic assessments and the value to students. Whilst the survey is small in scope, "it is possible - if done correctly - to obtain useful results from a relatively small survey" (Berger, 2014, p. 294). It should also be noted that the results and analysis are from the survey only and the focus group, which will provide a more nuanced perspective, is yet to be conducted.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The following results are reporting on three key areas from the survey: authentic assessments, publishing as a student, and *The Junction*. These areas provide some answers to the research questions including the efficacy of authentic assessments and work-related projects, the student experience both in the classroom and beyond, the value to students, and how academic staff might further encourage students to participate. In the first instance, though, the researchers have included a brief discussion of the background questions.

Background Questions

As noted above, the students were fairly evenly distributed across the three years of the program. Other background questions in the survey included a requirement for students to identify which courses they had completed in the program. Answers indicated more participants in the survey had completed the two first year courses, fewer had completed the second year courses and even fewer had completed the third year courses (see Table 1).

TABLE 1: Which courses from the journalism major have you done?

Answer Choices	No. of Responses	% Response
Introduction to Professional Writing (First year)	35	92.11
Introduction to Journalism (First year)	30	78.95
Feature Writing (Second year)	22	57.89
Radio Journalism (Second year)	14	36.84
Television Journalism (Third year)	7	18.42
Public Affairs and Communication (Third year)	7	18.42
International Media Studies (Third year)	11	28.95
Journalism (Third year)	8	21.05
Communication Professional Placement (Third year)	3	7.89

Note. This question was answered by 38 of the 39 participants.

Students were asked whether they had an intention to work in journalism. Approximately 35% responded "yes" and 18% responded "no" with almost half of respondents unsure of their future work aspirations (see Table 2). While the highest number of "unsure" respondents were first year students (8 out of 14 or 57%), there was a significant number of second (5 out of 12 or 41%) and third year students (5 out of 11 or 45%) who were unsure of their career aspirations. In the question regarding preferred occupation aspiration, more than a third of students listed journalism as their first choice of

a field to work in, while others listed public relations/corporate communications, advertising, teaching and research, law and other fields where written communication is perceived as both valued and prioritized such as publishing.

TABLE 2: Do you intend to work in journalism after graduation and which field are you interested in?

Answer Choices	No of Responses	% Response
Yes	14	35.90
No	7	17.95
Unsure	18	46.15
Field of work¹		
Journalism	13	34.21
Public Relations/Corporate Communications	9	23.68
Advertising	2	5.26
Teaching and Research	2	5.26
Law	5	13.16
Other (please specify)	7	18.42

¹This question was answered by 38 of the 39 participants.

Students were asked for a specific area of journalism to which they aspired. The traditional formats of newspaper, television and radio recorded the preferred choices out of 15 options including online-only news sites, online-only magazine sites, news agencies, magazines, film, freelancing, and non-journalism occupations including law, government information, public relations and advertising (see Table 3).

TABLE 3: In which area specifically would you like to work?

Answer Choices	No of Responses	% Response
News agency/Wire service	1	2.56
Newspaper	5	12.82
Magazine	2	5.13
Television	4	10.26
Online-only news site	1	2.56
Online-only magazine site	1	2.56
Radio	6	15.38
Film	1	2.56
Advertising firm	0	0.00
Public relations firm	5	12.82
Government Information	3	7.69
University	1	2.56
Freelancer	2	5.13
Law	4	10.26
Other (please specify)	3	7.69

Note. N=39.

Authentic Assessments

Students were asked whether they could recall experiencing authentic assessments and asked to list any such assessments. Almost 75% [n=29] chose “yes” and provided examples including news stories, feature stories/articles, profiles, interviewing, videos, slideshows, media releases, radio programs, news packages and radio news bulletins. These recollections of embedded authentic assessments provide the experience of practical learning (Valencia-Forrester, 2020). However, students also mentioned work-related projects such as public policy inquiry submissions and taking part in the ABC’s *Heywire* competition as assessments that they completed for external stakeholders.

When students were asked if this type of assessment would be helpful to their employment chances (Q: *Will this type of assessment increase your chance of employment? Why/Why not?*), the results saw more than 80% choosing “definitely will” (n=6) or “probably will” (n=26). These students clearly recognized that having a portfolio of work demonstrating journalistic initiative, knowledge and skills would, to varying degrees, enhance their employability. For example, a first year student answered “probably will” by stating you could “show the news story as examples of your work, show experience interviewing sources” and a second year student stated that this type of assessment “demonstrates that we know how to do these things in the professional workplace.”

I think having a solid portfolio as we exit university and enter the real world of work is a massive advantage - and to have had some of that work published and/or judged by people living and working in the industry is even better. It gives the student experience in submitting content that is ready for publication. I think authentic assessments also inspire students to try harder and

work harder because it isn't just a uni assessment, it could make a real difference to our early career. (third year student)

However, there were also students who were wary about completing assessments with a real-world application, demonstrating, perhaps, that more work is required by academic staff to stress the importance of some practical experience for those with aspirations to work in the field of journalism: "The potential for my work to become published has not been encouraged by lecturers/tutors and I have no recollection of other students who have achieved this" (second year student).

The above "don't know" comment from a second-year student raises concern. It is a high priority for academic staff to encourage students to publish their assessments in publications with a broader audience such as news outlets, magazines, on social news sites, and in the previously mentioned *Heywire* competition, particularly from second year. As one academic noted in an email exchange:

It's true we don't overly encourage first years to publish. This is where they are starting to practice, though a pitch exercise has been introduced, but certainly by second year it is talked about in feature writing and many features do end up getting published in *The Herald*, especially through the Editor's Prize, but also in outlets the students find themselves. We have also put students forward for other prizes over the years, but we do expect them to show initiative. (F. Biggins, personal email, November 12, 2019)

In fact, one of the questions specifically asked about staff encouragement (Q: *Do the teaching staff encourage publication?*) resulted in more than 80% (n=31) of respondents replying "yes." Employing different methods of communication to reach that other 20% is an area that can, should, and will be explored both between the academics and during the planned focus group.

The final question regarding authentic assessments asked participants about the volume and frequency of tasks (Q: *Should all assessments in the journalism courses be authentic assessments (i.e. all would be published as part of the assessment)? Why/why not?*). While there were students who chose "strongly agree" or "agree" and, at the other end, "disagree" or "strongly disagree", almost half chose "neither agree" or "disagree" (see Table 4).

TABLE 4: Should all assessments in the journalism courses be authentic assessments?

Answer Choices	No. of Responses	% Response
Strongly agree	5	12.82
Agree	7	17.95
Neither agree or disagree	18	46.15
Disagree	7	17.95
Strongly disagree	2	5.13
Why/why not?	23	59.00

Note. N= 39.

One conclusion that could be drawn from these results about authentic assessments is that there is a cohort of students who are not interested in pursuing journalism as a career with, as noted in Table 3, 18% of respondents stating they do not intend to work in journalism after graduation and 46% unsure. It could be argued that previous research conducted in Australian universities (Hanusch et al., 2015;

2016) regarding enrolment in journalism courses remains pertinent because “[s]ome students enter journalism courses not because they want to become journalists, but because they want journalistic skills” (Callaghan, 2010, p. 47). However, an analysis of the comments that students included point to other underlying concerns including a lack of confidence, too much pressure, student autonomy, and quality of the work:

It is too much pressure on students for every assessment to end up published - sometimes students just need to learn and sometimes we fail, and it is overwhelming to have that pressure on where every assessment has to be perfect and every assessment is out there for potential employers to see. There are definitely some circumstances where authentic assessments push people to be better, but not all the time. (third year student)

In contrast with the above views, a first year student who “strongly agreed” stated: “What is the point of doing an assessment if it isn't going to impact or mirror real life?”. This perspective echoes one of UON’s aims to produce work-ready graduates, while simultaneously reflecting the importance of performing “meaningful tasks” (Mueller, 2005, p. 1) in a journalism education environment.

Publishing as a Student

Several questions in the survey focused on whether a student had published either from assessments submitted as part of their university course or outside their university program. The rationale behind these questions was to discover whether students feel comfortable publishing to the broader public and, if they do not, why not?

For example, one question asked whether there should be more opportunities to publish external to the University (Q: *Is it important that the journalism courses include opportunities to publish assessments outside the University environment?*). This question was based around opportunities such as *The Junction* or *UniPollWatch*, what Valencia-Forrester (2020) calls a “pop-up newsroom”, and more than 87% of students agreed that it was either “very important” or “moderately important” (see Table 5). However, while an earlier question on whether students should publish (Q: *Should students publish during their degree?*) also received a positive response (see Table 6), 75% of students (n=29), do not take up the opportunity to publish externally or do not actively seek out those opportunities.

TABLE 5: Is it important that the journalism courses include opportunities to publish assessments outside the University environment?

Answer Choices	No. of Responses	% Response
Very important	18	46.15
Moderately important	16	41.03
Neutral	5	12.82
Slightly important	0	0.00
Not at all important	0	0.00

Note. N= 39.

TABLE 6: Should students publish during their degree?

Answer Choices	No. of Responses	% Response
High priority	17	43.59
Medium priority	12	30.77
Neutral priority	10	25.64
Low priority	0	0.00
Not a priority	0	0.00
Don't know	0	0.00

Note. N= 39.

An analysis of comments responding to why students think there should be more publishing opportunities provides a modicum of understanding of why students may be reluctant to publish, with comments including a lack of confidence in their abilities:

I feel that the opportunities are out there but many are unsure of where to look and how to go about publishing work. I also feel that by teaching staff and academics actively promoting it, more students would be more confident to do so. (first year student)

Building a portfolio is really important and helps students feel like they are going somewhere in their studies. However, more university direction about how to get published, who to submit stories to and how (e.g., how to write a proposal etc.) would be very beneficial. (third year student)

This lack of confidence was also shown to be an issue when students were asked about their comfort with external publishing (Q: *Are you comfortable publishing as a student? Why/why not?*). While the majority of students responded, “most of the time” (n=9) or “some of the time” (n=18), four students responded “seldom.” Those students wrote about their lack of experience (third year student: “I feel less qualified than a working professional”) and low confidence (second year student: “Sometimes I don't think it's good enough because I'm still learning.”) Students who answered “some of the time” said similar things: they do not feel as though their work is good enough, they are worried they are not qualified, they lack confidence, they are not always happy with what they've produced.

If the work I am publishing is of the highest standard then I would be comfortable publishing the content. However, if the work I am publishing is mediocre then I would not be comfortable publishing it as I would be worried it would taint my professional image later on in my career. (first year student)

As a student, my skills are not as refined as the professional journalists that work in society, so I would be uneasy posting my amateur work publicly. Perhaps a lack of confidence is a major contributor to this view. (second year student)

One advantage of using *The Junction* as a platform when attempting to encourage student publication is that students are provided with support, with the campus editor sub-editing students' work to a publishable standard, thus providing students with professional guidance to mitigate some of their concern about publishing their work in such a public space. The protocols in place for publishing via *The Junction*, as noted above, provide students with the best possible opportunity to develop and publish an article reflecting a high standard of engagement. The sub-editing process also provides a

definable learning moment for those aspiring to having work circulated in the public domain. The researchers also questioned students about *The Junction* and its value in the curricula.

The Junction

When students were asked about publishing via *The Junction* as a way to engage with an audience beyond academic staff (Bosco & Ferns, 2014) (Q: *The Junction* is a national student publication that gives students the opportunity to publish to a wide audience. Should there be an assessment where publishing on *The Junction* is compulsory? Why/why not?), almost two-thirds said this should be a compulsory component in the journalism curriculum (n=25). There were also objections. Currently, as noted above, publishing via *The Junction* is presented to the students as a “best work” model and it is encouraging to see that a high percentage of students wish to utilize the opportunity that *The Junction* provides. It is also encouraging to note the comments and common themes point to publication via *The Junction* as good for the student portfolio, as providing the opportunity to get journalism to a wider audience and as a mechanism for building confidence. Students also noted publication via *The Junction* as helping ensure students take assessments seriously and providing the opportunity to learn how to write for different audiences. Such comments demonstrate that students understand the importance of developing key knowledge and skills and this was demonstrated across the levels of education: “Sink or swim. If you sing, but are never heard, then you never sang” (first year student); “Students will take the assessment more seriously, go out of their comfort zone and put in more effort” (second year student); “Seeing work published inspires students to keep writing and feel like they are actually going somewhere in this degree and have something to show to employers” (third year student).

However, the answers to the “why not?” question provides some key information on why students are reluctant to publish. These students noted issues such as too much pressure, feeling underprepared, the decision should be student-led, and feeling uncomfortable about their work being read widely:

Some students might not feel comfortable publishing their work. For example, right now I would not be comfortable publishing any content as I am only first-year and feel that I have much more to learn before publishing content. (first year student)

Some students, myself included, may not feel as though they are comfortable publishing their work to a widely read platform. This kind of assessment could be possible in the circumstance that it had multiple stages of development and feedback to create a piece of writing that was up to publishing standard. (second year student)

A first year student expressed concern regarding the publishing process on this online platform: “Unnecessary stress for students - does Junction have submission requirements, are they very fussy with what they publish? If a student wants to publish they will - forcing it may just lead to resentment.” This concern suggests a misunderstanding of the process of publishing via *The Junction*. It seems that this student is uncomfortable with the lack of agency and being exposed as lacking in competency. This demonstrates a misunderstanding of the process, whereby at this time academic staff select and edit the work of any students who are put forward for publication.

CONCLUSION

The broader research project into WIL in journalism education at UON is ongoing with a plan to involve previous students, industry stakeholders and other universities. The researchers believe an enhanced understanding of student expectations and experience provides a crucial plank in a holistic conception

of WIL. The student survey undertaken for this research demonstrated that most students find authentic assessments a valuable component of their journalism education, but it is also imperative to understand the different challenges this type of assessment presents to students and if and how such challenges might be addressed.

The research associated with this study found that students believe authentic assessments are an effective and valuable way to provide them with publishing experience beyond the university. However, a lack of confidence means that students are either unable or unwilling to take up opportunities that will enhance their personal publishing profile. Using an opportunity such as *The Junction*, with support from academic staff to ensure students are publishing their best work, could help to provide students with the confidence to increase their engagement with real world experiences. It is also imperative to conduct further qualitative research to tease out if there are alternative interpretations or responses that could be explored. While the survey showed that most students have received encouragement from the teaching staff, as well as access to opportunities, it has also been identified that there is a need to find different ways to ensure students are aware of those opportunities.

Parks (2015) states that “experience-based courses should not be the exclusive format for teaching journalism, but experiential learning is essential to a quality journalism education” (p. 138). Such observation aptly contributes to our philosophy for teaching journalism practice; students should also experience meaningful work-related projects such as the *Heywire* competition and *The Junction*. The data and feedback from the survey will influence our teaching practice, will inform how academic staff deliver a redeveloped journalism major, including how to further incorporate *The Junction* as a place for publication, and will ensure there is a better focused approach across the program to encourage and support student publishing.

A tentative assumption from this research, and a driver for future research, is whether this lack of confidence and reluctance of students to publish can be attributed to the existing confidence of students in a regional university. Earlier research (Scott & Fulton, 2015) compared students from UON with University of Technology Sydney to discover if there were differences in work experience (paid and unpaid) and found metropolitan students had advantages in several key areas including opportunity and ongoing employment. An argument can be made that there is also likely to be differences between metropolitan and regional universities in this research project. Any such difference might be determined through collaborating with other universities and replicating the survey with their cohort. Are there noticeable differences in attitudes toward publishing between capital city and regional university undergraduate journalism students? That question provides one pathway for future research and the answers will assist in the provision of strategies that will support and encourage students in their career aspirations and enhance graduate employability.

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