Journalism capstone units: Capstone units for journalism programmes to facilitate the demonstration of graduate capabilities

Final report 2019

Lead Institution: Edith Cowan University

Project Leader: Associate Professor Trevor Cullen, Australian Learning and Teaching Fellow (ALTF)

http://www.capstonecurriculum.com.au/about-capstones/journalism-capstones

Acknowledgements

List of acronyms used

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

Australian Journalism Review (AJR)

Australian Learning and Teaching Fellow (ALTF)

Australian Qualification Framework (AQF)

Asia Pacific Media Educator (APME)

Department of Education and Training (DET)

Edith Cowan University (ECU)

Expert Fellowship Team (EFT)

Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA)

International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR)

Journalism and Mass Communication Educator (JMCE)

Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA)

Media Entertainment Arts Alliance (MEAA)

Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT)

Pacific Journalism Review (PJR)

Professional Industry Placement (PIP)

Project Reference Team (PRT)

Project Working Group (PWG)

Project Validation Group (PVG)

Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA)

Question-and-Answer (Q&A)

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)

Teaching Learning Outcomes (TLOs)

Technical and Further Education (TAFE)

Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA)

West Australian Network for Dissemination (WAND)

Work-integrated Learning (WIL)

World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC)

Executive summary

Aim of the Fellowship

This 18-month Department of Education and Training (DET) Fellowship, spanning from July 2015 through to January 2017, set out to provide, for the first time, a series of agreed principles, models and skills to guide journalism educators in the design and implementation of final-year journalism capstone units which effectively demonstrate and measure required graduate capabilities.

The context

The concept of a capstone unit is gaining currency within the Australian Higher Education system. A major motivating factor is the government's focus on enhancing graduate employability and assuring graduate outcomes, along with the need to develop capabilities for assuring Higher Education standards. This has led to an ongoing debate about academic standards within the Australian Higher Education sector. This critical nexus requires all university degrees and course majors to rigorously map learning outcomes against agreed-upon national standards. In particular, there is a need to map and evidence the relationship between generic attributes and disciplinary capabilities; the relationship between skills and knowledge and their application; the relationship between disciplinary communities, professional bodies and industry; and the relationship between macro course structure and micro subject design.

Previous attempts to measure journalism graduate capabilities were linked mainly to Professional Industry Placements (PIPs) with an emphasis on acquiring, rather than demonstrating, capabilities. In fact, there has never been a specific national strategy for the promotion of measuring the capabilities of graduate journalism students in the Australian university system.

Fellowship approach

At the inception of this Fellowship, I established a Project Working Group (PWG), a Project Reference Team (PRT), an Expert Fellowship Team (EFT) and a Project Validation Group (PVG). The PWG comprised of 30 journalism academics, either heads of journalism programmes or course coordinators, from 18 Australian universities that either officially offer capstone units or else run units that could be considered capstones. The PRT comprised of 3 lecturers who have received OLT citations (and OLT grants), from journalism programmes in New South Wales and Victoria—where the majority of journalism programmes are concentrated. This emphasis was to ensure balance and comparability nationally. The EFT comprised of 3 respective experts in graduate outcomes and capabilities;

standards assessment and validation; and capstone units design and development. The PVG comprised of 5 journalism academics from Melbourne universities, who were considered representative of the diverse range of the journalism academics in Australia, especially in terms of age and the time spent working as journalists, teachers or both.

Phase 1 (July – December 2015) involved consultation. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with the PWG, to ascertain each university's undergraduate journalism curriculum and the principles, models and skills of their respective capstone units. This phase also involved initial consultations with industry, to seek their views on the critical graduate capabilities that should be demonstrated and measured in a capstone unit. All of the interviews were transcribed.

Phase 2 (January – August 2016) involved validation. The PVG met at the Victoria State Library, with the following agenda:

- To discuss the feedback and findings on journalism capstone units as collected in Phase 1;
- To discuss and identify—in the context of the Australian Qualification Framework level 7 criteria—the skills and knowledge required by students to successfully complete a capstone unit; and
- To examine various models of capstone units and identify possible model(s) appropriate to journalism courses in Australian universities.

Phase 3 (September 2016 – January 2017) involved dissemination. This included the production of peer-reviewed publications, panel discussions and oral presentations at national and international journalism education conferences, continual engagement with professional bodies such as the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA) and World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC), and production of a Fellowship website (www.journalismcapstoneunits.org).

Fellowship findings

There was general agreement that a journalism capstone unit should:

- result in a publishable outcome;
- provide an opportunity to demonstrate core journalism skills; and
- be student-centred, require students to articulate what they wanted to achieve, and how they proposed to achieve it.

The PVG arrived at 7 principles for the journalism capstone unit:

- *Transition:* Assist students to develop a sense of professional identity and support them to manage their career planning and development.
- *Integration and closure:* Enable students to attain a sense of completion and an understanding of what it means to be a graduate and a global citizen.

- *Diversity:* Enhance students' capacity to engage with diversity in professional contexts.
- *Engagement:* Require students to assume active roles and to apply their learning in realistic, authentic and unfamiliar contexts, and to take responsibility for their own work.
- *Assessment:* Align assessment practice to agreed capstone principles. Ask students to reflect on their own capabilities and performance.
- *Evaluation:* Regular evaluations contribute to the demonstration of student attainment of discipline learning outcomes.
- *Skills:* Identity core pivotal journalism skills for demonstration and application—writing, story-telling, digital broadcast competencies across all platforms, professional publishable content, producing to deadline and reflective analysis.

There were found to be three models of journalism capstone units currently used, either in unison or conjunction, within Australian universities:
- internships (Professional Industry Placements);
- newsroom simulations or other in-house authentic learning experiences, such as publishing in a web-based paper/journal; and
- projects.

The PVG thought that each of these three models had value and should be retained, nominally as Capstone 1, Capstone 2 and Capstone 3. An agreed list of skills for journalism capstone units was presented, to JERAA. Refer to **Appendix B**.

Impact of the Fellowship

This Fellowship has assisted the (re)design of journalism capstone units to align with the government's AQF level 7 standards for Bachelor degrees. Australian journalism graduates will now be enabled to demonstrate, to both educators and employers, that they have acquired agreed skills and competencies for employment in a whole range of digital media and communications industries.

Key recommendations

On 17 December 2016, the Fellowship's research outcomes and recommendations—the agreed principles, models and skills—were accepted by the Executive of JERAA for use in journalism programmes in Australian universities. The Fellowship's findings have been circulated to all Australian universities that offer journalism programmes, and their respective capstone units are being (re)designed and implemented from 2017 onward.

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Chapter 1: The Fellowship context

1.1   The Fellowship aims

This Fellowship aimed to produce agreed graduate outcomes, principles and best practice to inform the development of journalism capstone units for use among Australian universities that offer undergraduate journalism degrees and majors.

It also aimed to facilitate improved collaboration with industry to ensure universities fully understand the needs of industry through close interactions with news editors.

These aims align directly with five key aims of the DET Fellowship scheme at large:
- measuring graduate skills and capabilities;
- fostering national collaboration and collegial networking;
- ensuring broad applicability;
- showing leadership in learning and teaching; and
- building on previous OLT projects.

These greater aims are identified as significant issues relevant across the Higher Education system.

1.2.1 Measuring graduate skills and capabilities

Currently, it is difficult for news editors to measure a skill set from a graduate's journalism degree or major, and for graduates to demonstrate evidence that they have acquired competencies for employment. Previous attempts to measure journalism graduate capabilities were linked more to assessment and learning outcomes with an emphasis on acquiring rather than demonstrating capabilities. There has never been a specific national strategy for the promotion of measuring the capabilities of graduate journalism students in the Australian university system. While no-one is proposing a unified tertiary journalism curriculum, there is a need to ensure consistency across course offerings.

A survey of Australia's undergraduate journalism degrees and majors as offered at 30 (out of a total 43) universities revealed that there was a wide diversity of units on offer (17 in all) and considerable discrepancies in structure, content, emphasis and delivery (Tanner, O'Donnell, Green & Cullen 2014). Some courses focus on theory-based units, while others focus on practical skills-building units. Of those 30 Australian universities offering undergraduate journalism courses, only 18 universities either officially offer capstone units or else run units that could be considered capstones. These capstone units also vary in content, delivery and learning outcomes. Some opt for research projects while others offer Professional Industry Placements (PIPs) or a selection from a list of core units. Hence, it is difficult to define exactly what a journalism capstone unit is from what is currently on offer. And there remains the basic issue of how to measure graduate capabilities.

In a tertiary journalism curriculum, there must be a way to identify the minimum standards and test capabilities to be met by a graduate from a Bachelor level degree or enrolled in a major in the field of journalism. This was partially attempted in 2011 with a Special Initiative OLT Grant entitled *Discipline Network: Journalism, Media and Communication Network* (Breit, Romano, O'Donnell & McLellan 2015). One aim of that study was to develop systemic discipline standards for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Australia that encompassed journalism, public relations, media and communication studies, and thereby provide some form of benchmarking across the universities in Australia. While this was an important aim, the outcome was difficult to achieve because of the immense variety of views from educators across the three disciplines, and the lack of disciplinary guidelines with which to measure standards. Teaching Learning Outcomes (TLOs) provide some guidance but do not define the content, teaching and learning approaches used to achieve outcomes (Romano 2014). This lack of specificity is supported by the findings of another OLT project on graduate outcomes:

> While many such lists are now available as external reference points for developing statements of outcomes, regardless of the 'outcomes' included on the list, evidence of the standard of their achievement requires assessment of students' (or graduates') abilities (Barrie, Hughes, Crisp & Bennison 2014).

This Fellowship used a collaborative approach to build on these efforts, but with a more focused, practical and achievable aim—to deliver a series of agreed principles, models and skills to guide teachers in the (re)design and implementation of final-year journalism capstone units that measure graduate skills and capabilities more effectively.

1.2.2 Fostering national collaboration and collegial networking

This Fellowship fostered national collaboration and collegial networking through its wide stakeholder consultation. educators, reviewers, and news editors (who are often overlooked as important stakeholders)—were engaged and offered input into what graduate capabilities might be deemed appropriate.

Universities that embed the capstone into their journalism programmes will be in a stronger position to demonstrate graduate skills and capabilities, and will thereby encourage industry to work with, and potentially accredit, their programme.

This Fellowship not only cultivated partnerships at the institutional level, but also developed wider educational partnerships with the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA), the World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC), the Media Entertainment Arts Alliance (MEAA) and the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA). The majority of educators from the 30 Australian universities that offer journalism programmes attend the JERAA annual national conference, making it a practical, proactive and effective dissemination strategy for this Fellowship.

1.2.3 Ensuring broad applicability

Journalism capstone units could become models for other disciplines such as public relations and advertising, especially since communication, social and digital media capabilities are becoming increasingly part of the required skill set for these disciplines.

1.2.4 Showing leadership in learning and teaching

This Fellowship showed leadership in learning and teaching by being the first to offer a practical solution. It provides a series of principles, models and skills to guide teachers in the (re)design and implementation of a journalism capstone unit for their context.

1.2.5 Building on previous OLT projects

This Fellowship drew upon, and added to, the findings of:
- the 2013 OLT National Senior Teaching Fellowship entitled *Capstone curriculum across disciplines: Synthesising theory, practice and policy to provide practical tools for curriculum design* (Lee 2015b);
- the 2011 Special Initiative OLT Grant entitled *Discipline Network: Journalism, Media and Communication Network* (Breit, Romano, O'Donnell & McLellan 2015);
- the 2011 OLT Fellowship entitled *Assuring graduate capabilities: evidencing levels of achievement for graduate employability* (Oliver 2015);
- the 2011 OLT Innovation and Development Grant entitled *Graduate qualities and journalism -curriculum renewal: Balancing tertiary expectations and industry needs in a changing environment* (Tanner, O'Donnell, Green & Cullen 2014);
- the 2011 OLT Grant entitled *Assessing the impact of work-integrated learning (WIL) on student work readiness* (Ferns, Smith & Russell 2014);
- the 2010 OLT Grant entitled *Assessing and assuring Australian graduate learning outcomes: Principles and practices within and across disciplines* (Barrie, Hughes, Crisp & Bennison 2014);
- the 2010 OLT Grant entitled *Capstone courses in undergraduate business degrees* (Bailey et al. 2013);
- the 2009 OLT Fellowship entitled *Improving graduate employability by implementing subject benchmarks* (Beck 2014); and
- the 2009 OLT Fellowship entitled *Curriculum and pedagogic bases for effectively integrating practice-based experiences* (Billett 2011).

1.3 The rationale for journalism capstone unit reform

Journalism capstone units are a relatively recent development in Australian journalism education. Universities increasingly offer capstones as part of curricula to prepare final-year undergraduates for employment and bridge the gap between academic learning and professional work. Journalism capstone units may enhance graduate employability, address

the issue of measuring graduate capabilities, address the problem with Professional Industry Placements (PIPs), and increase the consultation of journalism educators with industry.

1.3.1 Enhancing graduate employability

A major factor influencing the growing emphasis of the Australian Higher Education system on capstone units is the government's increasing focus on enhancing graduate employability and assuring graduate outcomes. The Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) defines the skills and knowledge that Australian university graduates should achieve when they complete a Level 7 qualification (i.e. a Bachelor's degree); refer to **Table 1**. Higher Education providers are legislatively bound by the AQF. Furthermore, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) will apply Threshold and Qualification Standards when deciding whether to grant registration or renew a provider's registration or to accredit courses. It is thus fitting to frame journalism capstone units within the context of the AQF Level 7 criteria.

Table 1. AQF Level 7 criteria (AQF 2013).

Summary	*Graduates at this level will have broad and coherent knowledge and skills for professional work and/or further learning.*
Knowledge	*Graduates at this level will have broad and coherent theoretical and technical knowledge with depth in one or more disciplines or areas of practice.*
Skills	*Graduates at this level will have well-developed cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply methods and technologies to:* *• analyse and evaluate information to complete a range of activities;* *• analyse, generate and transmit solutions to unpredictable and sometimes complex problems;* *• transmit knowledge, skills and ideas to others.*
Application of skills and knowledge	*Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, well-developed judgement and responsibility in contexts that require self-directed work and learning within broad parameters to provide specialist advice and functions.*

More than two-thirds of the 30 Australian universities that offer undergraduate journalism degrees clearly linked their course with a career as a journalist in their promotional material, as if the course was a ticket to employment (Cullen & Callaghan 2010, 126). An analysis of the same promotional material in 2012 revealed that little had changed (Cullen 2012). There is agreement that, if effectively designed, capstone units can improve students' learning and experience, and enhance graduate employability (Lee 2015b).

1.3.2 Addressing the issue of measuring graduate capabilities

A research paper presented at the first JourNet international conference on Professional Education for the Media in 2004 described journalism education in Australia as fragmented.

> *TAFEs, private institutions and universities provide an unpredictable mixture of craft skills and professional concepts, ranging from the intensely practical to the*

abstractions of communication, media and cultural studies. Cadetships range from sources of cheap labour to pedagogical excellence. There is therefore no guarantee that Australian journalists are trained and educated for their role as disseminators of accurate information and informed opinion. For journalism to benefit society, journalism education needs to move towards a more formal agreement between the news industry and the academy on a desirable journalism curriculum (JourNet 2004).

The issue of measuring graduate capabilities in journalism education in Australia has been debated, and unresolved, for well over a decade.

1.3.3 Addressing the problem with Professional Industry Placements (PIPs)

The 2011 OLT Innovation and Development Grant included interviews (conducted in 2012 and 2013) with 50 journalism academics and 50 news editors across Australia. There was broad agreement among the educators that journalism education should aim to achieve three key outcomes: build a broad knowledge base; develop research and analytical skills; and teach core media and communication skills (Tanner, O'Donnell, Green & Cullen 2014). However, in terms of the last outcome, there was a common view that Professional Industry Placements (PIPs) were problematic for testing graduate capabilities as not only were they decreasing in number, but students enrolled in PIPs did not necessarily have the required skills and often ended up performing menial tasks in the newsroom (Tanner, O'Donnell, Green & Cullen 2014). Most of the interviewed news editors revealed that they perceived graduate students enrolled in a PIP as being generally competent with digital media, but often lacking in basic general knowledge, essential newswriting and grammar skills (Tanner, O'Donnell, Green & Cullen 2014).

In fact, a PIP often exposed, rather than improved upon, a graduate's lack of ability. Furthermore, editors and journalists are often far too busy to instruct, monitor or assess their work practice skills. Billett's OLT Fellowship stressed the need to be clear about what needs to be learnt and to consider options other than supervised placements to secure intended educational purposes (2011, 20). While PIPs are useful, they can also be problematic in that they do not provide an adequate measurement of graduate capabilities, and they presume that graduates have actually acquired a certain level of capability. They could form part of a journalism capstone unit, but only as one of a number of other measurement activities.

1.3.4 Increasing the consultation of journalism educators with industry

Another issue prompting journalism capstone unit reform concerns the lack of consultation of journalism educators with industry. This was evident in the findings of the aforementioned 2011 OLT Innovation and Development Grant, which involved interviews with 50 journalism academics and news editors across Australia. These key industry employers were chosen as they routinely select and employ graduate journalists. However,

the majority of editors had little to no knowledge of the journalism degrees or majors, even within their home states. This might explain why the Australian tertiary journalism courses are not officially accredited by industry, with editors preferring to interact with known individuals rather than institutions.

Encouragingly, the 50 journalism academics and 50 news editors who were interviewed for the 2011 OLT Innovation and Development Grant were in agreement that industry and universities needed to work more closely together, with a belief that industry could have broader input into programme design and revitalisation of the journalism curriculum (Tanner, O'Donnell, Green & Cullen 2014). This idea is echoed in a 2011 OLT Grant on WIL impact: "Industry and universities should collaborate on curriculum development and design, supervision of students and feedback on assessment" (Ferns, Smith & Russell 2014, 8). Journalism and the media industry have undergone major structural changes due to the introduction of new digital technologies. This rapid change is notable in many industries but is acute in the media sector and therefore demands a particularly responsive and adaptable curriculum for journalism education.

1.3.5 Embedding new capabilities: being enterprising and entrepreneurial

St Clair (2015) points to a current challenge: the ever-changing world of journalism requires journalism students to acquire and demonstrate new capabilities such as being enterprising and entrepreneurial.

> *The world of journalism in the digital age is changing faster than university curricula can keep up. News is now produced in forms and on platforms that were non-existent 10 years ago. Journalists may increasingly generate their own work opportunities in entrepreneurial news outlets and start-ups, rather than as employees in legacy newsprint and broadcast media. Substantial workforce contraction has also occurred since 2012 as revenue in print and other traditional media has found new homes in social media and search engines, and over 1000 journalists (or 15 percent of the journalism workforce) were made redundant. Journalism graduates therefore need to be flexible, innovative and enterprising to survive professionally in this evolving setting* (St Clair 2015, 122).

1.3.6 Drawing on existing journalism capstone units

It is difficult to define journalism capstone units from what is on offer. Judging from existing capstones, an initial list of core skills that a journalism capstone unit needs to measure included: research, writing, grammar, digital and social media, video, communication and team skills. Yet there was inconsistency regarding the inclusion, importance and assessment of these skills.

At Swinburne University of Technology, the final-year journalism capstone unit is divided into two sections: Capstone A – JOU 30002 and Capstone B – JOU 30003. The description of

learning outcomes for Capstone A, which involves a journalism project and reflective essay, state that students will gain experience, complete a journalism project and reflect on ethical and legal issues connected with the practice of journalism. The description of learning outcomes for Capstone B is similar, and the learning outcomes included the ability to identify audiences, gain experience in building audiences, become part of an internet-based platform, and reflect on journalism practice including the ethical, legal and practical problems encountered. There is an absence of terms such as "measure" or "demonstrate" in respect to capabilities. "Should" is preferred to "can".

It is a similar story at Monash University. The final-year journalism unit was, in fact, a PIP unit where entry depends upon negotiation with the unit coordinator. Learning outcomes are expressed with phrases like "students should be able to".

At the University of Canberra, the journalism capstone unit is basically a PIP, but it is the only university to state in the learning outcomes that students "will be able to demonstrate ability". This offers concrete learning outcomes in contrast to the more optimistic modal verb "should", which creates an impression that it is more aspirational than actual.

All of the Australian universities with existing journalism capstone units agreed to collaborate in this Fellowship. Working with their relevant academics, this Fellowship investigated what substantive components needed to be in a journalism capstone unit and—rather than design a standardised unit—offered a series of principles, models and skills to guide teachers in the (re)design of a journalism capstone unit tailored to their context.

1.3.7 Tailoring the journalism capstone unit

A recent article in *Higher Education Research and Development* argues that "there is a clear need for the capstone experience to be tailored suitably to student (and workplace) needs" (Thomas, Wong & Li 2014, 13). This point is reiterated by a previous OLT National Senior Teaching Fellow, Professor Nicolette Lee, who notes that while the capstone curriculum has become increasingly important in Australia to assess discipline standards and Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) levels, the capstone curriculum is extraordinarily diverse and "must meet an array of student, institutional and sector needs, including threshold standards" (Lee 2015b).

Chapter 2: The Fellowship approach and activities

2.1   Stakeholder engagement

At the inception of this Fellowship, I established a Project Working Group (PWG), a Project Reference Team (PRT), an Expert Fellowship Team (EFT) and a Project Validation Group (PVG). Professor Robyn Quin, former Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) at Curtin University, was appointed the external evaluator for this Fellowship.

2.1.1 The Project Working Group (PWG)

The PWG comprised of 30 journalism academics, either heads of journalism programmes or course coordinators, from the 18 Australian universities that either officially offer capstone units or else run units that could be considered capstones, as follows:

- Swinburne University of Technology;
- Monash University;
- The University of Melbourne;
- RMIT University;
- University of Canberra;
- University of South Australia;
- The University of Sydney;
- University of Wollongong;
- The University of Queensland;
- Curtin University;
- Murdoch University;
- The University of Newcastle;
- University of Technology Sydney;
- Charles Sturt University;
- Queensland University of Technology;
- The University of Adelaide;
- La Trobe University; and
- Deakin University.

2.1.2 The Project Reference Team (PRT)

The 3 members of the PRT assisted this Fellowship by acting as independent and objective critical friends, reviewers and evaluators of the materials generated within the project. I chose lecturers who have received OLT citations (and OLT grants), from journalism programmes in New South Wales and Victoria—where the majority of journalism programmes are concentrated. This emphasis was to ensure balance and comparability nationally. The PRT comprised as follows:

- *Professor Stephen Tanner, Professor of Journalism, University of Wollongong*—former JERAA president, 2008 OLT Citation recipient for the engagement of media professionals and local community in ongoing review, implementation and refinement of a responsive and creative curriculum for journalism students;
- *Dr Colleen Murrell, Senior Lecturer of Journalism, Monash University & Deakin University*—2008 OLT Citation recipient for funding creative student learning to industry best practice through the design of authentic and engaging curricula and relevant assessment tasks in journalism; and
- *Jenna Price, Senior Lecturer of Journalism, University of Technology Sydney*—2013 OLT Citation recipient for a sustained commitment to improving student retention and engagement for journalism students from day one to employment.

2.1.3 The Expert Fellowship Team (EFT)

The 3 members of the EFT assisted this Fellowship by sharing their ideas and expertise. The EFT comprised as follows:
- *Professor Beverley Oliver, Deakin University*—with expertise in graduate outcomes and capabilities;
- *Professor Heather Alexander, Queensland University of Technology*—with expertise in standards assessment and validation; and
- *Professor Nicolette Lee, Swinburne University of Technology*—with expertise in capstone units design and development.

2.1.4 The Project Validation Group (PVG)

To avoid extending the research process with more data collection and discussions, I selected journalism academics from five universities in Melbourne who were considered representative of the diverse range of the journalism academics in Australia, especially in terms of age and the time spent working as journalists, teachers or both. The PVG comprised as follows:
- *Professor Lawrie Zion, Head of Journalism, La Trobe University;*
- *Associate Professor John Lidberg, Head of Journalism, Monash University;*
- *Associate Professor Andrew Dodd, Head of Journalism, Swinburne University of Technology;*
- *Dr Colleen Murrell, Senior Lecturer of Journalism, Monash University & Deakin University; and*
- *Dr Alex Wake, Senior Lecturer of Journalism, RMIT University.*

2.2 Phase 1 (July - December 2015): Consultation

The intention of Phase 1 was to consult with the Project Working Group (PWG) and other key stakeholders to develop an agreed set of graduate attributes that the capstone unit

sought to demonstrate and assess. I drew on the OLT Fellowship work of Professor Beverley Oliver, who has developed resources and activities associated with the following graduate capabilities:

- Written and oral communication;
- Critical and analytical (and sometimes creative and reflective) thinking;
- Problem-solving (including generating ideas and innovative solutions);
- Information literacy, often associated with technology;
- Learning and working independently;
- Learning and working collaboratively; and
- Ethical and inclusive engagement with communities, cultures and nations (Oliver 2015).

I began by conducting face-to-face interviews with the PWG. The semi-structured interviews included, but were not limited to, the following open-ended questions:

- What do you understand by the term 'capstone unit'?
- What type of capstone units do you use?
- What were the underlying principles for the capstone units?
- What disciplinary and professional skills do students need to demonstrate?

Each participant signed a consent form before their interview, which lasted at least one hour. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Several follow-up telephone calls were made to obtain both clarifications and further information. This 'audit' later, in Phase 2, underwent a validation process and informed a discussion paper, whereby I reviewed each university's undergraduate journalism curriculum and the principles, models and skills of their respective capstone units.

I held a meeting with the Project Reference Team (PRT) in late October 2015, to discuss feedback from the PWG interviews. I then consulted with each member of the Expert Fellowship Team (EFT) to discuss the project's progress.

I presented a paper on this Fellowship during Edith Cowan University (ECU) Research Week competition, "Pitch Your Research", which was attended by ECU's Executive Council that included, among others, the Vice-Chancellor and his four deputies. Also, I presented a paper on this Fellowship at an ECU Teaching and Learning conference on 4 November 2015. I presented a poster on this Fellowship at the West Australian Network for Dissemination (WAND) Sharing Day at the University of Western Australia on 6 November 2015.

I then organised and chaired a 45-minute Question-and-Answer (Q&A) panel discussion, and presented a peer-reviewed paper, on journalism capstone units at the annual JERAA conference at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, 1-5 December 2015 (Cullen 2015).

2.3   Phase 2 (January - August 2016): Validation

I organised a one-day workshop on journalism capstone units at the University of Western Australia on 1 February 2016, with journalism educators from four Perth-based universities: Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, Curtin University and Notre Dame University. Interestingly, none of these universities used the term 'capstone' in their journalism courses. The participants were asked the same four questions as the PWG in the Phase 1 interviews, but the session was conducted as an open forum rather than as questions directed at individual institutions. Journalism capstone units were to be embedded in their journalism programmes from 2017 onward.

In late June 2016, I circulated the first draft of a discussion paper titled *Journalism capstone units in Australian universities* to all of the Fellowship stakeholders for feedback. It included findings based on the face-to-face interviews conducted in Phase 1.

On 27 August 2016, Professor Robyn Quin and I facilitated a meeting of the Project Validation Group (PVG) at the Victoria State Library, in Melbourne, with the following agenda:

- To discuss the feedback and findings on journalism capstone units as collected in Phase 1;
- To discuss and identify—in the context of the AQF level 7 criteria—the skills and knowledge required by students to successfully complete a capstone unit; and
- To examine various models of capstone units and identify possible model(s) appropriate to journalism courses in Australian universities.

Professor Brenda Cherednichenko, Executive Dean (Arts and Education) at Deakin University, was also invited to the proceedings.

2.4   Phase 3 (September 2016 - January 2017): Dissemination

2.4.1 The Fellowship website

I developed the Fellowship website page to showcase resources for journalism capstone units. It will remain live for at least five years.

http://www.capstonecurriculum.com.au/about-capstones/journalism-capstones/

2.4.2 Peer-reviewed publications

Over the course of the Fellowship, I achieved three peer-reviewed publications—in *Pacific Journalism Review* (PJR), *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* (JMCE) and *Asia Pacific Media Educator* (APME) respectively:

- Cullen, T. (2017). Capstone units and the transition from university to professional life. [Australian Journalism Review](). 39(1), 89-99.
- Cullen, T. (2017b) Journalism capstone units based on agreed principles and standards. *Pacific Journalism Review,* (22)2, 172 -184.
- Cullen, T. (2016a) Designing capstone units that demonstrate student skills. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator,* 71(3), 360-370.
- Cullen, T. (2015c) A capstone unit for tertiary journalism programs that aims to facilitate the demonstration of graduate capabilities. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 25 (2), 297-304.

2.4.3 National and international media and communication conference papers

Over the course of the Fellowship, I presented research papers at five national / international media and communication conferences, as follows:
- Cullen, T. (2017a) *Agreed principles, models and skills for capstone units.* Research paper presented at the First World Summit of National Teaching Fellows, Radisson Blu Hotel, Birmingham, England,19th February.
- Cullen, T. (2016b) *Journalism capstone units that demonstrate key research, communication and entrepreneurial skills for new media jobs and markets.* Research paper presented at the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), Leicester University, England, 29th July.
- Cullen, T. (2016c) *Journalism capstone units based on agreed principles and standards.* Research paper presented at the World Journalism Education Congress (WJEC), Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand, 16th July.
- Cullen T. (2016d) *An overview of tertiary journalism capstone units and the need for agreed principles and standards.* Research paper presented at the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) conference, Esplanade Hotel, Fremantle, Australia, 7th July.
- Cullen, T. (2015b) *Capstone units and ways to demonstrate acquired knowledge and skills.* Research paper presented at the Teaching and Learning conference, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup, Australia, 4th November.

2.4.4 Research panels at national education conferences:

Over the course of the Fellowship, I delivered research papers as a panel member at two national education conferences, as follows:

Cullen, T. (2017). Preparing graduates for transition from university to professional life. Research paper presented as part of a panel of experts on student employability at the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) conference. Sydney Convention Centre, Sydney, 29th June.

- Cullen, T. (2017). Capstone curriculum development. Research paper presented as part of a panel of experts on Higher Education Futures at the World Summit of National Teaching Fellows. Birmingham, England, 15th February

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Chapter 3: The Fellowship findings and outputs

3.1   Findings from the interview questions

3.1.1 What do you understand by the term 'capstone unit'?

Generally, the interviewees said that a prime aim of a capstone unit was to improve the employability of the student. This was often achieved through the use of a portfolio that showed various skills such as written, audio, visual, photographic, online and social media skills. Another widely supported view was that a capstone unit should be a third-year unit, and that it should enable students to demonstrate the skills they had acquired over a three-year journalism course. Common phrases used to describe a capstone unit included: "bringing together of skills and knowledge acquired over a three year period", "a full stop on their course", "a throwback to the future", "rounding off their degree" and "making sure they are job ready". These descriptions and understandings resonate with the views of several prominent researchers in the field of capstone research, such as Lee (2015b) who emphasises transition and independence, and McNamara et al. (2012) who highlight the aspect of looking back and also forward:

> [...] an opportunity for final year students to both look back on their undergraduate study in an effort to make sense of what they have accomplished, and to look forward to a professional existence where they can build on that foundation. It is during the capstone experience that students complete the transition from their primarily student identity to embrace the beginning of their professional identity (McNamara et al. 2012).

3.1.2 What type of capstone units do you use?

Lee (2015b) identifies six common capstone models used across disciplines:
- Externally-oriented projects;
- Academic inquiry projects;
- Practice-oriented simulations;
- Practice-based consultancies;
- Task-oriented simulations; and
- Professional placements.

The interviews revealed that there were three types of third-year capstone units in use: internships, newsroom simulations and projects; that is, professional placements, practice-oriented simulations and externally-oriented projects, to use the nomenclature of Lee (2015b). The educators used at least one, and often two or three, capstone unit types for each of their respective journalism courses.

Internships (also referred to as Professional Industry Placements) were the most popular, followed by newsroom simulations and, lastly, projects. The internship usually lasted four

weeks full-time at a media organisation. This involved consultation with the journalism coordinator about the suitability of the placement. It was common practice to select high performing students rather than those who were average or struggling with the course. The newsroom simulation helped students to demonstrate what they had learnt during their three-year undergraduate course. Part of this included a portfolio of published work and achievements. The project required students to cover a week-long event or a local social or political issue. Students were exposed to a wide range of journalistic skills such as interviewing, writing, editing and keeping production deadlines. Critical reflection was considered a key part of the project.

Generally, the interviewees were satisfied that the benefits of a capstone unit far outweighed the negatives. For example, several educators said that the capstone units enabled students to produce portfolios or show reels, which are now basic requirements when students apply for jobs at media organisations. Others described how their students, especially in the internship and newsroom simulation capstone units, had started to think and act like journalists and how they developed a confident and professional approach to their work. They could also identify gaps in their learning. On the negative side, the university timetable often lacked the flexibility to cater for an intensive vocational course, and only RMIT University was able to structure its newsroom simulation unit into a whole day, once a week. Weak students struggled with internships, as industry was keen to employ highly motivated, intelligent and determined students.

3.1.3 What were the underlying principles for the capstone units?

The interviewees stressed the following five principles for an effective journalism capstone experience, but they did not rate them in order of preference:

- Transition to work and professional practice;
- Integration and extension of prior learning;
- Authentic and contextualised experiences;
- Student ownership and independence; and
- Continued development of critical inquiry and creativity.

These principles show close similarities to the list of general principles that Lee (2015b) found in her research on capstone curriculum. She argues that general principles that cater for diverse courses suit a wide variety of disciplinary capstone units. However, it must be noted that not all the interviewees were in full agreement with these five principles, and there is a need for further debate and discussion to arrive at an agreed list.

3.1.4 What disciplinary and professional skills do students need to demonstrate?

In brief, the skills required by journalism students to successfully pass the capstone unit were divided into two sections—disciplinary and professional.

Disciplinary skills:

Disciplinary skills included news writing, audio, online, television, photographic, video, editing, verification, and digital technical skills. Also, the student had to be a team player, possess an extensive social media presence, research and analytical skills, and an ability to publish across platforms. They had to be able to generate story ideas and communicate accurately, vividly and memorably. Several educators added that the ability to generate and pitch ideas to editors was essential, along with highly competent interview skills.

Professional skills:

Several interviewees spoke about the need for ethical practitioners with a solid knowledge of media law, and for journalism students to seek the truth, accuracy, balance and fairness in news reporting. Also, there was a call for a reflective and mindful practitioner who could see the consequences of their professional work.

It is interesting to note that the two lists—disciplinary and professional skills—closely correspond to what the academics and news editors recommended in the Cullen (2014) study. There was broad agreement among both educators and news editors that, at the end of their courses, journalism students should be able to demonstrate research, writing, grammar, digital and social media, video, communication and team skills. The two lists provide what needs to be demonstrated, but there was an inconsistency regarding the exact assessment of these skills. 'Entrepreneurial' was a term constantly repeated by the interviewees, with journalists increasingly generating work opportunities as the world of journalism evolves in the digital age.

3.2   Agreed aims of journalism capstone units

This Fellowship involved an extended discussion as to what was, and should be, the nature of a journalism capstone unit. At issue was whether the capstone unit should be primarily a means of learning new knowledge and skills or, while still a learning experience, a chance for students to apply their mastery and synthesis of the knowledge and skills gained over the course of their degree or major in journalism. There was general agreement that a journalism capstone unit should:

- result in a publishable outcome;
- provide an opportunity to demonstrate core journalism skills; and
- be student-centred, require students to articulate what they wanted to achieve, and how they proposed to achieve it.

3.3   Agreed principles for journalism capstone units

The Project Validation Group agreed on a set of 7 principles, with the understanding that principles provide a guide to the nature and unique importance of the capstone experience in the student journey to graduation and beyond. These principles were similar to the 5

principles mentioned during Phase 1 interviews by the majority of the 30 journalism academics comprising the PWG. However, it was agreed that this list provides clearer content and direction.

Transition:
Assist students to develop a sense of professional identity and support them to manage their career planning and development.

Integration and closure:
Enable students to attain a sense of completion and an understanding of what it means to be a graduate and a global citizen.

Diversity:
Enhance students' capacity to engage with diversity in professional contexts.

Engagement:
Require students to assume active roles and to apply their learning in realistic, authentic and unfamiliar contexts, and to take responsibility for their own work.

Assessment:
Align assessment practice to agreed capstone principles. Ask students to reflect on their own capabilities and performance.

Evaluation:
Regular evaluations contribute to the demonstration of student attainment of discipline learning outcomes.

Skills:
Identity core pivotal journalism skills for demonstration and application—writing, story-telling, digital broadcast competencies across all platforms, professional publishable content, producing to deadline and reflective analysis.

3.4   Agreed models of journalism capstone units

As mentioned earlier, there are three models of journalism capstone units currently used within Australian universities:
- internships (Professional Industry Placements);
- newsroom simulations or other in-house authentic learning experiences, such as publishing in a web-based paper/journal; and
- projects.

The Project Validation Group considered internships to be valuable, but increasingly difficult to secure, of variable quality and non-inclusive. Newsroom simulations offered an authentic learning experience and an opportunity to demonstrate strengths, yet they were resource intensive. Projects were seen to offer scope for platform-neutral and across-platform

journalism practice, plus the opportunity to engage in extended research and analysis. They were also a means by which students could demonstrate course learning outcomes, knowledge, skills and abilities.

In summary, the PVG thought that each of the three models had value and should be retained, perhaps as Capstone 1, Capstone 2 and Capstone 3. There was general agreement that a project unit should be supported by rigorous intended learning outcomes which, while not overly restricting student choice of topic, should ensure that unit outcomes were comparable for all students.

3.5   Agreed list of skills to demonstrate

The range of skills suggested by this Fellowship's Project Working Group and by the 50 news editors in the research report on industry needs and graduate attributes (Cullen, Tanner, Green & O'Donnell, 2014) was seen by the Project Validation Group as comprehensive. Nonetheless, they believed that students would not have to demonstrate every skill— writing, research and analysis were considered the core skills. The PVG noted that the essential journalism skills should be platform-neutral.

Additional suggestions for skills to be added to the list were:
- Audio (to replace the medium-specific 'radio');
- Advanced media literacy skills; and
- Knowledge of the contemporary and emerging media landscape.

Refer to **Appendix B** for the list of agreed skills for journalism capstone units. This list was presented to JERAA for acceptance.

3.6   Challenges

As mentioned earlier, not all of the interviewees were in full agreement with the five principles of a journalism capstone unit, and so there is a need for further debate and discussion to arrive at an agreed list. Also unresolved was whether a capstone unit, or indeed any other unit in the course, should necessarily include skills development related to future employment options; for example, freelance operations, start-up enterprises, contract negotiation and fee setting. Given concerns about a crowded curriculum and the varying policy requirements of the different universities, this matter is probably best left to individual universities to decide.

Part of the Fellowship that involved collaboration with industry did not go according to plan. Initial inquiries to arrange interviews with news editors showed that many felt they had already contributed to the issue of required industry skills in interviews conducted in 2012 and 2013, during the OLT Innovation and Development Grant. They said that they had little to add, and they wanted to wait until the completion of the Fellowship before committing to media coverage of the Fellowship. Therefore, the news editors will receive a copy of this

Final Report and their feedback will be collated and sent to Australian journalism educators. This Final Report will provide news editors with a stronger incentive to report on the activities and outcomes of the Fellowship.

3.7 Success factors

3.7.1 Industry collaboration

Industry's participation in the discussion and consultation process of this Fellowship had two beneficial impacts: improving the 'distant' relationship between academics and industry (Tanner, O'Donnell, Green & Cullen 2014); and revitalising the process of industry accreditation for journalism programmes in Australia, which is currently at a standstill.

3.7.2 JERAA support

JERAA's support, and eventual endorsement, of the Fellowship has been critical to its success. The majority of educators from the 30 Australian universities that offer journalism programmes attend the JERAA annual national conference, making it a practical, proactive and effective dissemination strategy for this Fellowship.

Chapter 4: The Fellowship impact and evaluation

4.1.1 Team members

The Project Working Group (PWG), Project Reference Team (PRT), Expert Fellowship Team (EFT), Project Validation Group (PVG) and the External Evaluator were consulted throughout the Fellowship, from its inception, and played an integral role in its progress.

After this Fellowship, I plan to conduct follow-up workshops at the national journalism education conferences in Newcastle (December 2017) and Hobart (December 2018), to support journalism educators in the (re)design of their capstone units. A monitor group (comprised of members from the WPG and the EFT) will track how many journalism programmes embed the capstone and elicit graduate feedback, to inform continual improvement. This community of practice will enable journalism capstone development to continue beyond this Fellowship, as the various units are implemented and the outcomes are peer-reviewed.

4.1.2 Immediate students

Capstone units, reflecting agreed principles, models and skills, will be embedded in journalism programmes from 2017 onwards. By the end of that year, final year students will experience the benefits of a (re)designed and nationally implemented capstone unit that allows them to demonstrate their skills and capabilities more effectively, thereby increasing their chances of employability in a range of communication and media professions. Through these means, the impact on students will continue beyond the life of the Fellowship, as the resources continue to be implemented and revised.

4.1.3 Spreading the word

The Fellowship's dissemination strategies were vast and multi-dimensional. They included wide consultation with educators and editors in all three project phases, production of peer-reviewed publications, panel discussions and oral presentations at national and international journalism education conferences, continual engagement with professional bodies such as JERAA and WJEC, and production of a Fellowship website.

4.1.4 Narrow opportunistic adoption

My involvement as an Australian Learning and Teaching Fellow (ALTF) has enabled me to partake in the activities and interact with other Fellows on an ongoing basis. Through the Fellows who have agreed to work with me, I am able to share the outcomes and outputs of the Fellowship at the various forums and become part of the academic community that is interested in this aspect of university learning and teaching. These activities enable an impact beyond the life of the Fellowship.

4.1.5 Narrow systemic adoption

Over the course of this Fellowship, numerous participating universities have (re)designed their journalism capstone units, and embedded them into their curricula. Australian journalism graduates will now be enabled to demonstrate that they have acquired agreed skills and competencies for employment in a whole range of digital media and communications industries, aligning with the government's AQF level 7 standards for Bachelor degrees.

4.1.6 Broad opportunistic adoption

News editors who were interviewed in the 2011 OLT Innovation and Development Grant on industry needs and graduate attributes (Tanner, O'Donnell, Green & Cullen 2014) have received the findings and recommendations of this Fellowship, which were endorsed by the JERAA Executive. Initial feedback shows that they fully support the outcomes and do not see a need to add to the list of principles, models or skills.

4.1.7 Broad systemic adoption

The capstone model will also be made available to other disciplines, such as public relations and advertising, especially since communication, social and digital media capabilities are becoming increasingly part of the required skill set for these disciplines. After the Fellowship, a conference paper on its outcomes and the final model will be delivered at the Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) annual conference in Sydney, in November 2017. These systemic measures go beyond participating institutions and will potentially lead to changes for all relevant students.

4.2   External evaluation

Professor Robyn Quin, former Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) at Curtin University, was the external evaluator for this Fellowship. Refer to **Appendix C** for her evaluation report.

4.3   Conclusion

On 17 December 2016, the Fellowship's research outcomes and recommendations—the agreed principles, models and skills—were accepted by the Executive of JERAA for use in journalism programmes in Australian universities. Refer to **Appendix D** for the JERAA letter of endorsement. This support has assisted the (re)design of journalism capstones to align with the government's AQF level 7 standards for Bachelor degrees. Australian journalism graduates are now enabled to demonstrate, to both educators and employers, that they have acquired agreed skills and competencies for employment in a whole range of digital media and communications industries.

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Appendix A

Certification by Deputy Vice-Chancellor

I certify that all parts of the final report for this DET Fellowship provide an accurate representation of the implementation, impact and findings of the project, and that the report is of publishable quality.

Signature: ....
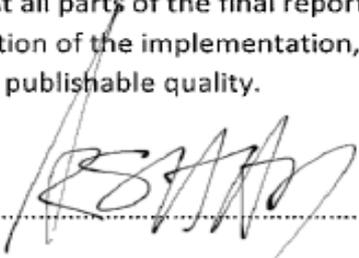
Name: ......Professor Arshad Omari.....................................Date: ....
Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor
11 March 2019

Appendix B

List of agreed principles, models and skills for journalism capstone units in Australian universities

Associate Professor Trevor Cullen
Australian Learning and Teaching Fellow
Edith Cowan University

Introduction

This document presents the findings from an Australian Learning and Teaching Fellowship (ALTF) study conducted from Mid 2015 to late 2016, and seeks endorsement from the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA) Executive members on agreed aims, principles, models and skills, especially in regard to the demonstration of required graduate skills and capabilities. Ultimately, such an agreement will provide strong evidence that journalism programs in Australia are in line with the government's AQF level 7 standards for Bachelor degrees. Moreover, graduates will be enabled to demonstrate evidence to both educators and employers that they have acquired agreed skills and competencies for employment in a whole range of digital media and communications industries.

Background to the study

The concept of capstone units is gaining currency within the Australian Higher Education system with a growing focus on enhancing graduate employability and assuring graduate outcomes. Just over half of the universities in Australia that teach journalism (18 out of 30), embed capstone units in their programs. This ALTF study was divided into three stages. The first stage involved face-to-face interviews with journalism academics at 18 universities in five States across Australia, to discover what type of capstone unit(s) they use, the principles they employ and the skills students need to demonstrate and apply. This data then underwent a validation process to decide on agreed aims, principles, models and skills for journalism capstone units in Australian universities.

Australian Qualification Framework (AQF)

A major factor influencing the growing emphasis of the Australian Higher Education system on capstone units is the government's increasing focus on enhancing graduate employability and assuring graduate outcomes. In fact, the Australian Qualifications Network (AQF) has published statements of what skills and knowledge graduates in Australian universities should achieve when they complete a Level 7 qualification (a Bachelor's degree). The Qualification Standards are a set of **requirements,** in the form of a legislative instrument, which are binding on Higher Education providers.

AQF Level 7 criteria

Summary:
Graduates at this level will have broad and coherent knowledge and skills for professional work and/or further learning.

Knowledge:
Graduates at this level will have broad and coherent theoretical and technical knowledge with depth in one or more disciplines or areas of practice.

Skills:
Graduates at this level will have well-developed cognitive, technical and communication skills to select and apply methods and technologies to:

• <u>analyse</u> and evaluate information to complete a range of activities;

• <u>analyse</u>, generate and transmit solutions to unpredictable and sometimes complex problems;

• <u>transmit</u> knowledge, skills and ideas to others.

Application of skills and knowledge
Graduates at level 7 will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, well-developed judgement and responsibility in contexts that require self-directed work and learning. Furthermore, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) will apply the Threshold Standards, including the Qualification Standards, when deciding whether to grant registration or renew a provider's registration or to accredit courses. It seems sensible, therefore, to ensure journalism capstone units be framed within the context of the AQF summary statements, and that a capstone unit adheres to the standards outlined in the AQF at level 7.

The validation process

Data was collected from face-to-face interviews with more than 30 journalism academics at 18 Australian universities. These universities were chosen either because they teach capstone units or similar subjects without using the term 'capstone'. The main focus of the study was to decide on agreed aims of journalism capstone units, a list of skills to demonstrate and what models to use. To avoid extending the research process with more data collection and discussions, the author selected journalism academics from five universities in Melbourne who were considered representative of the diverse range of the journalism academics in Australia, especially in terms of age and the time spent working as journalists or teachers or both. This group met at the Victoria State Library in late August 2016 to discuss the second stage of the study – the validation process.

The purpose of the meeting was to:

- present feedback and findings on journalism capstone units collected by the author as part of his ALTF study;
- discuss and identify in the context of the AQF level 7 statement, the skills and knowledge required by students to successfully complete a capstone unit;
- examine various models of capstone units and identify possible model(s) appropriate to journalism courses in Australian universities.

1. Agreed aims of journalism capstone units

There was an extended discussion as to what was and should be the nature of a capstone unit. At issue was whether the capstone unit should be primarily a means of learning new knowledge and skills or, while still being a learning experience, be primarily aimed at allowing students to apply their mastery and synthesis of the knowledge and skills gained over the course of their degree or major in journalism.

There was general agreement that a journalism capstone unit should:
- result in a publishable outcome;
- provide an opportunity to demonstrate core journalism skills;
- be student-centred and require students to articulate what they wanted to achieve and how they proposed to achieve their aim.
-

2. Agreed principles for Journalism capstone units

The validation group agreed on a set of 7 principles, with the understanding that principles provide a guide to the nature and unique importance of the capstone experience in the student journey to graduation and beyond. These principles were seen as similar to the five principles mentioned by the majority of 30 journalism academics in face-to-face interviews. However, it was agreed that this list provides clearer content and direction.

Transition:
Assist students to develop a sense of professional identity and support them to manage their career planning and development.

Integration and closure:
Enable students to attain a sense of completion and an understanding of what it means to be a graduate and a global citizen.

Diversity:
Enhance students' capacity to engage with diversity in professional contexts.

Engagement:
Require students to assume active roles and to apply their learning in realistic, authentic and unfamiliar contexts, and to take responsibility for their own work.

Assessment:
Align assessment practice to agreed capstone principles. Ask students to reflect on their own capabilities and performance.

Evaluation:
Regular evaluations contribute to the demonstration of student attainment of discipline learning outcomes.

Skills:
Identity core pivotal journalism skills for demonstration and application – writing, storytelling, digital broadcast competencies across all platforms, professional publishable content, producing to deadline and reflective analysis.

3. Agreed models of journalism capstone units

There are three models of journalism capstone units currently used within Australian universities:

- an industry placement
- a newsroom simulation or other in-house authentic learning experiences such as publishing in a web-based paper/journal
- a journalism project

The validation group considered the industry placement to be valuable but increasingly difficult to secure, of variable quality and non-inclusive. The newsroom simulation offered an authentic learning experience and an opportunity to demonstrate strengths. At the same time, it was resource intensive.

The journalism project

This was seen to offer scope for platform neutral and across-platform journalism practice and the opportunity to engage in extended research and analysis. Also, it was seen as a means by which students could demonstrate course learning outcomes, knowledge, skills and abilities. In summary, the validation group thought each of the models had value and should be retained, perhaps as Capstone 1 and Capstone 2. There was general agreement that a project unit should be supported by rigorous intended learning outcomes which, while not overly restricting student choice of topic, should ensure that unit outcomes were comparable for all students.

4. <u>Agreed list of skills to demonstrate</u>

The range of skills suggested by 30 journalism academics in the 2016 OLT Fellowship project, and from 50 news editors in the 2014 OLT research report on industry needs and graduates attributes, was seen by the validation group as comprehensive but believed that students would not have to demonstrate every skill with writing, research and analysis as being core skills. It was suggested that any skills list should make it clear that the essential journalism skills must be platform neutral.

Additional suggestions for skills to be added to the list were:

- Audio (to replace the medium specific radio)
- Advanced media literacy skills
- Knowledge of the contemporary and emerging media landscape.

Unresolved was whether a capstone unit, or indeed any other unit in the course should necessarily include skills development related to future employment options, for example, freelance operations, start-up enterprises, contract negotiation and fee setting. Given concerns about a crowded curriculum and the varying policy requirements of the different universities, this matter is probably best left to individual universities to decide. Please view the list on the last page.

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Contact details:

Dr. Trevor Cullen
Professor of Journalism
Australian Learning and Teaching Fellow
Edith Cowan University| Mount Lawley
Western Australia | WA 6050
T: 08 6304 6354| **m**: 0404 173 352
W: http://www.capstonecurriculum.com.au/about-capstones/journalism-capstones/

Educators are encouraged to select from this list of agreed skills

1. Disciplinary skills:

- Story telling skills
- Writing/grammar skills
- Ability to produce to deadline
- Create content of a professional publishable standard
- Generate story ideas
- Ability to pitch ideas
- Edit
- Verification skills
- Extensive social media presence/branding

2. Skills across all platforms

- Audio
- Video
- Photography
- Broadcast in various formats
- Ability to publish across platforms

2. Professional skills

- Ethical practitioner
- Seek truth, accuracy, balance and fairness
- Mindful practitioner – reflects on consequences
- Knowledge and understanding of media law
- Media literacy skills
- Knowledge of the contemporary and emerging media landscape
- Self development skills
- Resourcefulness and resilience

3. Personal skills:

- Good oral and communication skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Team player

4. Entrepreneurial skills –

- Build and sustain audiences across platforms

5. Research and analytical skills -

- How to learn, think and problem solve.

Appendix C

External Evaluator's report

Independent evaluation report for the Australian Teaching and Learning Fellowship: "A capstone unit for journalism programmes to facilitate the demonstration of graduate attributes"

Fellow: Associate Professor Trevor Cullen

Evaluator: Professor Robyn Quin

Date: December 2016/

As the external evaluator for this project I have been involved from its commencement in discussion with the investigator as to its aims, approach and strategies for dissemination. As well as some informal communication, we met on three occasions and I attended the validation workshop in Melbourne in August 17, 2016. The in-person attendance gave me the opportunity to see how well stakeholders accepted the findings of the study and the extent to which they supported the principles developed for capstone journalism units.

The investigator

Associate Professor Trevor Cullen has been the head of the journalism program at ECU for the past ten years. It is a strong program and was rated as one of the best performing journalism programs in the Graduate Careers Australia reports of 2010 and 2010. He has been recognized as an innovator and an excellent teacher winning both university and national awards for the quality of his teaching.

He came to this particular project with a comprehensive knowledge of journalism curriculum and teaching approaches across Australia. He completed in 2012-13 an audit of journalism curriculum at both undergraduate and post-graduate level in all universities teaching the subject as part of an OLT Innovation and development Grant: "Graduate outcomes and curriculum renewal: Balancing tertiary expectations and industry needs in a changing environment.

He is an active contributor to both journalism education and research into the teaching of journalism practice. His long and fruitful engagement with the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia has ensured that he has a wide network of academics and professional journalists with whom he could engage on this project. This network has been invaluable in providing feedback and promoting engagement with the project.

Project aims

The bold and ambitious aim of the fellowship was to produce an agreed statement of outcomes and standards which might usefully inform the development of capstone units in various types of journalism studies (degrees and majors). I say it was a bold and ambitious aim because:

a) Such a project is an intervention into curriculum. It attempts to define standards and outcomes within in a discipline where none currently exist in any codified manner. Academics hold dear their right to determine the curriculum of their discipline.

b) Getting academics to agree on what constitutes necessary knowledge (which must be the basis for defining standards and what a graduate must be able to do and know) in any discipline is an almost impossible task.

The investigator was well aware of the difficulties of identifying standards in a discipline that must be met by a graduate. He cites in one of his papers the Office of Teaching and Learning funded project "Discipline Network: Journal, Media and Communication which did not achieve in full its aim of developing discipline standards for journalism, public relations, media and communication studies because of the widely differing views of educators from these disciplines.

There exists substantial research into how disciplinary knowledge is constructed and curriculum acquires its form. It is explored in detail in the works of Michael Young (1971), Basil Bernstein (1971) Michael Apple (1979, 1982), Michel Foucault (1977), Pusey and Young (1979) and Henry Giroux (1981, 1983, 1992) and Bill Green (1993). Essentially, there are two schools of thought as to how disciplinary knowledge is constructed. There is the top-down theory of knowledge production that argues that "how a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control" (Bernstein, 1971, p. 47). A different model of knowledge production is described by Foucault as operating through the "micro-physics of power" (1977, p.26). This approach to understanding how disciplinary knowledge is constructed recognises that In all academic disciplines knowledge production happens in such formal and authoritative sites as academic conferences, journals and published research, but that there exist other locations for the production of disciplinary knowledge such as the individual academic drawing on his/her experiential knowledge, employers' feedback and their desire (or lack of) for graduates from specific programs, collegial networks and student demands.

The investigator has approached his project in the Foucauldian manner and mined the knowledge and experiences of those actually teaching the discipline of journalism to formulate a set of statements about what a graduate in journalism must know and be able to do. The strength of this approach is that it engages a wide group of invested parties, is

inclusive and is likely to have an impact because the outcomes of the project belong to those teaching the subject, not the researcher.

The bottom up approach adopted by the investigator to the task of making a curriculum intervention – a statement of standards and outcomes, is time consuming, a necessarily iterative process and requires excellent communication and negotiation skills. In this instance the task was further complicated by the diverse backgrounds of the university journalism educators. Some but not all had a professional history as a journalist and those that had been journalists prior to academia came from different areas – print, television, radio, for profit and not-for-profit employment areas, national and local media. The investigator was not dealing with a homogenous group of academics.

Structure of the investigation

The investigation into agreed standards and principles for capstone units in journalism was constructed as a conventional three stage inquiry: an examination of the current situation; an analysis of the data collected; the development of relevant and appropriate resources.

In stage 1 the investigator Associate Professor Cullen interviewed 30 journalism academics at 16 universities across five states. The aim of the interviews was to find out what journalism academics understood by the term 'capstone unit', how they structured the unit, the content they covered and the outcomes students completing a capstone unit were required to demonstrate.

Although more time consuming than a simple survey the advantages of conducting interviews are that:

(i)   More complex and richer data is generated;
(ii)   The investigator gets a deeper insight into the participants' individual understanding of the issue at hand;
(iii)   Contextual factors can be identified;
(iv)   Participants are usually more responsive to a face to face interview.

In the view of the evaluator the approach to collecting the data was appropriate and effective.

 The material collected during this stage of the project revealed two points of general agreement across the sixteen universities and a very large number of different practices, structures, content and assessment in capstone units. The mutually agreed points were that capstone units should enhance the employability of graduates and that such units should be taken in the student's final year. The interviews showed that capstone units varied hugely in length, weighting, content and assessment. Some were industry placement units, some were internships, some were news room or other types of simulations, some were projects for external bodies, some were research projects, some were practice-based consultancies. In short, it emerged that capstone units were not comparable across the sector.

As the evaluator, I was struck by the fact that the academics did not appear to be in accord as to whether the capstone unit should be one in which students learnt new skills and knowledge or one in which they synthesized and applied the knowledge and skills gained throughout the course of their studies. If agreement on this matter cannot be reached the successful completion of a capstone unit does not tell an employer much about a students' ability. This issue is raised again later in this report.

The early data collection pointed to an emergent trend in journalism courses, that of a need to embed entrepreneurial skills into the courses. The need to provide students with skills in entrepreneurship along with traditional journalism skills is being increasingly recognized by journalism educators as they see graduates needing to generate their own work. This could be a challenge for many educators whose professional experience did not encompass enterprise in the sense of generating employment for self.

Stage 2 of the investigation involved analysis of data and its validation. The investigator analysed the data collected in stage one on current capstone units, developed tentative statements on the aims of capstone units, described the necessary skills to be demonstrated and designed possible models of the where the capstone unit(s) might fit in with the degree course. Associate Professor Cullen then faced the issue of how to validate his findings. A common method of validating the data is to send it out to stakeholders and ask for further input. The investigator and I, as the evaluator, discussed this matter at length and decided on a different approach.

Academics are busy people, under constant pressure to maintain their teaching effectiveness and increase their research output. Journalism educators are no different and like all academics expected to do ever more with constrained resources. In my experience, despite the perceived value of a project such as this, stakeholders can become resistant to providing feedback if it means more work for them. I have seen very good research projects fall over when stakeholders simply did not have the time to engage with the material and provide feedback. But unless the stakeholders do engage with, criticize and elaborate on the findings then there is no validation.

Rather than distributing the findings to all those who had participated in the data collection phase and ask for feedback the investigator adopted a targeted approach. He approached journalism academics from five Victorian universities, sufficiently representative of journalism educators Australia wide (professional vs teaching background) and conducted a full day workshop with the aim of validating the data, developing statements of outcomes (skills and knowledge) of successful completion of a capstone unit and deciding on appropriate models of capstone units.

The validation approach adopted was, I believe, effective in producing real and desired outcomes, namely:

a) that a journalism capstone unit should produce a publishable outcome, a means by which students can generate core skills and be student-centred.

b) six principles to guide the design of journalism capstone experiences – transition, integration, diversity, engagement, assessment, evaluation and skills.

The validation group declined to settle on a single model for a capstone unit and considered industry placement, simulation or authentic learning experience and journalism research project of equal value.

In the view of the evaluator there was insufficient, convincing evidence presented to support the claim that all three models are of comparable value. Indeed, evidence was presented that some industry placements are of much less value to the student than others, that the achievement of learning outcomes within an industry placement are difficult to measure, that student outcomes across different placements are not comparable. It is recommended that further examination be made of the value to the student and the comparability of learning outcomes of industry placements in journalism.

In addition, the validation process did not result in a statement as to the need or otherwise to include studies in entrepreneurship and enterprise in the journalism curriculum. Although the data gathered in the interview stage showed that employment related skills were a matter of concern for journalism educators the project has not resulted in a firm statement as to what skills should be taught, by whom and in what context. Further work could usefully be undertaken in this area given both the Commonwealth's and universities focus on graduate employability.

Evidence of Impact

For a research project to have an impact people need to know the findings, be able to access the relevant supporting information and then use the information to make changes to their own practices. The investigator has striven for maximum impact by engaging the support of the peak journalism education body in Australia.

The final part of the validation process was the submission of the statement of principles to the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia. Acceptance of such by this influential, peak journalism education body is critical to ensuring that the project has an impact on curriculum design and teaching practice in journalism education in Australia.

The project outcomes have received support from the JERAA. The letter of endorsement is reproduced below in part:

 "To whom it may concern,

The Executive members of the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA) have accepted the report and recommendations for the use of journalism capstone

units in Australian universities prepared by Associate Professor Trevor Cullen, Head of journalism at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia.

As the current President of JERAA, I am happy to endorse this important study and report by Associate Prof Cullen, which was sponsored and supported by the Australian Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT)."

The project's report is available on the JERAA website which ensures comprehensive dissemination to education schools across Australia.

Engagement

The investigator has sought full engagement from stakeholders through face to face meetings, email communication, workshops and conference presentations. The stakeholder response has been positive, of value and early indications are that the outcomes of the project are having an impact on practice.

"Thank you so much for including me in this group. You have done terrific work on this project so far and I look forward to the next stage."

"Awesome work, by the way"

"Thanks very much for this Trevor and congratulations on your progress to date.
The documents and guidance you have provided to us about journalism capstone units have been extremely valuable as we have been working on our new project unit. "

Conclusion

It has been my honour to act as evaluator for this project. As such I have been pleased to discuss strategies with the investigator, monitor his progress, read the published outcomes and observe in person the validation process. I have been impressed by the way in which Associate Professor Cullen has been able to synthesize the data and achieve agreement on core principles for capstone journalism experiences for students.

As mentioned in the body of this report there is more useful work to be done on the issue of whether a capstone experience should be primarily either a learning experience or an opportunity to demonstrate accomplishments; on minimum standards for an industry placement capstone and on the desirability of teaching entrepreneurial skills in the context of a changed market place.

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Appendix D

List of achievements

Face-to-face Interviews at 18 universities across Australia

Face-to-face interviews with the Heads of journalism programs at 18 universities across five States in Australia. The universities included:

1. Swinburne University
2. Monash University
3. Melbourne University
4. RMIT University
5. University of Canberra
6. University of Sydney
7. University of Wollongong
8. University of South Australia
9. University of Queensland
10. Curtin University
11. Murdoch University
12. University of Newcastle
13. University of Technology, Sydney
14. Charles Sturt University
15. Queensland University of Technology
16. University of Adelaide
17. University of Wollongong
18. La Trobe University

Peer reviewed publications

- Cullen, T. (2017). Capstone units and the transition from university to professional life. [Australian Journalism Review](). 39(1), 89-99.
- Cullen, T. (2017) Journalism capstone units based on agreed principles and standards. *Pacific Journalism Review* (22) 2 p172 -1 84.
- Cullen, T. (2016). Designing capstone units that demonstrate student skills. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator,* 71(3) 360-370.
- Cullen, T. (2015). A capstone unit for tertiary journalism programs that aims to facilitate the demonstration of graduate capabilities. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 25 (2) 297-304.

National and international media and communication conference papers

- Cullen, T. (2017). *Agreed principle, models and skills for capstone units.* Research paper delivered at the First World Summit of National Teaching Fellows, Radisson Blu Hotel, Birmingham, England, on 19th February.
- Cullen, T. (2016). *Journalism capstone units that demonstrate key research, communication and entrepreneurial skills for new media jobs and markets.* Research paper presented at the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), Leicester University, England, July 29th.
- Cullen, T. (2016). *Journalism capstone units based on agreed principles and standards.* Research paper at the World Congress of Journalism Educators (WJEC), Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand, July 16th.
- Cullen T. (2016). *An overview of tertiary journalism capstone units and the need for agreed principles and standards.* Research paper delivered at the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) conference at the Esplanade Hotel, Fremantle, Western Australia, July 7th.
- Cullen, T, (2015). Delivered a research paper on *Capstone units and ways to demonstrate acquired knowledge and skills.* Teaching and Learning conference, Joondalup, Perth, WA, 4 November, 2015.

Research panels at national education conferences

Cullen, T. (2017). Preparing graduates for transition from university to professional life. Research paper presented as part of a panel of experts on student employability at the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) conference. Sydney Convention Centre, Sydney, 29th June.

- Cullen, T. (2017). Capstone curriculum development. Research paper presented as part of a panel of experts on Higher Education Futures at the World Summit of National Teaching Fellows. Birmingham, England, 15th February
- Cullen, T. (2016). Panel - *Why we haven't finished with employability.* Research paper delivered as a panel member at the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) conference at the Esplanade Hotel, Fremantle, Western Australia, July 6th.
- Cullen, T. (2015). Panel - *A capstone unit for journalism programs to facilitate the demonstration of graduate capabilities.* Research paper delivered as part of a national panel at the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia conference at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, New South Wales, 2nd December.

National Endorsement

The President and Executive committee of the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA) endorsed the outcomes of the National Teaching Fellowship - agreed principles, models and skills for journalism capstone units in Australian universities. http://www.jeraa.org.au/research/279/

Webpage:

http://www.capstonecurriculum.com.au/about-capstones/journalism-capstones/

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Hauhart, R., & Grahe, J. (2015). *Designing and teaching undergraduate capstone courses*. San
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Contact details:

Dr. Trevor Cullen

Professor of Journalism

Australian Learning and Teaching Fellow

Edith Cowan University| Mount Lawley

Western Australia | WA 6050

T: 08 6304 6354| **m**: 0404 173 352

Appendix E

JERAA letter of endorsement

Journalism Education
and Research Association
of Australia

www.jeraa.org.au
ABN 15 600 195 857   Incorporated in South Australia A39791

JERAA President:
Prof Matthew Ricketson
matthew.ricketson@canberra.edu.au
JERAA Co-Secretary:
Dr Kayt Davies
k.davies@ecu.edu.au
JERAA Treasurer:
Jolyon Sykes
jolyonsykes@bigpond.com
Telephone: 02 4268 2253

To whom it may concern,

The Executive members of the Journalism Education and Research Association of Australia (JERAA) have accepted the report and recommendations for the use of journalism capstone units in Australian universities prepared by Associate Professor Trevor Cullen, Head of journalism at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia.

As the current President of JERAA, I am happy to endorse this important study and report by Associate Prof Cullen, which was sponsored and supported by the Australian Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT).

The report, which draws on interviews conducted with journalism academics at 16 universities across Australia in 2015 and 2016, includes agreed aims, principles, models and skills for the use of journalism capstone units. The report is available on the Association's website at: http://jeaa.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Ricketson,

President, JERAA
and
Professor of Journalism
University of Canberra.