Australian journalism students’ motivations and job expectations: evidence from a survey across six universities

Folker Hanusch

Abstract

The value of tertiary journalism education is an often hotly debated topic among journalism educators and in the industry. Yet the voices of students are often not heard in these debates. For example, we know relatively little about why young people decide to study journalism, what area of journalism they want to work in and what they are looking for in a job. To shed more light on the student perspective, this paper reports on a survey of 320 undergraduate journalism students at six Australian universities. The results show that only a minority actually want to work in news journalism, while most prefer entertainment-focused areas. Students are motivated mainly by a love of writing and because they are attracted to journalism as a profession. In terms of job characteristics, they are interested in their own career progression, but also the extent to which they can provide a public service.

Introduction

The ways in which Australian journalists are educated has been a topic of much debate for some time, notably during the so-called “media wars” at the turn of the millennium (Turner, 2000) and more recently again during newspaper coverage following the Federal Government’s Independent Inquiry into the Media and Media Regulation (see Stewart, 2012). Typically in Australia, but also globally, such debates revolve around whether the model of educating journalists predominantly at universities is providing students with the skills necessary for practising journalism (Deuze, 2006; Reese & Cohen, 2000; Turner, 2000; see also Obijiofor & Hanusch, 2011, pp. 80-83 for a global overview). The most recent controversy in Australia saw some industry figures argue that journalism programs were failing to equip students with relevant skills and were producing graduates critical of the environment in which they wanted to work. Some also accused journalism programs of dishonesty in that they enrolled many more students than there were jobs in journalism (Christensen, 2012; Stewart, 2012).
Not surprisingly, the education of journalists has received significant scholarly attention. A recent analysis of articles published in *Australian Journalism Review* between 2000 and 2010 showed journalism education was the most frequently discussed topic during those 11 years (Hanusch et al., 2011), echoing similar evidence from an earlier period (Richards, 1997). Of concern in many of such articles has been whether journalism programs adequately prepare students for work in the industry, exhibiting a desire to produce effective future journalists.

Curiously, such debates have often been led by scholars, educators and the industry, with little input by those who are undergoing such an education. Research on journalism education in Australia has rarely examined the motivations of students for studying journalism or what they are looking for in a future job. Yet such knowledge could help journalism programs better understand the student body and use the information in reflecting some of the students’ needs. This paper aims to contribute to the debate on journalism education in Australia by providing empirical evidence gained from a survey of 320 journalism students at six Australian universities across four states which examined their motivations for undertaking a degree and the importance they place on a variety of job characteristics, as well as their satisfaction with journalism programs.

**Journalism students’ motives and expectations**

Holding a tertiary qualification in journalism has become an increasingly important attribute for journalists around the world, with recent evidence showing that the number of university-educated journalists has risen in many countries over the past decade (Weaver & Willnat, 2012). This has also been the case in Australia, where in the early 1990s only 35 per cent of journalists had a university degree (Henningham, 1996). Today, this number has risen to around 70 to 80 per cent (Hanusch, 2008; Josephi & Richards, 2012). While not all of those have actually studied journalism or communication, those who have represent at least half of graduates, highlighting the important role that journalism programs play in providing the practitioners of the future.

One issue of particular relevance to the most recent debates has been whether universities are deceiving students by enrolling many more of them than there are jobs. Evidence has existed for quite some time that only around one-third of journalism graduates end up working in journalism (for example, Patching, 1996; Green & McIlwaine, 1999). Yet far from all journalism students actually want to work in mainstream news media, with O’Donnell (1999) pointing out that journalism degrees also prepare students for successful careers in areas such as public relations, marketing and advertising, as well as commercial services. Recent evidence from Australian graduate surveys supports this, with 40 per cent of graduates working in communication services and 12 per cent in advertising or public relations (Christensen, 2012). A British survey also found that only 75 per cent of arriving journalism students were sure they wanted to work in journalism, with 23 per cent saying “maybe” and 1 per cent “definitely not” (Hanna & Sanders, 2007). Among students completing their degree, the percentage of those sure they wanted to work in the industry had fallen to 53 per cent, the number of those responding “maybe” had risen to 38 per cent and those saying “definitely not” constituted 9 per cent. In addition, debates over employment prospects often employ a narrow view, with only mainstream media organisations taken into account as employers. However, some have pointed out that there are actually many more job opportunities in journalism beyond “big media” (Cokley et al., 2011). Official statistics may shed additional light on this issue, with the most recent available data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) identifying 18,704 persons in the category of journalists and related professionals. Even if one excludes radio and television presenters, technical writers and copywriters, this still leaves 15,178 people who work as newspaper or periodical editors, print, radio or television journalists, program directors or as “journalists and other writers”. Evidence from research and industry estimates consistently puts the number of journalists employed in Australian media organisations at 7000-9000 (Christensen, 2012; Cokley et al., 2012; MEAA, 2009),
which demonstrates that differing definitions of what counts as journalism or who is a journalist may play a role. The fact there is no clear, universal definition of journalism may thus be at the heart of the issue (Zelizer, 2004). The arrival of online publishing, for example, has opened numerous opportunities for different types of journalism that may not traditionally be counted as part of the journalistic workforce. Nevertheless, because of the difficulty of establishing employment outcomes of journalism graduates, we still know relatively little about where graduates end up after their degree. What has also been lacking in debates about large enrolments in journalism courses is why students study journalism in the first place, what type of journalism they want to work in and what characteristics they are looking for in a future job.

Despite the focus on the education provided to Australian journalism students, the students themselves have rarely been the subject of thorough analysis. O’Donnell (2006) has noted that journalism students have mostly received attention only in terms of whether a journalism degree should be a requirement for entry into the industry. Australia is not unique in this regard, as studies of journalism students have been rare in many countries around the world. Some national surveys exist from countries and regions including Britain, China, Greece, Russia, Scandinavia, Spain and the US (Bjornsen et al., 2007; Frith & Meech, 2007; Hanna & Sanders, 2007; Hovden et al., 2009; Nygren et al., 2010; Plaisance, 2007; Sanders et al., 2008; Spyridou & Veglis, 2008; Wu & Weaver, 1998), but these have often been undertaken in isolation, rather than as sustained comparative efforts. Nevertheless, there has been some examination of students’ motivations for embarking on a degree in journalism.

In a pioneering effort, Boyd-Barrett (1970) surveyed British journalism students about their motivations for wanting to become journalists. He found only 1 per cent wanted to provide a public service, while 35 per cent were interested in the non-routine, non-conventional and sociable nature of journalism. In the US, Becker et al.’s (1987) study of journalism students at three universities found the vast majority were looking for an opportunity for originality/initiative, with a third seeing their job’s value to the community as very important, and just over one-fifth considering the level of pay as very important.

Splichal and Sparks’ (1994) global survey of students in 22 countries found that a combined 51.1 per cent of 1820 surveyed students wanted to work in human interest or culture, arts and social science rounds, while only 21.2 per cent wanted to work in political journalism. A further 9 per cent wanted to work in sports journalism. Considering that many journalism programs tend to focus on hard news journalism, there may thus be a misalignment between what journalism schools provide and what students are interested in. When asked about their motives for studying journalism, two-thirds of the students surveyed by Splichal and Sparks (1994) said they did so because they liked journalism as a profession, four out of 10 said they had a talent for writing, and just over one-quarter said they would like to travel. Just over one-fifth said they did so because of the chance of changing society, while only 4.5 per cent said their decision was based on the good salaries in journalism (percentages add up to more than 100 because students could tick multiple answers).

Hanna and Sanders’ (2007) study more than a decade later similarly found that the majority of British students embarked on their degree because they thought journalism would suit their personality or was desirable, satisfying or interesting. A love of writing was noted by around 27 per cent as the main reason for wanting to be a journalist. Public service ideals, either expressed more generally or specifically in terms of wanting reform or to change society, campaign or investigate, were noted by a combined 16 per cent, while, once again, good income was mentioned by less than 2 per cent. In fact, Hanna and Sanders (2007) found that British students who by the end of their degree were either “maybe” or “definitely not” going to work in journalism most commonly cited low pay as the reason for their decision. In terms of the area of journalism that students wanted to work in, we can see a predilection for feature and lifestyle rounds, as well as
sport. Less than 30 per cent of students said they wanted to work in hard news journalism, while more than 40 per cent preferred feature or lifestyle areas. Almost 20 per cent wanted to work in sports journalism.

Hovden et al.’s (2009) study of journalism students in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden found that the most commonly cited motive related to the variety and lively work that journalism provided. They argued that motivations could be divided into three groups: practical, idealistic and personal motives, with students in all four countries typically displaying a mix of practical and idealistic motives, such as wanting to have a varied and lively job with freedom and independence, as well as fighting injustice and working with political issues. Personal motives such as status and pay played only a minor role, leading Hovden et al. (2009, p. 154) to argue that “this points to a generation of journalism students who are motivated to make a difference by working in the picture of the classical fourth estate role of the press, while at the same time being motivated by the pragmatic everyday features of journalism”. Compared with the evidence from the Splichal and Sparks (1994) and Hanna and Sanders (2007) studies, it would appear Nordic journalism students displayed a higher propensity for public service ideals, the reason for which may arguably lie in the Nordic countries’ more pronounced public service-oriented media systems (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

In Australia, studies of journalism students’ views have tended to focus on individual universities. For example, Splichal and Sparks’ (1994) included 24 students from the University of Technology, Sydney, but due to the small sample size, the results of the largely quantitative survey cannot be considered for Australia alone. In a larger study, Alysen and Oakham (1996) surveyed 130 Deakin University journalism students, asking them about their motivations for undertaking their degree and their views of the profession more generally. In an open-ended question, they asked students why they had decided to study journalism, with most responding that they did so for the vocational opportunities, and a smaller number saying they enjoyed writing or wanted to improve their skills. Some of the responses in terms of vocational opportunities included a desire to influence society, to have power, to pursue the truth or to be a mediator between news makers and the general public. Most commonly, students thought that a career in journalism would be exciting, demanding or challenging, pressurised or stressful, as well as satisfying. Students’ views of the profession more generally, however, saw Alysen and Oakham (1996, p. 50) conclude that “we are facing a student body awash in a sea of stereotypes and superficial understandings of the profession they allegedly want to enter” (Alysen & Oakham, 1996, p. 50). Alysen’s (1998) subsequent study, which re-interviewed students in their final year, found their educational experience had changed their views on some aspects of the profession, such as pay rates, chances of securing a job and ethical issues, but they still displayed some of the misconceptions and stereotypes they held at the start of their degree.

In 2001, O’Donnell (2006) conducted individual focus sessions with 20 journalism students and graduates from the University of Technology, Sydney, examining, among other things, their expectations about a career in journalism, their ideas about core skills and the relevance of journalism education in preparation for the workforce. She found that students had quite different career expectations and goals, arguing that “not all those who aspire to work in journalism seek entry-level employment in a newsroom, a general level of competence across a broad range of news gathering and reporting skills, or a life-long career in journalism” (O’Donnell, 2006, p. 28). Hence, she questioned the dominant notion that journalism education should focus on entry-level requirements in mainstream newsrooms, even though many journalism students may not be aspiring to such a position. Grenby et al.’s (2009) survey of 444 high-school students interested in embarking on a degree in journalism found that students had some realistic expectations of their prospective career, but also some serious misconceptions. While they were aware that journalism was deadline and current events focused, time consuming and stressful, they also thought it was full of travel opportunities.
What becomes clear from the above review of the literature on students’ motives for studying journalism and their expectations of their career is that in a number of countries around the world, the variable and potentially exciting nature of journalistic work ranks highly, while public service notions are somewhat less important and the level of pay even less so. Yet we know relatively little about journalism students’ views in the Australian context, as the small number of studies that have been undertaken were conducted only at individual universities or employed qualitative methods. Thus, it is difficult to extrapolate from these findings to the wider student body and to quantify which of the motives are the most commonly held, as well as what some of the internal differences in the student body may be.

Methodology

Based on the literature review discussed above, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1: What are journalism students’ motivations for studying their degree?

RQ2: What are the job characteristics that students regard as the most important?

Questionnaires were administered to students at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Griffith University in Brisbane, Monash University’s Latrobe Valley campus, Queensland University of Technology, University of South Australia and University of the Sunshine Coast. This study was part of a pilot project across seven countries, and universities were selected in order to represent a variety of states. An important criterion was the willingness of collaborators who would administer the questionnaires in their classes. Only students enrolled in undergraduate journalism courses at Australian universities were surveyed. Postgraduate students were excluded, in line with the wider study requirements. Questionnaires were administered in hardcopy in class during Semester 2, 2011, either during tutorials or in lectures, with the aim of reaching as many students as possible.

The survey attracted a total of 320 valid responses, with 82 of those (25.6 per cent of the sample) from ECU, 56 (17.5 per cent) from Griffith, 40 (12.5 per cent) from Monash, 19 (5.9 per cent) from QUT, 45 (14.1 per cent) from UniSA and 78 (24.4 per cent) from USC. Two-thirds of the sample were women (66.9 per cent), reflecting previous evidence of female-dominated journalism programs in Australia and overseas (Alysen & Oakham, 1996; Becker et al., 2008; Densem, 2006; Grenby et al., 2009; Putnis et al., 2002; Splichal & Sparks, 1994). The median age of students was 20, with just over half (50.5 per cent) having attended a private high school, and 77.2 per cent born in Australia. The sample included a large number of first-in-family students, in line with Putnis et al.’s (2002) analysis of Australian communication and media studies students, with 49.4 per cent of students reporting that neither of their parents had completed a university education. Four out of 10 respondents (40.3 per cent) were in their first year of study at the time of the survey, 27 per cent in their second year, 28.3 per cent in their third year, as well as 4.4 per cent who were in their fourth year of study. Students’ political views reflect general evidence of journalists’ views, with 40.5 per cent stating their views were at least somewhat left of centre and 25.5 stating they were right of centre. Another 34 per cent identified as middle of the road.

In order to examine students’ motivations, students were presented with a list of 12 items and asked to identify the item that played the most important role in their decision to study journalism. These items were partly based on Splichal and Sparks’ (1994) work. Further, students were asked to identify their favourite area of journalism and communication employment, as this was deemed an additional motivator, particularly in terms of whether they wanted to work in news or entertainment journalism, or outside of journalism. To gauge students’ views on a variety of job characteristics (based on Splichal & Sparks, 1994), they were asked to rate each of 16 characteristics of professional life in terms of how important each was or would be in judging any job in
Results and discussion

Analysis of students’ primary area of interest shows that only a minority actually want to work in hard news. Only 36.6 per cent would like to work in news journalism for the rest of their career, while 42.5 per cent would prefer to work in entertainment journalism. A further 17.2 per cent want to work in public relations and another 3.8 per cent in teaching and research. This demonstrates that while a majority of almost 80 per cent are planning on working in journalism, not every student actually has this goal. Further, only one in three want to work in traditional news journalism, a finding which mirrors evidence elsewhere (Hanna & Sanders, 2007; Splichal & Sparks, 1994) and one which can add to discussions about the role of journalism programs, mentioned earlier, in providing the journalists of the future. The data here seem to suggest that a clear majority want to work in journalism, but the fact most want to work outside hard news shows a predilection for the softer types of journalism. Nevertheless, students are somewhat pragmatic about their chances, with 46.6 per cent believing they will begin their career in news journalism upon graduation, while only 29.7 per cent think they will start out in entertainment journalism. It should be noted that the distinction between news and entertainment journalism was made here to reflect the wider study requirements in examining journalism students across seven countries. Future studies should distinguish further between the various types of rounds in journalism in order to better ascertain what kinds of journalism students are actually interested in, as the simple dichotomy between news and entertainment may have been confusing for some students.

In terms of whether students want to work in news or entertainment journalism for the rest of their professional careers, an interesting gender gap can be found, with men much more interested in news and women more interested in entertainment, supporting some of the literature that sees women favouring softer types of journalism, while men favour hard news (van Zoonen, 1998). Of the male respondents, 58.2 per cent wanted to work in news journalism, with only 41.8 per cent favouring entertainment journalism. This was almost reversed with women, 59.6 per cent of whom wanted to work in entertainment journalism and only 40.4 per cent in news journalism. Using a chi-square test, this difference is statistically significant $\chi^2(1, N=250)=6.95$, $p<.01$, with Cramer’s $V=.17$ indicating a weak association.

In contrast to Hanna and Sanders’ (2007) findings, which showed a considerable drop in the number of students who said they definitely wanted to work in journalism by the time they reached their final year, there was only a marginal drop in Australian students. While 81.8 per cent of first-year students identified news or entertainment journalism as their preferred area of work for the rest of their career, 74.5 per cent of final-year students did so.

Regardless of warnings about the impending death of newspapers, 40.3 per cent of respondents want to work in print for the rest of their lives, with another 33.1 per cent identifying television as their favourite area. Radio follows in third place (10.6 per cent), and, surprisingly, only 6.6 per cent of students want to work in online journalism. This finding is similar to the results found in Alysen and Oakham’s (1996) study of Deakin University students more than 15 years ago. Considering that online journalism is often hailed as the future of journalism and journalism students’ use of new technologies is seen as embodying the shift to online journalism, their rejection of the online environment is surprising. One reason may lie in the fact there are still relatively few financially viable online-only news organisations, and thus students cannot see many opportunities in this area. In any case, this finding warrants further research.

As for the reasons why respondents studied journalism, one regularly cited in the literature topped the list (Table 1). More than one-third of students (36.3 per cent) said their talent for or love of writing was the main driver behind their decision to undertake a journalism degree.
Table 1: Motives for studying journalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am talented and/or I like to write</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like journalism as a profession</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the possibility to change society</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I like to meet interesting people</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I like to travel</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want to be journalist</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the possibility of covering scandals and abuses</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the possibility of being famous</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism is easy to finish</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the money that I could earn as a journalist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>317</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Talent or love for writing was also a dominant motive found in Splichal and Sparks’ (1994) study of journalism students in 22 countries, ranking second overall. The top-ranked motive in Splichal and Sparks’ study was that students liked journalism as a profession, and Australian students surveyed for the current study ranked this item highly as well, placing it second overall at 22.1 per cent. It should be noted that Splichal and Sparks allowed for multiple answers, while this study asked students to identify only the main motive for their decision. Nevertheless, a small number of students listed multiple motives under the item “other”. The third-most-mentioned item relates to the possibility of changing society (12.3 per cent), again an item that received considerable support from students surveyed by Splichal and Sparks (1994), although there is much lower support for this public service motive than found in Nordic journalism students (Hovden et al., 2009). This was followed by a desire to meet interesting people (7.9 per cent) and because respondents liked to travel (6.3 per cent). Motives such as the possibility of covering scandals and abuses, the possibility of being famous, a perception that journalism is an easy degree to complete and earning money were generally not considered important, again demonstrating that Australian journalism students are similar to those in other countries in this regard (Hanna & Sanders, 2007; Hovden et al., 2009).

There are some small but significant differences in the motivating causes influencing the choices of students who want to pursue a career in either news or entertainment journalism. Those wanting to work in entertainment journalism were less likely to be motivated by a predilection for journalism as a profession, with 19.1 per cent identifying it as their prime motivation, as opposed to 30.2 per cent of news journalism-oriented students. This is a statistically significant difference $\chi^2(1, N=252)=4.17, p<.05$, with Cramer’s $V=.13$ indicating a weak association. On the other hand, entertainment-oriented students were more likely to be motivated by the ability to travel (9.6 per cent) than their news-oriented counterparts (2.6 per cent), again a statistically significant difference $\chi^2(1, N=252)=5.12, p<.05$, with Cramer’s $V=.14$ indicating a weak association.

This difference sheds further light on Grenby et al.’s (2009) argument that high school students’ expectations of travel in journalism were a misconception. In fact, the finding here differentiates the situation, in that those who want to work in hard news do not expect to travel, while those working in entertainment journalism are more likely to do so, and, indeed, they may actually be more likely to travel, particularly if they work in areas such as travel journalism. By taking account of students’ preferred area of journalism, their motives and expectations can thus be examined more fully.
In order to answer Research Question 2, students were asked to indicate the extent to which they regarded 16 different job characteristics as important. Table 2 shows the relative scores for each characteristic.

**Table 2: Importance of job characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job characteristic</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Percentage saying very/extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The chance to advance in your professional career</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-life balance</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>79.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To use all your abilities and knowledge</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>77.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The chance to help people</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have supervisors who appreciate your abilities</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The possibility to develop a speciality</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have support from the staff</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>70.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have a valuable job, essential for society</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The chance to influence public affairs</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have co-workers who make the job easy</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>54.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial policy</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of autonomy you have</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have a prestigious job</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fringe benefits</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While any comparison can only be limited because of the time gap and different foci of the studies, the results here show some similarities to the priorities displayed by Australian journalists surveyed in the early 1990s (Henningham, 1996). Henningham’s study showed journalists were reasonably well paid and that pay and fringe benefits were not particularly important considerations for them, a finding which is replicated in this study of Australian journalism students. Similarly, job security ranked at the top of Henningham’s list, and is ranked highly by students as well.

Students’ answers were then subjected to Exploratory Factor Analysis with oblique rotation in order to examine whether there were any underlying dimensions through which their views could be analysed. Principal axis factoring was used as the method of extraction, as several of the items were not normally distributed. A preliminary analysis of the factor structure found that a number of factors were substantially correlated, hence the Direct Oblimin method of rotation was used. A number of studies have argued that journalists’ views of their work are often not mutually exclusive, but rather related; hence, this decision followed established convention (see, for example, Donsbach & Patterson, 2004; Ramaprasad & Hamdy, 2006; Weaver et al., 2007). Six items were excluded during the preliminary analysis because they did not load clearly on any of the factors. These included the items “to use all your abilities and knowledge”, “job security”, “editorial policy”, “the amount of autonomy you have”, “to have a prestigious job”, and “work-life balance”. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test resulted in a satisfactory sampling adequacy of KMO=0.73, with Bartlett’s test of sphericity $\chi^2=908.09$, df=45, p<0.001 sufficiently large for conducting EFA. Four factors had eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of 1, and combined accounted for 54.12 per cent of variance (Table 3).
The analysis shows that journalism students’ views of job characteristics can be examined through the following four main dimensions:

1. **Collegiality**: This refers to students’ views of their work environment and whether it is supportive, in terms of co-workers as well as from supervisors.

2. **Public service**: Whether students can make a difference in their job is a further dimension identified here. It relates to their views of whether they can influence society, help people or more generally perceive the job they are doing as an important part that is useful to society more broadly.

3. **Financial concerns**: Included in this dimension are students’ views of their pay and the fringe benefits they may be able to gain in their job.

4. **Career progression**: This dimension relates to the opportunities students see in getting ahead in their career, as well as to develop a speciality. Respondents who regard this dimension as important want to be able to move up quickly, perhaps in a quest for self-fulfilment.

Cronbach’s α scores testing for internal consistency of the dimensions ranged from good to poor. Highly acceptable consistency was found for the dimensions of “collegiality” (.83) and “public service” (.77), while it was below the generally recommended level for “financial concerns” (.62) and “career progression” (.54). One reason for this lies in the fact that both the “financial concerns” and “career progression” dimensions are made up of only two items rather than the preferred three, necessitating further research to examine their validity. At the same time, the items constituting each of these dimensions appear to make logical sense, and, following Boyle’s (1991) advice about internal consistency, their moderate homogeneity may still be acceptable for this study.

The four dimensions found here bear some resemblance to dimensions of job characteristics found in a recent study of Chilean journalists (Mellado & Humanes, 2012). In particular, the items which constitute “collegiality” are the same as those that make up Mellado and Humanes’ dimen-
sion of “human relations”, and the “public service” items were included in their dimension of the same title. Similarly, “financial concerns” items were part of Mellado and Humanes’ “working conditions” and the items included in “career progression” were part of their “professional projection and development” dimension. Overall, there are only small variations, demonstrating the relative validity of the dimensions found here. The dimensions also broadly compare to Hovden et al.’s (2009) analysis which argued that journalism students’ motives could be divided into practical, idealistic and personal ones.

When examining the extent to which Australian journalism students support the four dimensions, we can see that the largest focus is on career progression, with a mean score of M=4.08 (SD=.66) out of a maximum of 5. The next most-important dimension is whether students can realise their public service ambitions (M=3.81, SD.78), followed by concerns over collegiality (M=3.73, SD=.82). The least important dimension relates to financial concerns (M=3.13, SD=.67). Mean difference was statistically significant according to a repeated measures ANOVA with a Greenhouse-Geisser correction (F(2.89, 887.97)=114.05, p<.001). Post-hoc tests with Bonferroni correction showed significant differences between each of the four items, except between public service ambitions and collegiality.

Differences exist in terms of gender and students’ preferred area of journalistic employment. T-tests reveal that women are significantly more likely to follow a public service ideal than men t(176.31)=2.31, p<.05, with Cohen’s d=.28 indicating a small effect. At the same time, students who would like to work in entertainment journalism are more likely to value career progression t(244)=2.06, p<.05, d=.26 as well as collegiality t(248)=1.51, p<.05, d=.28 than their news-oriented counterparts. However, in both cases the effect was again small.

Overall, students appear to be quite content with the education provided by Australian journalism programs. When asked to evaluate the training that future journalists receive in Australia, 16.7 per cent answered “very good”, and 63.2 per cent said it was “good”. A further 17.9 per cent thought it was average, while 0.9 per cent thought it was bad and 1.3 per cent thought it was very bad. When students were asked whether it was necessary to study journalism at university in order to practise the profession, just under two-thirds (65.6 per cent) thought it was necessary, while 34.1 per cent did not think so. This is a surprisingly high number, especially when we exclude those students whose favourite area is PR or academia. Of students who want to work in news or entertainment journalism, a similar percentage (34.5 per cent) does not think it is necessary to study journalism at university level. Further, the education experience itself does not seem to play a major role in shaping this view. While fewer final-year students think it is necessary to study journalism (60.8 per cent compared with 69.8 per cent of first-year students), the drop is marginal and statistically non-significant. Men and women think about this issue differently, however, with only 30.1 per cent of female students saying they do not think it is necessary to study, while 42.9 per cent of male students think that way, a statistically significant difference, \( \chi^2(1, N=314)=5.01, p<.05 \), even if Cramer’s V=.13 indicates only a weak association. Why such a sizable minority of students think it is not necessary to study journalism is clearly ground for future research. If one-third of students don’t think it is perhaps necessary to study, why do they undertake a three-year degree? The increasing trend to university education in journalism has generated a perception that to gain employment one must have a degree, even if the content learned is not necessarily considered relevant. There may also be a perception that many of the vocational components of journalism degrees are better learned in a practical newsroom environment than in university classrooms. Additional research using qualitative approaches may be able to shed further light on this issue.
Conclusion

This paper has shed some light on Australian journalism students’ motives for undertaking an undergraduate degree in journalism. The analysis showed that only four of every five students actually want to work in journalism when they graduate, and of those a majority would prefer to work in entertainment-focused journalism rather than in news. This finding is in contrast to what most journalism programs focus on in their teaching, supporting O’Donnell’s (2006) analysis that “the narrow focus on entry-level newsroom jobs as the primary indicator of successful journalism education may also have skewed curricular and teaching priorities to address the expectations of a particular group of potential employers (metropolitan daily newspapers) at the expense of others”. This does not mean journalism programs should simply adjust their curriculum to satisfy potentially ill-conceived student desires. Hard news reporting needs to remain an integral part of journalism education, as many of its skills apply to entertainment journalism as well. Nevertheless, journalism schools may want to aim to better cover the spectrum of journalistic activity beyond and in addition to hard news. As others have noted previously, a journalism degree can prepare students for a range of other occupations, and it would seem only a minority actually come into their degree with a hard news mindset.

The analysis of students’ motives for undertaking their degree validated some common perceptions, in that most students make their decision because they like to write, rather than any notions of changing society and providing a public service. Many also simply just like journalism as a profession, a rather vague description which may need further investigation in terms of what they actually like about it. The job characteristics that students value most highly include personal career goals, in that career progression is an aspect most are focused on. Nevertheless, the ability to provide a public service does rank reasonably highly when students examine the value of a job, demonstrating that they do want to make a difference, even if it wasn’t their primary motivation. Collegiality is an important concern for them as well. The fact that financial concerns do not rank highly in students’ expectations lets us assume that students are not motivated by money but rather higher ideals.

There are some important differences in terms of gender as well as the type of journalism in which students want to work. Women tend to be significantly more interested in working in entertainment areas of journalism, while men favour the hard news area, in line with existing research which shows women favour softer types of journalism. At the same time, women also exhibit higher support for a public service ideals and are more likely to support the need for tertiary journalism education. In terms of the area they want to work in, entertainment-focused students are more likely to value collegiality and career progression when it comes to job characteristics, and are less likely to have been motivated to study journalism because they like journalism as a profession. On the other hand, they are more likely to be motivated by a desire to travel than their news-oriented counterparts. Analysis of the above differences, however, showed that while they are statistically significant, the effect size is generally small.

Naturally, there are some limitations to this study. While it is the first large-scale examination of journalism students’ views in Australia, not every university was represented. Hence, a larger, more representative study is currently being planned. Despite this, care was taken to represent a number of states and types of universities, not least in their educational orientation. In any case, the analysis provides a preliminary empirical basis which can be used for further analyses and discussions about the role of journalism education and its relation with the industry.
References


Author

Folker Hanusch is a senior lecturer in journalism at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland.

The author would like to thank Kathryn Bowd, Leo Bowman, Trevor Cullen, Beate Josephi, Michael Meadows and Louise North for their assistance with data collection.