

# Challenges for campus and community media in Asia-Pacific diversity

**Abstract:** The ‘watchdog’ model has created a journalism culture that is too adversarial and creates conflicts rather than helping to solve today’s problems/ conflicts. The panellists assess new journalism paradigms in the Asia-Pacific region where the media is able to make powerful players to account for facilitating the development needs of communities, especially those in the margins of society. A challenge for contemporary journalism schools is to address such models in a global context of ‘development rights’ with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals as a benchmark. In the Pacific Islands context, journalists face a challenging news reporting terrain on their news beats, especially in the Melanesian countries of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Besides dealing with political instability, coups, civilian unrest and complex developmental issues, journalists must contend with hostile governments and draconian media legislation. The talents, idealism and storytelling skills of Pacific journalists can be cultivated and strengthened to produce independent platforms and models of journalism that challenge the status quo. Examples of this campus strategy include Radio Pasifik, Wansolwara, Pacific Scoop and Asia Pacific Report.

**Keywords:** Australia, Fiji, journalism education, journalism models, New Zealand, Melanesia, talanoa journalism, student journalism, sustainable development goals, United Nations

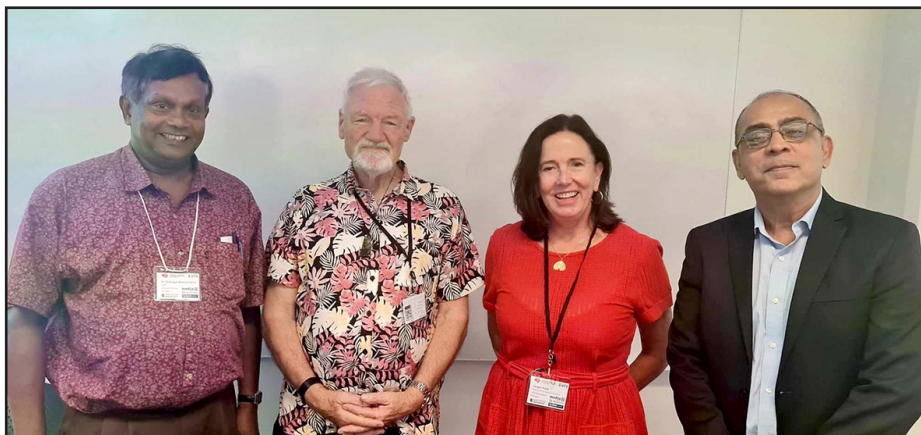
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INTRODUCING the ‘Challenges for campus and community media in Asia-Pacific’ diversity panel at the Journalism Education and Research Association (JERAA) conference at the University of Technology Sydney in December 2023, was Jacqui Park, former head of network strategy and innovation for the Vienna-based IPI (International Press Institute) Global Network of editors and journalists. She is a journalist and editor with deep experience building journalism communities around press freedom and high-integrity journalism, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

She is senior fellow for news media innovation at the University of Technology Sydney and was founding CEO of Australia's Walkley Foundation for excellence in journalism and founding Asia-Pacific director for the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

Park said she was 'excited' to be chairing the session on how we should be thinking about the challenges and opportunities for journalism in the Pacific right now. She said she was excited over the discussion because of the subject matter, but also because of the people who were on the panel. She said it would contribute to thinking about what was missing in the conversation going forward about what kind of communities the Pacific was working for.

'These are some of the important questions about how do we remake journalism for the future,' said Park. 'To help us negotiate these issues, we have Dr Kalinga Seneviratne (Australia/Sri Lanka) of the University of South Pacific (USP) who is talking about a need for a new paradigm of community centred 'watchdog journalism', Associate Professor Shailendra Singh (Fiji), head of journalism at USP, who will be explaining an innovative model of student journalism in the Melanesian states, and Professor David Robie (Aotearoa New Zealand), who I have known for a long time at the Pacific Media Centre and as a former coordinator of the Journalism Programme at USP in my work at the IFJ. He will be talking about how investigative and storytelling models like Talanoa Journalism can open our eyes to the blind spots of legacy news media.'



**Figure 1: The Pacific campus and community panel at JERAA 2023: (from left) Kalinga Seneviratne, David Robie, Jacqui Park, and Shailendra Singh.**

***Dr Kalinga Seneviratne:***

**Time to rethink 'Watchdog Journalism' in the Pacific**

For more than five decades, 'Watchdog Journalism' has been taught as the yardstick for a free media. With the so-called 'mainstream' media becoming increasingly commercialised—both in a global scale and domestically—and with the

media being primarily owned by business conglomerates, the ‘watchdog’ model has created a journalism culture that is too adversarial and creates conflicts rather than helping to solve today’s problems/conflicts. A new paradigm of watchdog journalism is needed where the media is able to hold powerful players to account for facilitating the development/livelihood needs of communities, especially those in the margins of society. This new paradigm of journalism needs to focus on ‘development rights’ rather than ‘human rights’ taking into account many aspects of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs should be looked at in terms of a new definition of human rights where the journalist could play a similar role to that prescribed in ‘watchdog’ journalism theory, but looking for solutions rather conflicts, and include a larger field of stakeholders which need to be made accountable such as governments, big business and particularly conglomerates—even NGOs and faith-based organisations. This watchdog role needs to be applied to trade agreements and other treaties, including those addressing climate change. To develop a new journalism culture to address these issues, media training programmes in the Pacific need to rethink their strategies and examine how to promote independent social media models that are economically and sustainably viable.

**Associate Professor Shailendra Singh:**

### **Nurturing resilient journalists: A Fiji case study of student news reporting in challenging Pacific environments**

Pacific Island journalists face a challenging news reporting terrain on their news beats, especially in the Melanesian countries of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Besides dealing with political instability, coups, civilian unrest and complex developmental issues, journalists must contend with hostile governments and draconian media legislation. Online harassment is also an emerging problem. Considering these situations, one issue facing Pacific journalism schools and training institutes is how best to prepare students for this environment to insulate against any shocks and build resilience before joining the job market. One strategy adopted by The University of the South Pacific Journalism Programme is emphasis on practical news reporting through student-run media, mainly *Wansolwara*, the student training newspaper, and *Wansolwara Online*. This presentation looks at student journalists’ experiences in covering Fiji’s 2018 general election under fairly restrictive media legislation and electoral laws—the 2022 Reporters Without Borders media freedom index branded Fiji the ‘worst place in the Pacific’ to be a journalist. This was due to draconian media legislation in place for nearly 13 years, before the new government repealed it during 2023. In any election, news media usually focus on the political elites and their contests and confrontations, as per the Western ‘watchdog’ news reporting framework, which emphasises ‘impact’,

‘conflict’ and ‘prominence’ as premium news values. *Wansolwara* chose to differentiate its coverage by preferencing lesser-known candidates, female contestants, and grassroots voters, which is more in line with the ‘human-interest’ centered news values of development journalism, constructive/solutions-orientated journalism, and peace journalism principles. The elections coverage was not just an opportunity to familiarise students with media laws and electoral procedures, but also acquaint them with development issues by engaging with everyday people and practising different approaches in news coverage. This presentation looks at how we prepared the students for the elections, the challenges encountered in the field, editorial outputs, and the learning outcomes of the exercise.

**Professor David Robie:**

**Media plurality, independence and Talanoa: An alternative Pacific journalism education model**

The shrinking mainstream media plurality in Aotearoa New Zealand provides a context for examining publication of campus-based media where student and faculty editorial staff have successfully established an independent Asia-Pacific digital and print press over the past two decades. New Zealand’s largest city Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) has the largest urban population of Pacific Islanders globally—more than 300,000 people in a total of 1.7 million (Pasifika New Zealand, n.d.), earning the moniker ‘Polynesian capital of the world’. The presenter has had a pioneering role with four university-based journalism publications in the Pacific region as key adviser/publisher in Papua New Guinea (*Uni Tavur*, 1993-1998); Fiji (*Wansolwara*, 1998-2002); and Aotearoa/New Zealand (*Pacific Scoop*, 2009-2015; *Asia Pacific Report*, 2016 onwards), and also with two journalism school-based publications in Australia (*Reportage*, 1996, and *The Junction*, 2018-2020) (Robie, 2018). In early 2021, he was a co-founder of the Asia Pacific Media Network | Te Koako Incorporated which has emerged as a collective umbrella for academics, student journalists and independent reporters and writers producing several innovative publications, including the research journal *Pacific Journalism Review* and a strengthened *Asia Pacific Report*, which draw on a cross-disciplinary range of media contributors and scholars in other professions. These contributors are mindful of the challenges of reportage about the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This section of the panel explores an independent journalism model drawing on professional outlets especially for Asia-Pacific students and how such an investigative and storytelling model as Talanoa Journalism can be an effective bridge to alternative media careers and addressing ‘blind spots’ in legacy news media.

The articles in this Frontline section of *Pacific Journalism Review* based on the earlier presentations in the JERAA panel on ‘Challenges for campus and

community media in Asia-Pacific’ present a basis for lively debate. The section begins with David Robie’s overview of how challenges have been faced at three institutions in Papua New Guinea and Aotearoa New Zealand, followed by Shailendra Singh who is joined by former *Wansolwara* colleague Geraldine Panapasa in his case study of Fiji and two post-coup elections, and it is rounded off with Kalinga Seneviratne and a focus on China in the Pacific and the geo-political challenges for the region and ‘watchdog’ journalism.

**Reference**

Robie, D. (2018). *Asia Pacific Report: A New Zealand nonprofit journalism model for campus-based social justice media. Ikat: The Indonesian Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 2(1), 119-146. <https://doi.org/10.22146/ikat.v2i1.37395>

**Resource video**

JERAA 2023 - Challenges for campus and community media in Asia-Pacific diversity panel <https://youtu.be/7qaMbgnOKiQ>

