

# 5. From *Pacific Scoop* to *Asia Pacific Report*

## A case study in an independent campus-industry media partnership

**Abstract:** Media convergence within the news and current affairs landscape over the past two decades has opened opportunities for competing newspapers, television stations and online publishers to form alliances to approach digital and editorial challenges with innovative strategies. The partnerships have often enabled journalists to embrace multimedia platforms with flexibility and initiative. This has fostered a trend in ‘gatewatching’ and a citizen responsive and involved grassroots media rather than legacy mainstream gatekeeping, top-down models. Such committed media attempts in search of investigative journalism accompanied by ‘public’ and ‘civic’ journalism engagement initiatives have also been emulated by some journalism schools in the Asia-Pacific region. This has paralleled the evolution of journalism as a research methodology with academic application over the past decade. Selecting two New Zealand-based complementary and pioneering Pacific digital news and analysis publications, *Pacific Scoop* (founded 2009) and *Asia-Pacific Report* (2016), produced by a journalism school programme in partnership with established independent media as a combined case study, this article will demonstrate how academia-based gatewatching media can effectively challenge mainstream gatekeeping media. *Pacific Scoop* was established by an Auckland university in partnership with New Zealand’s largest independent publisher, Scoop Media Limited, and launched at the Māori Expo in 2009. The article also explores the transition of *Pacific Scoop* into *Asia-Pacific Report*, launched in partnership with an innovative web-based partner, *Evening Report*. The study analyses the strategic and innovation efforts in the context of continuing disruptions to New Zealand’s legacy media practices related to the Asia-Pacific region.

**Keywords:** Asia Pacific Report, digital media, experiential learning, gatekeeping, gatewatching, independent media, legacy media, New Zealand Pacific Scoop, Papua New Guinea, problem-based learning, Samoa, Scoop Media, student publication

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## Introduction

**M**EDIA convergence within the news and current affairs landscape over the past two decades has opened opportunities for competing newspapers, television stations and online publishers to form alliances to approach digital and editorial challenges with innovative strategies. The partnerships have often enabled journalists to embrace multimedia platforms with flexibility and initiative (Dailey, Demo & Spillman, 2005; Flew, 2009). This has fostered a trend in gatewatching, citizen responsive and involved grassroots media rather than more conventional mainstream gatekeeping, top-down models (Bruns, 2011). Such committed media attempts in search of investigative journalism accompanied by ‘public’ and ‘civic’ journalism engagement initiatives have also been emulated by some journalism schools in the Asia-Pacific region (Cass, 2002, 2016; Robie, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2012, 2014). This has paralleled the evolution of journalism as a research methodology with academic application over the past decade (*Asia-Pacific Media Educator* [various], 2015; Bacon, 2006, 2012; Davies, 2009, 2014; 2016; Flew, 2009; Nash, 2016; Pearson, Patching & Wilshere-Cumming, 2015; Robie, 2015, 2016a). Selecting two New Zealand-based complementary and pioneering Pacific digital news and analysis publications, *Pacific Scoop* and *Asia-Pacific Report*, produced by a journalism school programme in partnership with established independent media as a combined case study, this article will demonstrate how academia-based gatewatching media can effectively challenge mainstream gatekeeping media. *Pacific Scoop* was established by Auckland University of Technology’s Pacific Media Centre in partnership with New Zealand’s largest independent publisher, Scoop Media Limited, and launched at the Māori Expo in Auckland in 2009. It has operated successfully since then with several student-driven postgraduate media projects, including the Leaders Summit of the 16-nation Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in Auckland, New Zealand, in 2011, featuring the UN Secretary-General; the 2012 PIF Forum in the Cook Islands with US State Secretary Hilary Clinton as a visiting dignitary; the 2014 West Papua media freedom symposium and Fiji General Election ending eight years of post-military coup pariah status; and the 30th anniversary in 2015 of the bombing of the environmental ship *Rainbow Warrior* by French secret agents.

The ‘live’ experiential approach provided by problem-based learning (PBL) environments develops confidence and a sense of competence among student journalists (Berney & Robie, 2007; Cass, 2002; Hanney, 2005; Hartnett, 2010; Meadows, 1997; Pearson, 2000; Robie, 2010; Robie & Singh, 2004; Sheridan Burns & Hazell, 1999). As a concept, it is regarded as a method of ‘learning by discovery’ as initially developed by Plato. Students use intuition to solve problems in a simulated or real context. In modern times, PBL became widely adopted by health sciences in the 1950s in the United States (Meadows, 1997, pp. 98). It

was later adapted as a methodology by other disciplines, including architecture, engineering and geography. Several journalism schools in Australia adopted it in the mid-1990s, especially related to covering issues such as cross-cultural reporting and youth suicides (Sheridan Burns & Hazell, 1999). Teaching and learning based on the 'real world' of structured problems faced by newsroom professionals is a highly suited framework for journalism school publishing. As Sheridan Burns and Hazell have described it:

Valuing process over product and learning over teaching, it aims to develop life-long learning skills so that graduates can apply their knowledge and understanding to new situations. (Sheridan Burns & Hazell, 1999, p. 58)

Problem-based learning—active, constructive and reflexive—is arguably the closest tertiary students can get to real-life experience before graduation. It involves greater realism and free inquiry and develops decision-making skills. It also calls on students making greater use of their existing knowledge to gain new knowledge, skills and insight. Hanney argues that problem-based learning (PBL) as an educational methodology, or strategy, using 'live projects' broadens learning opportunities beyond the transfer of factual knowledge and generalisations. He says it can be thought of as 'both a curriculum and a process' (Hanney, 2005, p. 109). Often the PBL process is designed to produce students who will take up a challenge with initiative and enthusiasm; reason reflectively, accurately and creatively from an integrated and flexible knowledge base; monitor and assess their own progress; and collaborate effectively as a team to achieve a common goal—in this case the newspaper or news outlet. According to Savin-Baden, with this form of experiential learning, students are encouraged to 'use reasoning abilities to manage and solve complex problems' (Savin-Baden & Major, 2004, p. 11). Based on 20 years of experience as a prisons rights and peace advocate, Hartnett, 2010 has argued for a form of media education that is more enriching intellectually and made more politically relevant by 'turning our efforts toward community service, problem-based learning and new means of collective scholarly production' for educating journalists. This means creating and developing independent and robust campus-based media. He argues that using PBL as a methodology in teaching journalism in a publishing context helps media becoming 'enmeshed to its very core in the larger promises of democratic governance, enlightenment principles and civic life' (p. 71). While all four of the case example news issues assessed in this article contrast in their structure and style, use of PBL as a learning experience is a common factor and this has been most developed with *Asia Pacific Report*.

The case study includes these and other projects as indicators of independent journalism produced by postgraduate student journalists who covered, researched

and analysed contemporary events and issues. Since the legacy business model for Scoop Media has changed into a dynamic crowdfunding and public foundation approach (Thompson, 2015), the article explores the transition of *Pacific Scoop* into a new independent digital venture, *Asia-Pacific Report*, launched in early 2016 with an innovative web-based partner, *Evening Report*. The study researches and analyses the strategic and innovation efforts in the context of continuing disruptions to New Zealand's legacy media practices related to the Asia-Pacific region.

### **Public interest journalism renewal of Scoop and *Pacific Scoop***

Founded in 1999, Scoop Media, arguably the most important and most innovative of independent news media organisations for more than a decade in New Zealand, established a 'hub of intelligence for the professionals (not just media)' (Scoop Media, n.d.). As an online strategy, the news of the day was delivered free in the public domain in a form 'creating a no-spin media environment'. With an eroding advertiser base in the past five years, it was clear the strategy needed to be modified for survival. Towards the end of 2014, Scoop initiated a transformation by becoming New Zealand's first general news publisher owned by a charitable trust board. Dubbed 'Operation Chrysalis', the project set out to turn the 16-year-old online publishing business into a new business model—'one connected directly to its readers, [and] owned by a not-for-profit' (Scoop Foundation for Public Interest Journalism, 2015). A message from the 'new Scoop' team declared:

The New Scoop publishing company will shortly adopt a new constitution which will add further protections around editorial integrity.

Today [15 September 2015] we launched a website and public campaign to announce the fruits of our work at [takebackthenews.nz](http://takebackthenews.nz). All our readers, and indeed all New Zealanders, are invited to participate in the future of the Scoop project.

With the use of an infographic this document sets out how the New Scoop structure is designed and intended to work. (Scoop Foundation, 2015)

The statement said the 'challenge of Scoop' was 'creating a village' (Figure 1):

The challenge of Scoop is one of coming together for a common purpose—to protect and preserve the function and values of professional news in New Zealand society during a period of great economic disruption to the news industry. On Day One, 16th September, New Scoop will begin again as a start-up, albeit one which is a little over 16 years old and which already has substantial income and 500,000 monthly readers. (Scoop Foundation, 2015)



**Figure 1: Scoop’s designer Scott Broadley created this ‘village’ infographic to set out ‘key relationships’ in the vision for the new not-for-profit structure.**

In early 2016, Alastair Thompson stepped down as editor and was replaced by former senior *Listener* journalist Gordon Campbell. In March, the Scoop Foundation Trust Board announced that veteran journalist and broadcaster Jeremy Rose and Public Good Aotearoa convenor Jan Rivers had been appointed as members. Margaret Thompson remained as Trust Board chair with the fourth member being Alastair Thompson. The announcement also stated that the New Scoop was ‘supported by nearly 1000 Scoop Foundation members and over 100 accredited organisations’ (New trustees for Scoop Foundation, 2016).

In an impact statement published in June 2016, the Scoop Foundation for Public Interest Journalism stated that ‘an informed citizenry is a basic requirement for democracy. Our founding support is to support ethical journalism training and the publication of trustworthy public interest information, freely accessible

to all New Zealanders'. The statement also said 'Scoop Publishing Ltd publishes www.scoop.co.nz and is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Charitable Trust. All profits must be applied to the objectives of the Trust' (Scoop Foundation for Public Interest Journalism, 2015).

Given this vision of creating a sustainable, low-cost, business model that provides for 'free access to independent, reliable, archived news information for more people in New Zealand' and a platform to support the diversity of voices that reflects the 'real society' of New Zealand, it may seem curious timing that one of the educational components of the Scoop umbrella should choose to break away and launch a new initiative (Scoop Foundation, 2016). However, on closer examination, it is clear why *Pacific Scoop* morphed into the independent *Asia Pacific Report* in January 2016.

*Pacific Media Centre Online* was established in mid-2007 as the umbrella website for AUT's Pacific Media Centre (PMC), a research and publication unit providing independent research tools, books and resources for the region (www.pmc.aut.ac.nz). It also initially became the publication outlet for students on a postgraduate Asia-Pacific Journalism Studies paper, established in 2007 as the first course of its kind at any New Zealand university. The *PMC Online* website was closely associated with the *Pacific Journalism Review* research journal's website www.pjreview.info and the Pacific Media Watch monitoring service and database. Both the PMC and Scoop Media Ltd, collaborated to launch *Pacific Scoop* as a specialist news and analysis coverage of the South Pacific region. It was also both an educational outlet and a publication open to contributing academics and journalists. Catering for this niche field was a collaborative effort between Scoop co-editor Selwyn Manning and me. In August 2009, the partnership between the PMC and the Scoop Media group resulted in the launching of *Pacific Scoop* as a joint collaborative publication at the AUT Māori Expo. This was a unique development between an industry media group and an academic institution. The then Scoop co-editor and general manager, Alastair Thompson, recalled:

Pacific coverage is something that Scoop has focused on since we were founded in 1999 shortly before New Zealand hosted APEC in Auckland. We have always sought to service New Zealand news needs with an eye on the international—and in that regard the Pacific is the area that we as a nation are most concerned with and most engaged with. We also identified that the Pacific is an area which is poorly covered by New Zealand and international media and is therefore something we could make an impact in. In the four years from 2004-2008 Scoop had also covered the Pacific Forum closely. (A. Thompson, personal communication, 23 May 2011).

At the time, Scoop was ranked third by the Nielsen Net/Ratings in its news category and was 'finally recognised' in the Qantas Media Awards as a finalist for Best News

Site in 2007 (Introducing Scoop.co.nz, 2011). According to Thompson, the opportunity to work with the PMC arose shortly after I established the centre in 2007. 'We had previously worked with David in coverage of the Fiji coups and other Pacific news via his *Pacific Media Watch* service,' he said. 'Around the same time, we had just established the hosting infrastructure which made launching and populating *Pacific Scoop* significantly easier.' The PMC's connections to media organisations and contributors throughout the Pacific 'are unparalleled' and so it seemed like a relationship which would 'work well for both parties' (Thompson, personal communication, 2011). Thompson categorised the weaknesses of New Zealand media reportage of the region thus:

Generally coverage of the Pacific only occurs in New Zealand media in times of crisis and disaster. This is not ideal. Scoop's stream of raw news (press releases and speeches), however, is [fairly] constant and can form a more comprehensive backdrop to the news coverage which is provided by PMCs correspondents and students when news of significance to them arises. (Thompson, personal communication, 2011)

Then Scoop co-editor Selwyn Manning reflected after the launch of *Pacific Scoop*:

Once the idea was conceived, common ground between Scoop Media and the Pacific Media Centre was identified. We shared a vision of creating and sustaining a web-based media hub that would offer insightful items (both written text and multimedia reports) to an audience that is interested in, and active in, Pacific issues and affairs both here in Aotearoa/New Zealand and in the wider Pacific region. (S. Manning, personal communication, 10 October 2009)

*Pacific Scoop* described itself as a new regional 'hub' portal partnership venture: 'The idea is to produce a distinct blend of news, current affairs and analysis—a fresh and independent "voice" of the Pacific ... We are keen to tell the hidden stories and address justice for the marginalised.' Education, culture, creativity, environment, health, human rights, media, social justice, resource development, regional security and technology are some of the topics high on the reportage and learning list for student journalists. '*Pacific Scoop* is a good example of developing synergies between academia and industry,' noted Manning (Ibid.) It is an example of a symbiotic relationship between Scoop Media and the PMC. The centre brings a wealth of experience on Pacific affairs, and alongside this experience comes the 'respect of significant academics, journalists, students, decision-makers from throughout the Pacific'. These contacts, and the information they submit to *Pacific Scoop*, is what sets it aside from other online offerings, Manning added.

Students at Auckland University of Technology on the postgraduate Asia-Pacific Journalism course produced the bulk of the original news and current affairs copy and images. They were required to produce a portfolio of three in-depth news feature articles on a Pacific issue of up to 1200 words and a minimum of five sources. Supplementing the daily file from students from AUT, Divine Word University in Papua New Guinea, USP and the National University of Samoa were articles by leading Pacific academic staff, such as economics professor Wadan Narsey, development studies professor Crosbie Walsh, and governance associate professor Scott MacWilliam at the Crawford School of the Australian National University, regional journalists and civil society advocates and analysts. Complementing the PMC's initiative, Professor Walsh, who founded the development studies programme at the University of the South Pacific, had himself been a prominent Fiji blog publisher ([crosbiew.blogspot.com](http://crosbiew.blogspot.com)) and authored a definitive paper on Fiji political and media blogs (Walsh, 2010), noted:

There are television and radio channels devoted to the Pacific but they are aimed primarily at a Pacific Islander audience. *Pacific Scoop* appeals to a wider audience, it can (and does) publish controversial material and, other than the blogs, readers interested in Pacific Islands affairs have nowhere else to go... Its neutrality and political balance gives it entry to places where the more polemical blogs rarely trespass. I think its greatest weakness is its vulnerability: it relies too heavily on the work of one man, and it operates on limited finances. (C. Walsh, personal communication, 26 May 2011)

### **The metamorphosis from *Pacific Scoop* to *Asia Pacific Report***

By late 2015, the climate around *Pacific Scoop* had changed (Figure 2). Co-founder Selwyn Manning had resigned as co-editor in 2011 and concluded his roles on Scoop Media's board in the same year. Through his new company, Multimedia Investments Ltd, Manning founded in 2012 security-intelligence analysis site 36th-Parallel.com, open-source intelligence sites ForeignAffairs.co.nz, LiveNews.co.nz, NewsKitchen.eu and de.Newskitchen.eu in 2012. The following year, he co-founded the highly popular *Daily Blog*, which recruited an ever-growing stable of progressive columnists and commentators and collaborated with Radio Waatea to offer New Zealand's only daily current affairs programme, the half-hour *Fifth Estate*. In 2014, Manning founded and launched EveningReport.nz in which reportage and analysis converged with public service webcasting.

By then the PMC had found the *Pacific Scoop* format increasingly limited for the type of ground-breaking digital initiatives it wanted to achieve. An active digital microsite collaboration with Little Island Press publisher Tony Murrow led to production of *Eyes of Fire: 30 Years On*, a digital microsite based on my





**Figure 2: Pacific Scoop at the time of changeover and launch of Asia Pacific Report, 29 January 2016.**

updated 1989 book, *Eyes of Fire: The Last Voyage of the Rainbow Warrior* (Robie, 2016a). Featuring a series of oral histories produced by AUT journalism and television students in 2015, was a key factor in the PMC’s enthusiasm to establish a pioneering new venture. A subsequent meeting with Manning, who outlined a series of options, convinced me to press ahead with establishing *Asia Pacific Report*.

Reflecting on the 2009 launch of *Pacific Scoop*, Manning argues that ‘it was quite a successful effort at branding a niche service like this’, but he cautioned that perhaps it benefitted strongly from being attached to Scoop Media (Manning, personal communication, 6 July 2016). Manning also offered some insights into the changing times.

Since 2009, Scoop Media Ltd suffered from stagnation and also a significant drop in revenue. [This was] largely due to increased competition in the online domestic news market and a collapse of the online advertising market. Consequently its brand suffered from the company’s inability to

inject surplus-to-operation revenue into site and function development. Its internal pressures also prevented it from addressing a shift in online audience behaviour including a dramatic increase in social media usage and a decline in site-specific unique access. This pattern is not unique to Scoop but [is] common among the 1990/2000 generation of online news media. (Manning, personal communication, 2016)

According to Manning, this example demonstrates a ‘fundamental shift in on-line content values’. In the 2000s, value ‘could be measured, applied and acquired’ from content published exclusively to a single online site. Since 2010, argues Manning, ‘steady and definable degradation of single content has been in evidence’. In 2016, it has now become ‘necessary to calculate value through reach’ (Manning, personal communication, 2016).

With fewer people seeking information from a single site, content is more likely to accrue added value through syndication of content beyond single site expression, but rather expressed in multiple networks of interconnected sites, interests, niches and media. This new media environment has its parallels in today’s multimedia convergence models.

Multimedia Investments Ltd, the parent company to EveningReport.nz, owns or part owns a network of complementary news outlets, each occupying a specific niche, cumulatively exporting more than 30,000 published items per month to global aggregation companies, including Dow Jones, Factiva, Lexus Nexus, Moreover.com, and Acquire Media internationally, and Knowledge Basket’s Newztext based in New Zealand. The joint venture between Multimedia Investments Ltd and the PMC’s *Asia Pacific Report* plugs the website’s ‘Asia-Pacific-rich’ content into this network and enables it to achieve considerable reach, adding value to the readership potential to each item published (Manning, personal communication, 2016).

Establishing this opportunity of reach and the opportunity to create a modern online environment where the PMC and AUT Asia-Pacific students can apply and develop their talents was a key factor driving *Asia Pacific Report* within a rich learning environment (see Fiji Report—‘Bearing Witness’, 2016).

What does *Asia-Pacific Report* offer that was not already part of *Pacific Scoop*? The new venture has a far stronger ‘Asia-Pacific’ mix with greater and more relevant Asia content. It is roughly 2/3rds Pacific, 1/3rd Asian, with frequent other pieces, usually analysis, that are truly global. One of the more successful audience reaches in the past six months of publishing was with the Philippines presidential election when *Asia Pacific Report* ran a live feed from *Rappler* in Manila on May 9 (with the anchor page having 1786 views that day) (LIVE: #PHVote2-16, 2016). Between the 2006 and 2012 national census, the Filipino diaspora community more than doubled from 15,285 to 37,302. In 2013, 40,350

people claimed Filipino ethnicity (Story: Filipinos, n.d.). *Asia Pacific Report* has also run several insightful articles about the tough-talking and assassin-encouraging president-elect Rodrigo Duterte before he was sworn in on June 30 (Robie, 2016).

### **Asia-Pacific reportage deficit**

Manning argues that AsiaPacificReport.nz is able to ‘speak to its brand’. For example, to apply a comparative, *Pacific Scoop* by name was primarily a site designed to address a reportage deficit in the Polynesian and part of the Melanesian sectors of the Pacific. However, ‘the same reportage deficit can be applied to western Melanesia and Southeast Asia’ (Manning, personal communication, 2016). He adds:

The issues that impact on Polynesia often have their parallels in Melanesia and Southeast Asia. *Asia Pacific Report* is able to embrace, advocate, and report on the entire APAC region, wherever the need for reportage arises. Significant relationships have been established between the Pacific Media Centre and new media outlets in South East Asia. An impressive number of students have benefited from internships in this sector. *Asia Pacific Report* reflects this in its digital DNA. (Manning, personal communication, 2016)

Another important factor is that unlike most media in New Zealand, *Asia Pacific Report* actually focuses on media coverage outside New Zealand while having an impact within New Zealand. This reflects the fact the AUT Asia Pacific Journalism Studies postgraduate paper is the only international journalism studies course of its kind in New Zealand, in spite of the fact that the National government’s policy is to invest in Southeast Asian political or social capital as well as business (hence funding being provided for the establishment of a NZ Institute of Pacific Research in early 2016 and a proposal to establish a Southeast Asian Studies centre of excellence later in the year). Manning reflects on the skewed media coverage linked to parochial editorial policies:

Due to intense competition among the mainstream news media, the tendency for editors is to focus on New Zealand-specific news and angles. The preoccupation for domestic regionalisation excludes consideration of many BIG issues impacting in the wider geographic region. Commercial imperatives, minimal reporter number pressures, poor contact and professional development, would suggest this situation will not change in the medium term.

Radio New Zealand International is the exception to the above. *Asia Pacific Report* was founded on an APAC regional reportage strategy and is able to express the dedicated commitment to reportage on this patch. (Manning, personal communication, 2016)

Both Manning and this author see this publishing initiative as ‘strategically positioning itself as a primary provider of content—both text and multimedia for the region, especially where human rights and peace journalism are concerned’. According to Google Analytics, Indonesia has frequently figured among the top five audiences on *Asia Pacific Report* (usually behind New Zealand, Australia and the United States), especially at times of strong West Papuan coverage. At other times, Fiji, Papua New Guinea or Vanuatu might rank in the top five. One month (May 2016), Papua New Guinea was top.

Opportunities to express a reportage policy and sensitivity to human rights, report socio-political events that cause and effect consequences that impact on the people and environment of the APAC region. This message is contained onsite for reference, and is syndicated out to a global audience. It is a message that is both unique and compelling. Content is King, and the challenge is to bring about an understanding that leads to positive change.

The site specific audience analytics suggest a growing appreciative audience. It is early days for *Asia Pacific Report*, but it has already established itself as a media outlet that can be relied upon as a primary source of information and reportage about this region. (Manning, personal communication, 2016)

The following section outlines some exemplars of Asia-Pacific reportage drawing from a PBL context:

### **Case 1: February-March 2016: De Brum, Nuclear Zero lawyers and climate change**

Since the last week of January 2016 with the launch of *Asia Pacific Report* by Pacific Cooperation Foundation chairman Laulu Mac Leauanae, the website has projected the strong climate change and environmental legacy earlier exhibited by *Pacific Scoop*, with the first story reaching close to 2000 views being an exclusive report about Marshall Islands Foreign Minister Tony de Brum and the republic’s legal team Nuclear Zero being nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for their ‘courageous step’ in filing lawsuits against the nine nuclear nations (Archer, 2016). They were nominated by the Oslo-based International Peace Bureau, which is dedicated to the vision of a world without war and is itself a Nobel Peace Laureate. Tony de Brum was one of the four winners of the 2015 Right Livelihood Award, also known as the ‘Alternative Nobel Prize’. The people of the Marshall Islands were joint recipients.

Between February 15-17, *Asia Pacific Report* comprehensively covered the ‘In the Eye of the Storm’ climate change conference in Wellington, particularly through the work of a freelance journalist, Thomas Leaycraft, in collaboration with Scoop Media (see for example, Leaycraft, 2016). In April, the Pacific Media Centre dispatched two journalists, TJ Aumua and Ami Dhabuwala, to Fiji in the

mid-semester break to work with the University of the South Pacific's Centre for the Environment and Sustainable Development (PaCE-SD) to research and report on a 'bearing witness' climate change PBL assignment. As part of this project, they visited a village, Daku, in the Rewa River delta and witnessed first-hand how the people have been empowered by adaptation (Fiji Report—'Bearing Witness', 2016). The next PBL example involves aviation and public safety.

### **Case 2: Kilman government vs *Vanuatu Daily Post* on air safety**

On 27 January 2016, after the *Vanuatu Daily Post* reported a front page story exposing a Port Vila international airport safety issue, caretaker Prime Minister Sato Kilman accused the newspaper of bringing his 'name into disrepute', and of 'partisan bias' (Caretaker PM slams *Vanuatu Daily Post*, 2016). Editorial director Dan McGarry rejected this attack and penned a fresh editorial:

... [T]he accusation that we have somehow politicised the issue is simply false. The entire piece is an argument *against* politicising this topic.

Yes, Mr Kilman's government is hardly the only one guilty of playing political football with the lives of our travellers. We agree on that point. The key point in the editorial was:

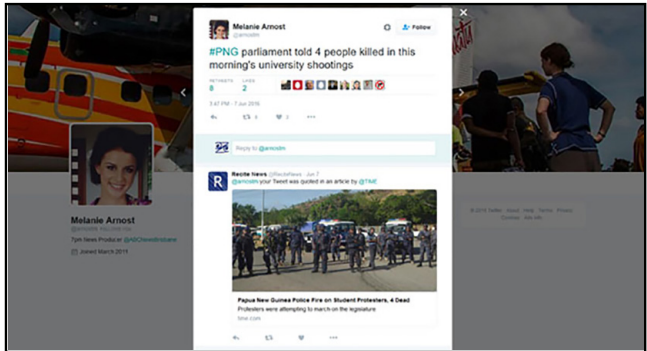
*"Three different governments, three different plans. That's no way to run a country."* (McGarry, 2016)

Republishing this editorial with McGarry's permission as a news story meant that this item was the first on *Asia Pacific Report* to nudge 1000 views. The issue was vitally important for the region and while New Zealand media only reported Air New Zealand pulling out its scheduled flights, *Asia Pacific Report* provided broader, more nuanced coverage about the politics and media freedom information behind the safety issues. Ten well-informed articles on the issue over the next few weeks concluded with a report on May 8 declaring that the Bauerfield Airport had been 'rehabilitated' and a 'new tourism era' was being ushered in (Vanuatu airport runway repairs, 2016). The *Asia Pacific Report* coverage was thanks to collaboration with the *Vanuatu Daily Post* and citizen journalists and social media through *Vanuatu Daily Digest*. Four months later, PBL reporting involved a crisis in Papua New Guinea.

### **Case 3: May-June 2016: University unrest in Papua New Guinea**

For several weeks in May and June 2016, the hashtag #UPNG4PNG became a 'hot' item as universities mounted a series of peaceful protests and class boycotts seeking to force Prime Minister Peter O'Neill from office over corruption allegations (Kama, B. 2016). This climaxed on June 8 when PNG police opened fire on a peaceful demonstration when they failed to arrest the Student Representative Council president, Kenneth Rapa, and later at Unitech on June 25 when off-

campus ‘marauders’ killed a student with bush knives (Kama, L. 2016; Unitech student dies, 2016). Although initial reports of four deaths at UPNG were reported globally (Figures 3, 4), this was later downgraded to at least 23 wounded, four of them critically who later recovered (Davidson, 2016). Students at the country’s universities, particularly UPNG, were the latest in a ‘long list of those in the firing line for denouncing the leadership of Papua New Guinea’s seemingly impregnable Prime Minister Peter O’Neill’ (Kama, 2016b). The students wanted O’Neill to resign and also for the police commissioner not to suppress investigations into corruption allegations implicating the prime minister. The students had been on strike since the end of April until finally the frustrated UPNG administration abandoned the academic year and disbanded the SRC, stripping it of its campus authority (Aupong, 2016).



**Figure 3: Melanie Arnost reports the first tweet about ‘4 people’ being killed at the University of Papua New Guinea police shootings on 8 June 2016.**

But in spite of the students’ persistent campaign, even mounting a lawsuit against the UPNG management, and their track record of being political dissidents, there seems little chance of O’Neill stepping down. In an analysis of the struggle in the Lowy Institute’s *The Interpreter* and *Café Pacific*, Australian National University legal studies doctoral candidate Bal Kama assessed their strength.

Tertiary student movement in [Papua New Guinea] has been a powerful tool for political activism on national issues since Independence. Back in 1991, students were involved in a violent protest against the government for increasing MPs’ salary.

In 1997, students joined the PNG Defence Force to protest against the use of Sandline mercenaries in the Bougainville crisis, and demanded the resignation of the then Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan. Chan withdrew the mercenaries and resigned from office.

In 2001, students protested against the privatisation of state assets and the land mobilisation programme (LMP) administered by Sir Mekere Morauta’s government. Eventually, Mekere withdrew the policies, including the LMP that sought to acquire customary land rights as surety for loans provided to the government and was part of the World Bank’s structural adjustment programme (SAP).



**Figure 4: Helen Davidson’s article in *The Guardian* headlined ‘Papua New Guinea: four students reported dead after police open fire on march’, 8 June 2016.**

However, the success of the protest came at a huge cost with three students allegedly shot dead by security forces. (Kama, B., 2016)

The PNG Constitution provides for the right to protest, to hold public assembly, and for freedom of expression. However, these are qualified rights, meaning they can be restricted if it appears that a protest would cause disharmony and instability. The laws were tightened after the bloody outcome of the 2001 protest against Mekere’s government about which two young *Uni Tavar* student journalists gave testimony to the Woods Commission of Inquiry into the tragedy (Marshall, 2001; Wakus, 2001). The recent protests have been essentially within university campuses because of the restrictions and associated risks in taking to the streets (Ibid.). In the absence of reporting of the students versus O’Neill developments by New Zealand media (apart from Radio New Zealand International), *Asia Pacific Report* extensively covered the unrest in collaboration with digital media, such as *Loop PNG* and *PNG Today*, and citizen journalists, including one among the staff of the university who supplied us with regular quality images (see Images: Students accused, 2016).

While the constitutional crisis continued to simmer in Papua New Guinea, another more cultural issue played out in New Zealand and Samoa which also challenged student journalists in a PBL context.

**Case 4: June 2016: Samoa Observer front-page suicide controversy**

In June 2016, anger mounted over the reporting of the death of a young Samoan transgender woman in Apia on the front page of a *Sunday Samoan* edition

of the *Samoa Observer* (19 June 2016). Reaction spread to New Zealand with prominent transrights campaigner Phylesha Brown-Acton declaring the media coverage had left her ‘absolutely disgusted’ (*Sunday Samoan* condemned, 2016).

On the front page of its *Sunday Samoan* edition, the *Samoa Observer* showed a full-length image of 20-year-old Jeanine Tuivaiki’s lifeless body hanging from the rafters in a central Apia church hall. In the accompanying news story, the newspaper misgendered the tragic young woman. ‘I am absolutely disgusted by the *Samoa Observer* and their front page photo of a young *fa’afafine* woman,’ said Brown-Acton, who described the reporting as ‘completely inappropriate and disrespectful’.

Where is the respect for this young person and her family? The use of such an image to sell newspapers is the lowest form of sales tactics and the editor and the reporter should be held accountable for such degrading journalism. (*Sunday Samoan* condemned, 2016)

The word *fa’afafine* meaning includes the prefix ‘*Fa’a*’, meaning ‘in the manner of’, and *fafine* means ‘woman’ (Milner, 1966, p. 52). This ‘third gender’ (Danielsson, et al, 1978) is well-accepted in Samoan culture and has a significant place in Pacific social mores; they are traditionally trained from a young age to do women’s daily work in an *Aiga* (Samoan family group).

Confronted with the public hostility, the *Samoa Observer* followed up by publishing an initial front page apology on July 20, headed ‘And if you’re offended by it still, we apologise’, that critics saw as closer to a self-justification, which in turn also drew widespread criticism on social media. Finally, editor-in-chief Gotoa’itele Savea Sano Malifa wrote a personal apology—he had not been involved in the editorial decision to publish the front page image and story—to *Samoa Observer* readers published in the July 21 edition.

Let me say this is not an easy letter for me to write. Still, I feel duty-bound to write these words, since it is our duty to tell the public we serve, the truth.

The truth is that last week, we made a sad mistake when we published a story on the late Jeanine Tuivaiki, on the front page of the *Sunday Samoan*.

We now accept that there has been an inexcusable lapse of judgment on our part, and for that we are sincerely regretful.

Yesterday, we met with members of Jeannie Tuivaiki’s family at their home at Vaiusu, where we extended our sincere apologies, and we are now thankful that we have done so.

And so to Jeanine’s family we are very sorry.

To the LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender] community in Samoa and abroad, we offer our humble apologies. (Apology to our readers, 2016)



However, this apology in which Savea also pointed out that the newspaper had been a strong supporter of the rights of the fa'afafine over many years, did not stem the deluge of hostile letters and social media attacks. This prompted Kalafi Moala, chief executive of the *Taimi 'o Tonga* group and deputy chair of the Pasifika Media Association (PasiMA), to pen his own personal message trying to bring some perspective back into the debate:

A brother has made a terrible mistake. He has, however, taken responsibility for it and has apologised. Those of us who are offended need to offer forgiveness in the spirit of Pacific compassion, and move on.

I have known Savea for almost 30 years, and he is one of the most professional and enduring journalists in our region. He has also been very successful in building a news organisation, and a daily publication that has made all of us Pacific people proud.

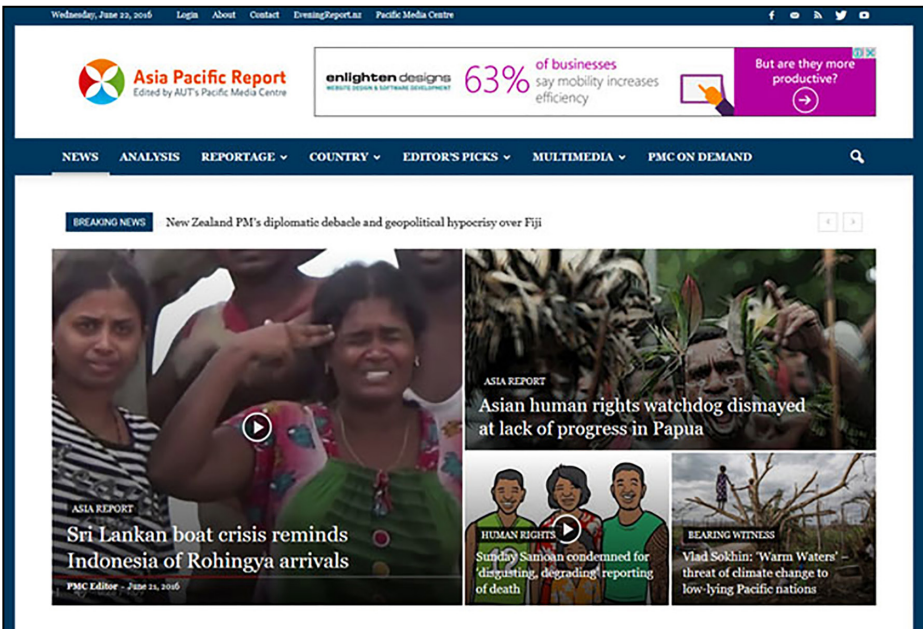
The *Samoa Observer* has a code of ethics, and Savea is one whom I know to advocate passionately for the need for media organisations to have a code of ethics. There is no excuse for mistakes so blatant as this suicide report, and I would be the last one to offer any justification for what the *Samoa Observer* did.

Reaction to the *Sunday Samoan* report has been largely fair, and reasonable. Media is often the harshest critic of itself, but criticism is usually left with a close-ended condemnation without any solutions. (Moala, 2016).

In some respects, critics saw the reportage in the *Sunday Samoan* as reflecting a 'historical bias' in the way in which some media in Samoa and elsewhere in the



Figure 5: Le Va's Pasifika media guidelines 'whiteboard' video embedded in *Asia Pacific Report's* articles related to the *Samoa Observer* transgender suicide controversy, June 2016.



**Figure 6: A typical *Asia Pacific Report* ‘display top’ on the home page—a Sri Lankan refugee makes a distraught ‘shoot me’ gesture after Indonesian authorities refused food, water, or any help, 21 June 2016.**

Pacific treat transgender, gay and lesbian news. Editor Moala introduced some balance into the public backlash.

*Asia Pacific Report* had no ‘solutions’ either, but rather than joining the ‘blame game’ that many media indulged in, stirring even greater offence, this news website and its sister project, Pacific Media Watch, attempted to treat the editorial blunder as a PBL experience and to contribute to a more informed and sensitive approach by embedding constructive video resources and links available to Pacific journalists. Pasifika media can play a key role in leading ‘safe messaging’ about reporting suicide to Pacific communities. In partnership with Pasifika media in February, Le Va (2016), launched the ‘Pasifika media guidelines for reporting suicide in New Zealand’, a whiteboard video providing an overview of the guidelines (Figure 5). The guidelines can be downloaded from Le Va’s website ([www.leva.co.nz](http://www.leva.co.nz)). Pasifika journalist Sandra Kailahi and 23 Pasifika media organisations contributed to co-developing the guidelines.

All four of these case studies—involving reporting of Nuclear Zero, Vanuatu’s international airport, the Papua New Guinea government police crackdown on students, and the youthful suicide in a Samoan church—illustrate how PBL, in this case involving real incidents and issues rather than simulated ones, can contribute strongly to student journalists gaining professional experience and insights that will prepare them for a reflective and insightful media career.

## Conclusion

Faced with the contemporary cynical clickbait culture predominant in mainstream news media, it is important for academic institutions that host schools of communication to offer alternative models that demonstrate media as a successful political institution and cornerstone of democracy. Five elements central to the ‘rhetorical and philosophical justification of the Fourth Estate’ were identified by (Schultz, 1998) as political purpose and independence; commercial priorities; the importance of public opinion; the diversity of information and viewpoints presented; and the degree of accountability. Journalism education today is about engaging these elements and producing well-rounded, well-educated journalists who have sound critical thinking abilities and a commitment to the media being part of the broader society’s solutions, not adding to its problems. As Geoff Kemp (2013) has reminded the Fourth Estate, it acts as a ‘proxy for the public’s rights’; university communication studies and journalism programmes must revive the democratic fabric in a fragmented media environment. While Schultz’s ‘commercial priorities’ category echoes the global debate on media ‘business models’ (McChesney & Pickard, 2011), independent campus-based serious media demonstrate an alternative economic model. This article highlights a case study of student-based journalism that is making a difference. It is not only contributing to investigative journalism in the Pacific but is, in that process, also providing a space for a new generation of student journalists who are committed to covering a range of social issues. Quality and independent campus-based media play a critical role in developing the full potential of student journalists. Such media is founded on a robust methodology of experiential and problem-based learning (PBL) with reflexive workshops. Journalists with a quality all-round tertiary education with a strong exposure to disciplines such as business, economics, geography, government, history/politics, human rights, language and culture, and the environment are a sound investment in a nation’s cultural capital (Robie, 2004, p. 248; 2014). An independent student media working in collaboration with academics, independent journalists and citizen journalists, as demonstrated by the *Asia Pacific Report* and the earlier *Pacific Scoop* models, contribute to a new generation of journalists with a deeper self-understanding and stronger sense of the Fourth Estate for the benefit of all society, especially in support of social justice.

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