

Canadian Journalism Programs' Response to Local News Poverty: The Challenges of Doing More

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ABSTRACT

Background *This study is the first to examine Canadian postsecondary journalism programs as generators of local news. Motivated by growing local news poverty in Canada, the study investigated local news terrain from the vantage point of journalism faculty involved in program-based publications.*

Analysis *Survey results from faculty based in 22 English language Canadian universities, colleges, and technical institutes revealed active local news publishing environments, some of which included collaborations with media and non-media partners.*

Conclusions and implications *While survey and focus group data showed strong faculty interest in expanding local news contributions by Canadian journalism students, participants also identified the pragmatic, economic, and pedagogical challenges of doing more.*

Keywords *Journalism education; Journalism program publications; Student journalism; Local news poverty; Collaborations; Academic workload*

RÉSUMÉ

Contexte *Cette étude est la première à examiner les programmes de journalisme canadiens postsecondaires en tant que pourvoyeurs de nouvelles locales. Motivée par une pauvreté croissante des nouvelles locales au Canada, cette étude examine les nouvelles locales du point de vue d'enseignants en journalisme participant aux publications réalisées dans le cadre de leurs programmes.*

Analyse *Les résultats d'un sondage d'enseignants de 22 universités, collèges et instituts de technologie de langue anglaise au Canada révèlent des milieux où la publication de nouvelles locales s'avère active, y compris en collaboration avec des partenaires médiatiques et non-médiatiques.*

Conclusions et implications *Les données provenant du sondage et de groupes de discussion indiquent un intérêt prononcé de la part des enseignants pour accroître les contributions aux nouvelles locales faites par leurs étudiants en journalisme. En même temps, les personnes interrogées ont identifié des défis pragmatiques, économiques et pédagogiques qui entravent leurs capacités d'en faire plus.*

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Mots clés *Éducation en journalisme; Publications dans des programmes de journalisme; Journalism étudiant; Pauvreté des nouvelles locales; Collaborations; Charge de travail académique*

Introduction

As journalism undergoes a “wrenching transformation” (Wilkinson & Winseck, 2019, p. 289), so too does journalism education (Allen, Craft, Waddell, & Young, 2015). Within professional practice, disruption has resulted in a profound decline of local news coverage and its public service function worldwide (Allsop, 2019; Barnett & Townend, 2015; Corbett & Lindgren, 2019; Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Napoli, Weber, McCollough, & Wang, 2018; Nielsen, 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, Williams, Sambrook, Harris, Garcia-Blanco, Dencik, Cushion, Carter, & Allan, 2016). In Canada, local news poverty has been closely monitored (Lindgren, Corbett, & Hodson, n.d.),¹ only to reveal further upheaval as the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with thousands of lost jobs and at least 50 local news outlets temporarily or permanently closed (Lindgren, Wechsler, & Wong, 2020).

Despite the contraction of professional local news media outlets across Canada, and perhaps because of it, some positive developments have also been observed. In Western Canada, we have witnessed our undergraduate students obtaining more opportunities to play active roles in generating local news stories, not only through our program-based publications but also through program collaborations with media and non-media partners. These observations underpinned a decision to study how news operations running within Canadian postsecondary journalism programs were participating in the local news landscape. A survey of faculty overseeing program-based publications followed by a focus group framed an evidence-based discussion about the potential for journalism schools to play a larger role in local news.

Literature review

This examination of how journalism programs and their publications participate in the local news economy begins with defining local news. April Lindgren, Jon Corbett, and Jaigris Hodson (2017) describe it as “the timely reporting and publication of original, verified news about people, places, issues and events in a geographically defined community” (para. 10). Some scholars describe a more hyperlocal approach (Metzgar, Kurpius, & Rowley, 2011), in which journalists tackle specific gaps in coverage while also driving civic engagement. Local news is further described as localizing global events for more localized audiences (Clausen, 2004). The importance of local news is most often articulated in terms of serving the public good, including journalism’s capacity to support and connect communities, drive civic engagement, and inform the civically engaged (Barthel, Holcomb, Mahone, & Mitchell, 2016). Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (2015) suggests local news can also hold “local elites at least somewhat accountable” (p. 1), though local news providers have also been accused of rarely holding powers to account (Monbiot, 2009). Nielsen (2015) concedes that local journalism sometimes fails, but he contends “the roles it plays are important” (p. 2), as evidenced in Pengjie, Gao, Chang Lee, and Dermot Murphy’s research (2019) linking the closure of newspapers to increased costs in municipal borrowing and salary spending. Citizens also value the social role of local news providers, as conveyed by residents of Amsterdam who expected their local TV station

to perform no less than seven social functions, ranging from “giving citizens insight into how the city ‘works’” to “contributing to social cohesion” (Meijer, 2010, p. 1).

Despite the need for and value of local news, its providers have been deeply challenged by disruption to traditional business models, leaving organizations scrambling to adapt to plummeting advertising revenues and profits (Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2014). In Canada, between 2008 and June 1, 2020, a total of 335 local news outlets closed, including 242 community newspapers, which are defined as publishing fewer than five times per week (Lindgren & Corbett, 2020).

Another national report painted a similarly bleak picture, with the number of newspaper articles in 20 Canadian communities falling by half in one decade and coverage of civic institutions falling by one third (Public Policy Forum, 2018). Despite such reports, some researchers have urged caution in adopting the “crisis” narrative. Drawing on Statistics Canada data, Sabrina Wilkinson and Dwayne Wensick (2019) noted “the number of journalists in absolute terms nearly doubled in the past 20 years, from just over 6,000 in 1998 to 11,700 in 2017” (p. 382). However, to interpret the increase as representing good news for emerging and professional journalists is likely ill-advised, as the researchers noted that people who call themselves journalists are less likely to have permanent jobs.

With legacy business models in flux, media scholars took up the question of how local news gaps should be filled, and by whom. James Compton and Paul Benedetti (2010) examined mass journalism layoffs after the 2008–2009 financial crisis and wondered if unpaid bloggers and citizen journalists could replace the “unheralded labour” of journalists holding authorities to account while making “possible a record of public life” (p. 496). In the end, they doubted the work of professional reporters could be replaced. In New York, Sam Ford and Christopher Ali (2018) called for an expansion of “thinking as to what constitutes local news and who practices local journalism” while also advocating for more “ethnic media, community media, user-generated media” (p. 12).

Responding to journalism in crisis, Canadian media scholars mapped out public policy strategies that would include participation by many more Canadian actors, including those in the academy as well as increased government support for alternative community hyperlocal and public media (Gasher, Brin, Crowther, King, Salamon, & Thibault, 2016). Gunhild Olsen (2018) examined how four U.S. nonprofit journalism centres were using classrooms as newsrooms by pairing student-journalists with professionals to engage in investigative journalism. Errol Salamon (2017) urged governments to fund research into student-generated content as well as “student-industry collaborations, and non-objective journalism” (para. 15). And in a similarly framed study to this one, Jennifer Martin, Lucy Smy, and Matthew Ricketson (2019) surveyed postsecondary staff overseeing journalism program-based publications in Australia. They found teaching newsrooms, while once rare, were now commonplace and viewed as pedagogically sound, addressing local news gaps through the public-facing work of student journalists. The Australian study also reported program faculty ranks were “bolstered by journalists” (p. 211) who were no longer employed by mainstream outlets. These journalist educators were adopting elements of the teaching hospital model by creating a supervised experience for journalism students in university newsrooms,

similar to medical student work in hospitals (Newton, Bell, Ross, Philipps, Shoemaker, & Haas, 2012). But Australian respondents also reported challenges, including inadequate institutional support to offset the vast hours required, through editing, to ensure student content was meeting legal and editorial standards.

Maarit Jaakola (2018) identifies “the pedagogical newsroom” (p. 182) as operating within a journalism program and supported through course work. Jaakola distinguishes such newsrooms from professional newsrooms by their commitment to reflexive student learning, experimentation, creating space for mistakes, and innovation. Despite support for postsecondary news operations, critics question the practice of replicating industrial newsrooms that are no longer offering graduates much in the way of career opportunities. In a keynote address, Robert Picard, then director of research at the Reuters Institute, told a national gathering of Canadian journalism educators that “journalism education has been co-opted by industry” and that the curricula had been produced to train “news factory workers” (2015, p. 8) despite the decline of such factories. Others have implored journalism educators to teach emerging journalists how to better engage in rigorous research and think critically about how their communities work, while spending less time on the operational steps involved in the presentation of news (Gasher, 2015). Donica Mensing (2010) posited that journalism could return to its democratic roots by teaching students to more fully engage with communities through a model that would “place the journalist as reporter, editor and facilitator within a community” (p. 512).

This study explores Canadian journalism programs as generators of local news, providing a view to the opportunities and friction points identified by faculty participants. It advances the knowledge of Canadian journalism programs’ relationship to local news poverty by, for the first time, itemizing program publications and reader metrics. It also identifies which areas of local news are currently covered by faculty consciously working with students to fill some of the gaps left by a declining mainstream media. As educators contemplate expanding local news production vis-a-vis their students, their program publications, and their collaborations with media and non-media partners, some are voicing concerns similar to those identified by Martin, Smy, and Ricketson (2019). Expanding local news work could place even higher demands on faculty editors, while also placing additional financial burdens on institutions that may not wish to provide the resources required. This study also surfaces other concerns, such as requiring professional-grade work from students who are still learning and might not be committed to such work.

Methodology and analysis

This study asked: How are Canadian journalism schools addressing local news gaps? Data were collected in two stages: a national survey administered in late 2018 and early 2019, followed by a small focus group in the spring of 2019. The survey employed a purposive sample of educators acting as advisors or supervisors of Canadian journalism program-based publications operating within public English language universities, colleges, and technical institutes. Drawing on a 2018 list of Canadian journalism programs published by J-Source: The Canadian Journalism Project, faculty were sought for this study who were best suited to discuss their program-based publishing envi-

ronments. Thirty-five programs were contacted and advisors from 22 programs took part, representing eight universities, 11 colleges, and three technology-focused institutes. After an initial review of survey data, some gaps were identified in how respondents defined local news, which led to the development of a small focus group involving three advisors representing a small, a medium, and a large journalism program, each based in a different province (Krueger & Casey, 2001).

Given the journalistic norm of naming sources as well as the aim of creating a stronger network of Canadian journalism educators, all participants agreed to be named. A combination of closed- and open-ended questions, detailed in Appendix 1, were shared using SurveyMonkey®. While drawbacks of survey research can include low response rates and lack of rich description (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003), the survey achieved a program participation rate of 63 percent of programs contacted. Guided by the work of Catherine Pope, Sue Ziebland, and Nicholas Mays (2000), researchers read and re-read data several times to arrive at key themes for interpretation. Both survey and focus group participants were provided the opportunity to review answers and figures, since some estimated metrics or did not have immediate access to sought-after information. This resulted in one survey participant requesting an answer to be anonymized due to concerns about backlash from an employer. Limitations included the lack of participation by French language universities in Québec. While some were contacted, this gap might have been mitigated through the development of a French language survey tool. Furthermore, the list used to develop the sample may have missed some programs. Another limitation included the likelihood that some respondents might have had only a partial understanding of their programs' local news interests, capacities, and publications. Including student journalists would have expanded understanding of their roles in local news creation, but that fell beyond the scope of the study, which was approved by the human research ethics board at Mount Royal University.

Results and implications

Study findings are captured along four themes, including how respondents define local news, the quantity and quality of local news that programs are generating, support for collaborations as a way forward, and a discussion of the opportunities and challenges presented by running news publications within the academy.

Defining local news

In defining local news, the majority of faculty supervisors described their program-based publications as extending well beyond the campus news beat. A subsequent review of the sites confirmed these publications were covering broader community news. Most respondents described local news as having an impact on local residents—filling gaps left by struggling legacy media—and serving underrepresented voices. In terms of geography, the majority spoke of bounded regions, ranging from “neighbourhood news” to much larger spaces, including “provincial and federal constituent boundaries.” Another factor that partly determined local news boundaries was students' ability to interview sources for face-to-face interviews. In a focus group discussion, Tim Currie of the University of King's College explained transportation limitations sometimes meant students could only engage with sources if those sources could be reached

along accessible bus routes in Halifax, Nova Scotia, though Currie also indicated some students occasionally covered stories far beyond the provincial capital, because events throughout Canada's second smallest province were still considered to be local. In this same discussion, Brian Gorman from MacEwan University in Edmonton, Alberta, defined local news with personal geography: "You're the epicentre of whatever is local." Gorman defined his school's front door as "downtown proper" and the back door as a multicultural area where many immigrants and refugees live, "the type of area that is filled with people who don't buy BMWs." He noted this back-door community was of less interest to major media outlets and represented a local news opportunity for journalism students "to cover this neighbourhood as a neighbour." Most survey respondents described local news efforts as having community impact, using phrases that connoted journalism's power to inspire, connect, and help people, while building meaningful change within communities.

Local news generation: A major focus for Canadian journalism programs

Canadian journalism programs are not only contemplating local news generation, they are deeply immersed in it as they continue the long-standing practice of publishing student-produced journalism across online, broadcast, social media, and print platforms. A subsequent scan revealed all content was freely available to the public. Online publications outnumbered print by nearly two to one, with both mediums, in some cases, attracting significant audiences, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. Respondents viewed local news poverty as driving many opportunities for student journalists to fill gaps through these publications, with several respondents mentioning the need to serve underrepresented citizens whose voices were missed by mainstream media.

Table 1: Canadian journalism program online publications (2018/2019)*

School	Publication name, URL	Estimated online average monthly visitors	Estimated stories per year	Notes
Algonquin College Nepean, ON	<i>Algonquin Times</i>	2,000–3,000	200–300	Depending on time of year
BCIT Burnaby, BC	<i>BCIT News</i>	N/R*	960	½ dozen stories/day during school year; Did not provide average monthly views
Carleton University Ottawa, ON	<i>Capital Current</i>	N/R	400	About a dozen per week; Site is fairly new, metrics currently unavailable
Centennial College Scarborough, ON	<i>On the Danforth</i>	N/R	15	Does not track unique monthly views metric
Centennial College Scarborough, ON	<i>Toronto Observer</i>	N/R	N/R	Number of stories unreported; published through learning lab
Conestoga College Kitchener, ON	<i>Spoke Online</i>	400–500	480	15 stories per week published during school year

Table 1 (continued)

School	Publication name URL	Estimated online average monthly visitors	Estimated stories per year	Notes
Durham College Oshawa, ON	<i>The Chronicle</i>	N/R	400–500	Does not track monthly views metrics
Fanshawe College London, ON	<i>1069 the X</i>	5,000	500	
Humber College Toronto, ON	<i>Humber News</i>	N/R	100s	Unsure of unique monthly views metrics
Humber College Toronto, ON	<i>Humber Et Cetera</i>	N/R	100	
Humber College Toronto, ON	<i>Sweat Mag</i>	N/R	30	
Langara College Vancouver, BC	<i>The Voice</i>	N/R	N/R	
MacEwan University Edmonton, AB	<i>The Scavenger</i>	N/R	6–15	Unsure of monthly views metrics
Mohawk College Hamilton, ON	<i>Ignite News</i>	N/R	100–150	Does not track unique monthly visitors metrics
Mount Royal University Calgary, AB	<i>Calgary Journal</i>	15,000–50,000	500–700	
NAIT Edmonton, AB	<i>NAIT News Watch</i>	N/R	80	Unsure of monthly unique visitors metrics
Nova Scotia Community College Halifax, NS	<i>WTV Media</i>	N/R	N/R	Social media only - Facebook; Number of stories unreported
Ryerson University Toronto, ON	<i>Ryersonian</i>	50,587	650	
SAIT Calgary, AB	<i>The Press</i>	N/R	100+	Unsure of unique monthly visitors metrics
Sheridan College Oakville, ON	<i>Sheridan Sun</i>	3,700	500	
St. Clair College Windsor, ON	<i>Mediaplex Examiner</i>	300–500	800–1,000	
University of King's College Halifax, NS	<i>The Signal</i>	18,090–56,202	400	Average monthly views for the year. Monthly views #s during workshop period considerably higher @ 56,202
University of Regina, SK	<i>Ink</i>	12,892	75	

Table 2: Canadian journalism program print publications (2018–2019)*

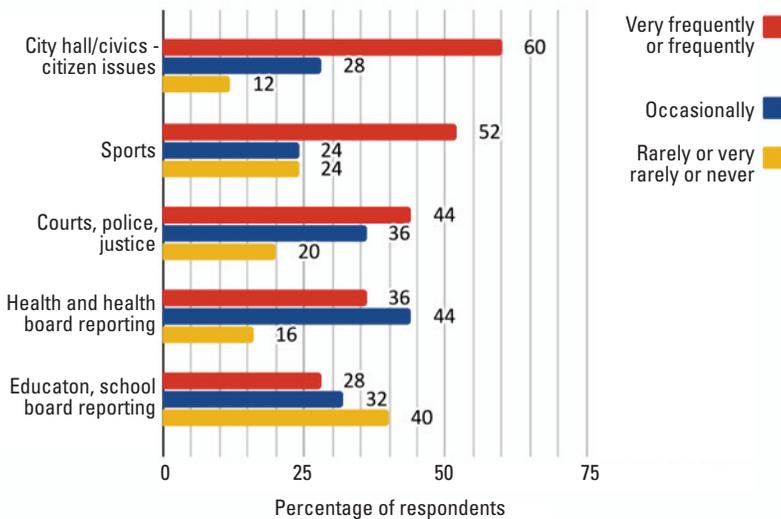
School	Publication name URL	Estimated print annual circulation	Estimated stories per year	Notes
Algonquin College, Nepean, ON	<i>Algonquin Times</i>	40,000	120–200	4 issues/year; Circulation annually; printing underwritten by Student Association
Centennial College Scarborough, ON	<i>On the Danforth</i>	4,000	15	2 issues/year; Circulation annually
Durham College Oshawa, ON	<i>The Chronicle</i>	10,000	175–200	5 issues/year; Circulation annually
Humber College Toronto, ON	<i>Humber Et Cetera</i>	N/R	80	4 issues/year; Annual circulation unknown
Langara College Vancouver, BC	<i>The Voice</i>	14,000	256–340	16–20 stories in each eight-page weekly, with seven weekly editions a semester; 16–20 stories during two to three dailies at the end of each term
Mount Royal University Calgary, AB	<i>Calgary Journal</i>	60,000	80	6 issues/year; Circulation annually
Ryerson University Toronto, ON	<i>Ryersonian</i>	88,000	260–400	22 issues/year; Circulation annually
SAIT, Calgary, AB	<i>The Press</i>	4,000	96–112	8 issues/year; Circulation annually
Sheridan College Oakville, ON	<i>Devium</i>	30	15–20	One issue/year; Circulation annually
St. Clair College Windsor, ON	<i>Mediaplex Examiner</i>	8,000–10,000	400	Weekly publication; circulation annually
University of Regina, Regina, SK	<i>Ink</i>	1,200	40	4 issues/year; Circulation annually
University of Regina, Regina, SK	<i>The Crow Magazine</i>	3,000	5-12	One issue/year

Notes: *Some metrics reported by faculty advisors were estimations. The lists of publications are not exhaustive as some respondents did not mention all publications connected to their programs. Some publications were not reported, or N/R, as some respondents indicated learning was the primary role of the publication and therefore metrics were not formally tracked. Others indicated they did not have time to obtain metrics.

Ninety-six percent of respondents reported commitment to local news was moderate to high, with city hall and civics (defined as the exploration of citizen rights and issues) representing the most covered topics, as illustrated in Figure 1. Sports reporting was second (it was not specified if coverage was on or off-campus.) More than 90 percent of respondents confirmed students were covering local news frequently or very

frequently. Respondents also indicated students were actively engaged in authoring profiles of local people, with 84 percent suggesting students frequently or very frequently developed such profiles. Survey results further showed the work of student journalists was being shared publicly; 44 percent of respondents indicated student work always reached a public audience, while remaining respondents indicated student work usually or sometimes reached a public audience. Most respondents indicated news work was carried out by students under the supervision of faculty within course-based settings, a model that ensured a steady supply of student journalists undertaking editorial work in exchange for course credit. Respondents indicated the impact of student reporting was judged according to both metrics and community and audience feedback.

Figure 1: Topic Coverage Frequency by Student Journalists



Source: Canadian faculty advisors

Print publication circulation is typically measured using the number of print-based units (i.e., newspapers or magazines) produced and circulated over time. Annual figures were sought for this study, with some of the larger publications reporting significant reach. The *Ryersonian* produced 88,000 papers throughout the year; the *Calgary Journal*, 60,000; the *Algonquin Times*, 40,000; and *The Voice*, 14,000. Advisors also provided metrics for online publications, measured by the average number of unique monthly visitors to publication websites. Once again, the audience reach was large in some cases, with *The Signal* garnering 56,000 unique average monthly visitors during key workshop periods; the *Calgary Journal*, 50,000, when editorial classes were in session; the *Ryersonian*, 51,000; and *Ink*, about 13,000.

Recognizing that metrics are but one measure of impact and that “measuring impact is hard” (Stray, 2012, para. 16), advisors were asked to discuss how reporting projects affected communities. They responded with multiple examples of original and enterprising community-based stories. Terra Tailleir of the University of King’s College,

describing a project that investigated arsenic in drinking water wells (see Frederiksen, 2017), wrote: “It’s a good example of a deep dive into a local topic that no other media has the time or resources to cover. It was shared widely in local communities.” Others described reporting projects that exposed wrongdoing, helped and connected community members, gave voice to the marginalized, and ultimately created change. The high-impact stories cited by faculty served as a reminder of the considerable gravitas of topics being covered by Canadian student journalists, including the legalization of cannabis, opioid overdoses, serial murder in a LGBTQ+ community, immigration challenges, Indigenous issues, mental-health topics, environmental contamination, and institutional failures. Several advisors also discussed how student-produced local news stories triggered mainstream media to follow up with similar reporting; this was interpreted by participants as a measure of success, as was the act of giving “voice” to people in the community who otherwise might never have been heard.

Filling gaps created by local news poverty was another consistent driver reported by most respondents. They described dwindling mainstream coverage as creating an opportunity for Canadian journalism programs to, in the University of Regina’s Mark Taylor’s words, “fill the void left by shuttered or non-existent newsrooms in communities.” Similarly, Cheryl Vallender of Sheridan College in Oakville, Ontario, envisioned student journalists covering community stories “that the local news outlets can’t due to cuts.” The University of King’s College, for example, found it was the only outlet covering a murder trial in Halifax because other “media didn’t or simply couldn’t devote resources to this,” wrote Terra Tailleir. Brian Gorman described his program’s intent to create a hyperlocal news site “dedicated to the working-class and poor neighbourhoods” adjacent to the campus, adding, “We also hope to provide some kind of supplement to the city’s rapidly disappearing arts and entertainment journalism.” Several unique local news initiatives were mentioned. At the University of Regina, for example, students endeavoured to find and report on stories in rural Saskatchewan communities, after which they would publish a one-time newspaper named after the community. Respondents also touched on ways that journalism schools and their publications were collaborating within nationally coordinated investigations involving other journalism schools and professional media organizations.²

Canadian journalism programs embracing media and non-media collaborations

Study respondents indicated local news gaps were being addressed through program collaborations involving both media and non-media partners. Joy Jenkins and Lucas Graves (2019) define collaborations as “projects through which journalists from different news organizations work with one another and with other actors — such as technologists, data scientists, academics, and community members — to report, produce, and distribute news” (p. 7). Some 70 percent of respondents ranked their programs as very or extremely interested in collaborating with others, with the goal of generating more local news. The same number, 70 percent, reported having already undertaken collaborations that resulted in contributions to the local news environment, some of which are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3: Canadian journalism program collaborations

Journalism program	City	Partnering organization	Project
British Columbia			
Thompson Rivers University	Kamloops	Student placements	
Langara College	Vancouver	Placed article in Black Press	Undocumented immigrants
BCIT	Burnaby	Tiny Light Foundation	Public service: photos
		CBC Radio	
Alberta			
Mount Royal University	Calgary	Mental Health Commission of Canada, Calgary chapter	Mental health
		CBC/Calgary Herald	New immigrants
		Institute for Investigative Journalism	Lead in drinking water
		Mount Royal University Iniskim Centre	Indigenous content
SAIT	Calgary	Contributed to local news sites	
NAIT	Edmonton	The Edmonton Police Service	Opioid crisis
		An inner-city agency	Homelessness
Saskatchewan			
University Of Regina	Regina	Institute for Investigative Journalism	Price of oil
		Unnamed	Hooked: opioids
Ontario			
Humber College	Etobicoke	Institute for Investigative Journalism	Lead in drinking water
Durham College	Oshawa	City of Oshawa	Using Esri data for city maps
Algonquin College	Ottawa	Ontario Colleges Athletic Association	Sweat Magazine
Conestoga College	Kitchener	Wilfrid Laurier University	
		Waterloo Region Record	
		Global News	
Centennial College	Scarborough	Multiple community partners as part of coursework	Social media campaigns
Sheridan Collage	Oakville	Provided broadcast to local news station	Election coverage
St. Clair College	Windsor	Provided exclusive stories to local media outlets	
Nova Scotia			
University of King's College	Halifax	Ku'ku'kwes News/Maureen Gogoo	Missing and murdered Indigenous women
		The Walrus	Mental health
		Institute for Investigative Journalism	Lead in drinking water
		The Coast	
		Advocate Media Inc.	
Nova Scotia Community College	Halifax	Ku'ku'kwes News/Maureen Gogoo	Truth and Reconciliation

Source: Responses provided by Canadian journalism educators; some responses were incomplete.

Programs entered a wide range of partnerships, together with other journalism programs, nonprofit agencies, and professional media outlets, both large and small. Referencing calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, respondents described three collaborations with Indigenous organizations. Erin Moore with Nova Scotia Community College's journalism program wrote about the critical leadership provided by an independent Indigenous news outlet, *Ku'ku'kwes News*, which resulted in students producing stories about truth and reconciliation. The University of King's College also mentioned its high-impact work with the same news outlet, whereby students reported on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls from the Maritimes. The profiles were co-published on both news sites. The *Calgary Journal* partnered with the Iniskim Centre, a campus Indigenous support centre, to produce podcasts about issues affecting Indigenous people. Many respondents also identified multiple partnerships, past and present, with traditional media companies, out of which came a range of student-produced stories, including immigration, refugee, mental-health, and Indigenous issues, with some stories published in both program and partner sites. A number of respondents also indicated involvement with the Institute for Investigative Journalism (IJ), a consortium between journalism schools and media partners based at Concordia University. The IJ has engaged hundreds of Canadian journalism students in activities such as collecting water samples for lead testing, undertaking large data journalism projects, and producing stories for public audiences. Collaborations with non-media partners, including the Edmonton Police Service, the Canadian Mental Health Association, and the Ontario Colleges Athletic Association, were also mentioned. These collaborations reflect a type of reimagining of local news and who gets to practice it. As such, Ford and Ali's (2018) call to "expand our thinking" (p. 12) would seem to be materializing, with industry turbulence cracking open opportunities in the local news economy. However, if local news gaps are driving organizations to more actively seek partnerships with postsecondary journalism programs (and this would be a worthy avenue for future research), then journalism educators would need to guard against exploitation (Salamon, 2015). Student journalists are hungry for opportunity but often unpaid for their efforts. Any move to expand collaborations and partnerships would require continued advocacy by educators to ensure students are appropriately acknowledged and in some cases compensated for their work.

Opportunities and challenges associated with journalism program publications

Producing news and running news operations within academic programs presents both opportunities and challenges. Many respondents reported optimistically that program publications were well positioned to address local news gaps. Publications were overseen by faculty with professional journalism experience. Students were described as heading into their neighbourhoods, interviewing sources, and developing news stories with a focus on serving their communities. While respondents' commentary about local news generation was largely optimistic in tone, they also identified challenges.

This study frames the faculty-identified challenges of collegiate news work in relation to faculty workload, institutional support, the role of the student, and collabo-

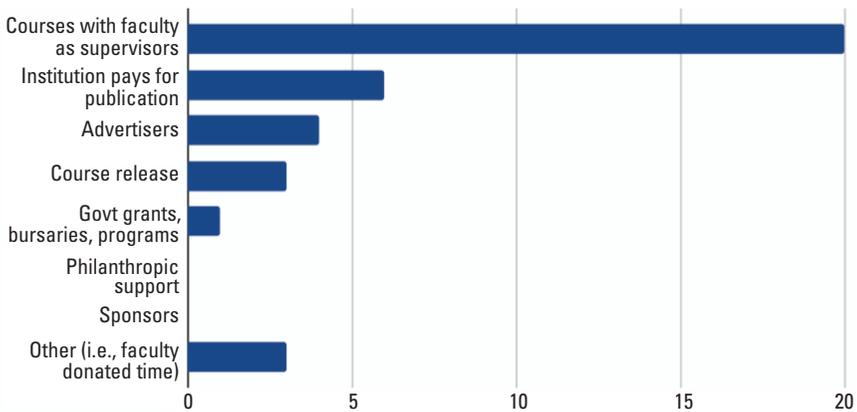
rations. Similar to a study by Martin, Smy, and Ricketson (2019), several respondents in this study indicated a level of fatigue associated with editing student content for public edification. Carleton University's Aneurin Bosley cited the workload challenge of educators taking on editorial and publishing roles, in addition to teaching. Some faculty advisors also noted their institutions did not always understand nor support the publishing enterprise, a position discussed by John Maxwell Hamilton (2014), who argued journalism programs, their faculty, and their research missions were poorly understood in the academy: "The chairs of departments of English preside over programs that need no justification. Heads of journalism units cannot assume that. Every time a new provost arrives on campus, they have to worry about 'educating' him or her on the fundamental value of their unit" (p. 299). Faculty can feel especially taxed when their student journalists engage in investigative reporting that sometimes results in threats by disgruntled sources or legal actions. Respondent Archie McLean from Mount Royal University explained that when done well, investigative reporting holds authorities to account and can precipitate much public critique and debate. He noted that expanded news coverage could put already risk-averse postsecondary institutions in the position of having to respond to accusations of wrongdoing.

Respondents also touched on the challenges faced by journalism programs that investigate their own institutions. One respondent, who asked not to be identified because of possible backlash from university administrators, reported having helped student journalists discover an infrastructure problem that presented potential safety risks to the public. The participant indicated administrators knew of the problem but did not address it until after the news story was published. Another respondent shared a link to a high-impact story about the respondent's college losing millions trying to establish a campus in Saudi Arabia (Kidd, 2018). The story resulted in a lengthy response from administration accusing the publication of a lack of balance and context, which the editors attached at the end of the story.³ Respondents raised additional concerns about academic scheduling as an impediment to expanding local news operations. The student body is "constantly changing," noted Ryerson University's Peter Bakogeorge, adding "there is no consistency and only limited 'organizational' memory in a journalism program when it comes to local issues and people." Similarly, Conestoga College's Larry Cornies noted that just as students get "up to speed," they graduate. Others mentioned the challenge of running news operations over the fall and winter terms, only to see most student journalists leave in the spring. Postsecondary schedules were seen as testing the relationship with audiences, which in some cases are left with no new content for up to four months of each year.

Respondents also noted that if program publications were to fill more local news voids, journalism programs would require deeper support, or as respondent Frank Moher of Vancouver Island University said, "convincing administrations or funding organizations, both private and public, to pay for it." Generating stories vis-a-vis publications is expensive. Print publications carry significant production and circulation costs, while online publication expenses include website maintenance and hosting, audio and video production costs, as well as subscriptions for web-related tools. Unlike some U.S. collegiate journalism programs, which enjoy external support from founda-

tions, Canadian programs in this study reported they were funded almost entirely through their institutional budgets. Respondents showed their publications to be deeply dependent on institutional funding (see Figure 2, in which respondents described funding sources for their first-listed online publications). Furthermore, of all the publications discussed in the study, only one print publication was reported to be receiving philanthropic support. This may be tied to Canadian tax laws, which have historically disallowed charitable donations to news outlets. However, it is noted that most Canadian post-secondary institutions are registered charities that could be making charitable fundraising for journalism programs and their publications a higher priority. Another unique source of funding was reported by one program publication that received funding from the students' association.

Figure 2: Faculty respondents ($n = 20$) indicate sources of support for first listed online publications



Another pressing matter for most faculty was the role of the student in publishing operations. Respondents expressed concerns about student interest, motivation, and capacity to do even more news work. The lack of journalism career opportunities and poor pay were cited as impeding faculty's ability to excite students about filling gaps in local news. As Jim Van Horne of Fanshawe College indicated, "Many prefer 'corporate communications' careers and feel journalism is just a stepping stone." These responses reinforce the need for journalism educators to reconcile their role in "training students for a professional workforce with the slow-motion disintegration of that workforce" (Anderson, 2017, p. 2033). Respondents further articulated concerns about expecting students to do the work of professionals. Frank Moher of Vancouver Island University indicated that while his program operated an online magazine, the focus was on teaching skill development and supporting graduates heading into the professional world, adding, "We do not aspire to be the professional world." St. Clair College's Veronique Mandal noted that her students were up to the task and viewed covering local news "as their obligation, and because it's expected, they take the role seriously." Others, however, stated students were not always interested in local issues. "Students are interested in global entertainment, global environmental issues etc., it is hard for

them to understand that entertainers, concern about the environment, and political movements all start locally,” noted Denise Schon from Centennial College. Jim Cunningham from the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and Brian Legree from Durham College expanded on the challenge of engaging students to cover local news, though they and others discussed strategies to enhance interest, such as framing coverage as more directly affecting students.

Faculty also expressed challenges in terms of students not necessarily being ready to take on more news work. It is challenging work that plays out amid shifting professional norms (Bjørnsen, Hovden, & Ottosen, 2007; Deuze, 2005; Williams, Guglietti, & Haney, 2018). Respondent Tim Currie contemplated whether students possess “a weaker understanding of civics” compared to previous generations, adding they “may be less familiar with local news formats and coverage because their information diet (e.g., social media, podcasts) is different from previous generations.” Taras (2015) examines this generational divide, describing a type of “downward spiral” where “the less exposure to news, the less interest people have in public affairs, and the less likely they are to vote” (p. 10). Characterizing young digital natives as “peek-a-boo citizens,” Taras depicts them as both “connected, and global,” yet “increasingly rootless, distrustful, disconnected, and arguably unhappy” (p. 41). The depiction highlights a need for a deeper understanding of how journalism student motivations, interests, and emerging professional identities inform any move to expand local news efforts in the academy.

Finally, while most faculty conveyed optimism about pursuing collaborations as a way to address local news gaps, 30 percent of respondents indicated lower levels of interest. Some respondents noted their programs were very small. It is possible that faculty editors felt they and their programs were too overloaded to even contemplate entering collaborations. Additionally, respondent Archie McLean indicated collaborations could be both rewarding and difficult to manage. Based on experience with both media and non-media organizations, the authors have personally observed the need to help students deconstruct the experience, especially when working with non-media partners who may not know or embrace journalistic values such as independence and autonomy (Deuze, 2005; Shapiro, 2014). Managing the ethics of partnership can be messy and requires helping students to decipher independent journalism from community service work or even public relations.

Conclusion

This research represents the first time Canadian journalism educators were queried about their program-based news publications, their capacity to address news poverty, and their interest in collaborations. The majority of journalism programs are robust creators of open-access local news content, fuelled by students carrying out supervised coursework that often finds its way to online, print, social, and broadcast sites. Several faculty advisors reported trying to actively fill local news gaps with student-generated content. Faculty optimistically described the excitement and impact of student reporting projects on underreported issues, as well as significant collaborations with media and non-media partners. In this study, it is reasonable to infer that journalism school collaborations with Indigenous organizations are a response to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls to action.

Despite their optimism and excitement about local news, faculty raised important pedagogical, financial, and ethical questions about plunging students and faculty into more public-facing endeavours. Sources of tension included faculty workload concerns and students' ability to produce deadline-driven work that meets journalistic standards. There were varying levels of institutional and financial support with only one reported instance of philanthropic support for a publication. Other challenges included inconsistent student interest in local news, academic schedules that hinder publishing in summer months, and the dearth of professional news work that awaits journalism graduates. We find it unlikely that Canadian journalism programs can or should replace the labour of professional journalists. However, the current collective efforts of dozens of journalism programs is a force to be acknowledged and leveraged.

This study provides many avenues for continued research, including best practices for engaging journalism students in local news reporting and collaborations, the best way to evaluate publication and story impact, and best practices to increase institutional and philanthropic support for program-based news operations in Canadian journalism schools. Furthermore, the study findings open the door to identifying priorities for journalism programs wishing to expand local news coverage. One obvious priority should be to leverage more support from public and private funders to bolster local news initiatives designed with and for the community. Key is to connect supportive student learning to initiatives that best serve communities in a time of declining local news. Collaborations are among the more powerful ways to upscale the kinds of local news stories that ultimately serve the public good. All of this requires a reimagining of students as partners. However, an expanded commitment to year-round publishing with dedicated faculty editors and paid student journalists may be necessary to expand local news generation. At their best, postsecondary institutions are places of intellectual ferment and change. Given the decline of traditional journalism jobs and a trend toward journalism as a freelance enterprise, journalism educators must work together for continued innovation that reaches beyond established formulas of news work and delivery.

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Notes

1. To gauge whether Canadian journalism programs participating in this study were situated in locations that had experienced local news shrinkage, research assistant Stephanie Hagenars plotted participant programs on a Google map (<https://tinyurl.com/mappingnews>) layered with local news outlet closure data from Lindgren & Corbett (n.d.) that used geo-mapping to track local news activity, including outlet closures, mergers, and downsizings in Canada since 2008.
2. The mission of the Institute for Investigative Journalism (Concordia University, n.d.) includes addressing news poverty by assisting with "quality reporting for underserved communities" (Mission 3, para. 12). The IJ's first investigation examined the environmental costs of Canada's oil industry (Observer Media Group, 2020). The latest national investigation, called *Tainted Water*, examined lead levels in Canada's water supply, with contributions from participating journalists, media companies, journalism students, and postsecondary institutions.

3. Unlike most program publications produced by journalism students for course credit, the *Algonquin Times* receives some funding from the students' association rather than the university.

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Websites

1069 the X, <https://www.1069thex.com/news/>
 Advocate Media Inc., <https://advocatemediainc.com/>
 Algonquin Times, <https://algonquintimes.com/>
 BCIT News, <https://bcitnews.com/>
 Calgary Journal, <https://calgaryjournal.ca/>
 Capital Current, <https://capitalcurrent.ca/>
 The Chronicle, <https://chronicle.durhamcollege.ca/>
 The Coast, <https://thecoast.ca/>
 The Crow Magazine, <http://www.jschool.ca/in-depth/the-crow>
 Humber Et Cetera, <https://humberetc.ca/>
 Humber News, <http://humbernews.ca/>
 Ignite News, <http://www.ignitenews.ca/>
 Ink, <http://ink.urjschool.ca/>
 J-Source: The Canadian Journalism Project, j-source.ca
 Kúkúkwes News, <http://kukukwes.com/>
 Mediaplex Examiner, <http://themediaplex.com/>
 NAIT News Watch, <https://naitnewswatch.ca/>
 On the Danforth, <http://onthedanforth.ca/>
 The Press, <https://saitjournalism.ca/thepress/>
 Ryersonian, <https://ryersonian.ca/>
 Scavenger, <https://macewanjournalism.com/>
 Sheridan Sun, <http://sheridansun.sheridanc.on.ca/>
 The Signal, <https://signalhfx.ca/>
 Spoke Online, <https://spokeonline.com/>
 Sweat Mag, <http://humberjournalism.com/sweatmag/>
 Toronto Observer, <https://torontoobserver.ca/>
 The Voice, <https://www.langaravoices.ca/>
 The Walrus, <https://thewalrus.ca/>
 WTV Media, <https://www.facebook.com/WTVMedia/>

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Appendix 1: Local News Survey Questions

Filling the Local News Gap? A mixed-methods analysis examining the potential for Canadian collegiate journalism publications to serve local news needs

Exploring Local News

1. How do you (or how does your program) define local news?
2. What opportunities do you see for Canadian journalism programs wishing to play a more significant role in local news generation?
3. What challenges do you see for Canadian journalism programs wishing to play a more significant role in local news generation?
4. Is your journalism program discussing how it could fill gaps in local news coverage? (Yes/No/Not Sure)
5. If yes, what aspects of this contribution have been, or are being considered?
6. If no, what (if anything) is impeding this discussion?
7. How would you rank your program's commitment to covering local news? (Likert Value Scale)
8. Do students in your program cover local news? (Likert Frequency Scale)
9. How often are your students engaging in city hall and/or civic issues reporting? (Likert Frequency Scale)
10. How often are your students engaging in school board and/or education reporting? (Likert Frequency Scale)
11. How often are your students engaging in courts, police and/or justice issues reporting? (Likert Frequency Scale)
12. How often are your students engaging in health board and local health issues reporting? (Likert Frequency Scale)
13. How often are your students engaging in local sports reporting? (Likert Frequency Scale)
14. How often are your students developing profiles of local people? (Likert Frequency Scale)
15. How often do students' local news stories reach a public audience? In other words, are their stories being published for public consumption? (Likert Frequency Scale)
16. How interested would you say most students are in doing local news stories? (Likert Likelihood Scale)
17. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about student interest in covering local news?

Impact

1. Please describe up to 3 recent student-generated local news stories that in your view had significant impact in your community, including links.
2. What else can you tell us about how local news stories from students in your program have affected your community?

3. How interested would your program be in collaborating more intentionally with other journalism schools with the goal of generating, sharing and celebrating local news reporting projects? (Likert Likelihood Scale)
4. Would you be interested in the creation of a website that names and celebrates top local news stories originating from journalism program students across Canada? (Yes/No)
5. If such a website were developed, may we re-publish (with credit) the high-impact stories listed earlier? (Yes/Yes, but contact me directly before doing so/No)

Collaborations

1. How would you describe your program's overall interest in collaborating with others with the goal of generating local news? (Likert Likelihood Scale)
2. Has your journalism program undertaken any collaborations that have resulted in contributions to the local news environment? (Yes/No/Unsure)
3. If yes, list and briefly describe a few examples. Collaborations could include (but are not limited to) formal or informal partnerships with foundations, media companies, academic groups, other news sites, and not-for-profits.
4. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about past, present or future collaborations or partnerships?

Your Program's Online Publication

1. Does your program have 1 or more online news publications? (Yes/Yes, but someone else is better suited to answer questions about this publication/No)
2. Your Online Publication (Repeated up to 4 online publications)
3. What is the URL of the first online news publication you would like to tell us about?
4. What are the objectives of this publication, stated or otherwise?
5. How much editorial content is published in this site annually? (i.e. # of articles created)
6. What are the average unique visitors per month?
7. What do you consider to be key metrics besides unique views? (i.e. bounce rates, stories that other news outlets follow, verbal feedback, social media feedback, university recognition)
8. How is this publication supported? You may choose more than one answer.
 - Editorial courses in which faculty are in place to act as faculty supervisors
 - Course releases, whereby 1 or more faculty support the publication outside of regular course work.

- postsecondary institution provides money to pay for publication expenses
 - Advertisers
 - Sponsors
 - Philanthropic support (i.e. donations)
 - Government (i.e. grants, bursaries, programs)
 - Other
9. (Optional) If you chose other, could you please explain?
10. (Optional) Is there anything else you wish to tell us about this online publication?
11. Does your program have another online publication that you would like to tell us about? (Yes, and I'm prepared to answer questions about this publication/Yes, but a colleague is better situated than me to answer questions about this publication/No)

Print Publications

1. Does your program have print publications? (Yes/Yes, but someone else is better able to answer questions about this publication/No)
2. Print Publications (Repeated up to 3 print publications)
3. What is the name of the first print publication you would like to tell us about?
4. What are the objectives of this publication (stated or otherwise)?
5. How is this publication supported? You may choose more than one answer.
 - Editorial courses in which faculty are in place to act as faculty supervisors
 - Course releases, whereby 1 or more faculty support the publication outside of regular course work.
 - postsecondary institution provides money to pay for publication expenses
 - Advertisers
 - Sponsors
 - Philanthropic support (i.e. donations)
 - Government (i.e. grants, bursaries, programs)
 - Other
6. If you chose other, please explain.
7. How much editorial content is typically published in this print publication, annually? (i.e. 5 to 10 stories in a 30-page publication, six times a year)
8. If not already specified, what is the publication's publishing rhythm? (i.e. weekly, monthly, 6 times a year, etc.)
9. What is the circulation for this publication, annually?

10. Where geographically is this print publication distributed?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about this print publication?
12. Does your program have another print publication you would like to tell us about? (Yes, and I'm able to answer questions about the publication/Yes, but a colleague is better situated to answer questions about this publication/No)

Social Media Engagement

1. How are your publications, or publication, using social media to serve local news needs? Click all that apply:
 - Engage audience
 - Grow audience
 - Interact with audience
 - Drive traffic to online website(s)
 - Find sources
 - Find information
 - Monetize
 - Feature native (social-only) content
 - Other
 - N/A
 - (Optional) If 'other' please explain.
2. How confident are you in your program's approach to teaching social media? (Likert Confidence Scale)
3. (Optional) Is there anything else you would like to tell us about how your publication(s) is using social media to serve local news needs?

In Conclusion

1. Is there anything else you wish to expand on as we explore the local news landscape as it pertains to Canadian postsecondary institutions?
2. If you have identified colleagues you think should complete this survey, could you please provide their contact information here?
3. Once the results of this study are reviewed, the research team hopes to conduct a small focus group, likely in early spring of 2019. Would you be willing to be contacted about participating in a focus group with other faculty editors? (Yes/No)