

# Intercultural issues in the Norwegian journalism curriculum

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This study looks into Norwegian journalism curricula and how and to what degree they focus on intercultural issues. The web pages to six different schools are analyzed to see how the objectives are formulated, and how the curricula are composed. The six schools are Oslo University College, Volda University College, Bodø University College, University of Stavanger, Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication and University of Bergen. The findings suggest that the schools emphasize educating for practical journalistic skills on behalf of in-depth analysis of contemporary society. Oslo University College and Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication focus on intercultural communication and global issues to a larger extent than the others. Based on the results, the study discussed some perspectives that might be needed to equip Norwegian future journalists for a global reality, where there are no longer given and fixed skills for a journalist.

**Keywords:** journalism education, curriculum, intercultural, global, ethnicity, Norway.

## Introduction

The media in Norway is daily focusing on topics related to immigration and an increasingly multicultural society. Different types of education are taking this reality into account in their curricula. Within the pedagogical field there are subjects such as migration pedagogy, both at the kindergarten level and the elementary school level. Language departments have Norwegian as a second language as a part of their cur-

riculum. Several colleges now have even BachelorBachelor degrees in intercultural understanding or similar topics (Høgskolen i Oslo, 2009). In summation, most of the education preparing future generations for the increasingly greater intercultural challenges, appear to be the ones that are educating future pre-school teachers, and teachers in elementary and secondary schools.

This research is an investigation of how the Norwegian journalism education deals with questions of intercultural issues, questions about ethnicity, immigration and related issues. Deciding on a specific term here is a challenge. In the remaining part of this study, the term *intercultural* will be chosen. The term is not very precise, but is meant to represent the various cultural issues in the Norwegian society, such as integration, immigration, multiculturalism, and ethnicity and so on. *Intercultural* deals with the different aspects of issues concerning the meeting between people from different cultural backgrounds within Norwegian society.

These considerations have led to raise the following problem statement of this research: *What kind of focus on intercultural issues does journalism education give to future journalists in Norway? And to what degree are they trained to describe and report from the contemporary Norwegian society? We might add an additional question: how are these questions related to the Norwegian press' own goals and objectives?*

## The code of ethics

In answering that, one needs to look into the fundamentals in the philosophy of the Norwegian press; the code of ethics that was first established in 1936 and revised many times afterwards (Norsk Presseforbund, 2008). This code of ethics is reflected in the curricula of all the journalism educations. In many ways the code of ethics forms the basis of the whole thinking of how journalism education should be developed and serves as the 'ten commandments' of journalism. Related to our problem statement, there are several paragraphs that are particularly relevant.

The first paragraph is about the role of the press in society. Paragraph 1.2. states that "the press should take care of important tasks, such as information, debate and critique of society. The press has a unique responsibility of letting different views be expressed." This is a general formulation of

the need to inform the public about important contemporary issues. No places in the code of ethics ethnicity or intercultural issues are mentioned in particular, but as these questions are amongst the most highly debated in Norwegian society, they are among the issues that should be covered by this paragraph.

There is one paragraph however (Paragraph 4), that mentions race and national identity amongst publicity rules. Paragraph 4.3 states: “Show respect for people’s identity, private life, race, nationality and religious views. Do not emphasize personal and private relations when this is irrelevant to the story”. This paragraph is the only one directly referring to race and national identities.

The following analysis will therefore look into way journalism curricula reflects the manner, in which journalists are trained to be able to inform, debate and perform critiques of central issues in contemporary Norwegian society in general, and how, in particular, they are trained to report about ethnicity and intercultural issues.

## Methodology

In order to find the answer to our problem statement, this article will look into actual curricula, but will be limited to an analysis of the Bachelor programs of the following journalism programs in Norway: Bodø University College, Oslo University College, University of Stavanger, University of Bergen, Volda University College and Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication<sup>1</sup> in Kristiansand. These colleges are chosen because they have comparable Bachelor programs concentrating specifically on educating future journalists, while other colleges and university educations that are more academic oriented, giving for example Bachelor degrees in media science and media and communication, are excluded.

The study concentrates solely on the written curriculum, as found on the official web pages of the six schools. In addition to this, the schools were contacted to get additional information related to the different curricula. Many of the schools offer internships in newspapers and other media institutions during the educational period. Intercultural issues

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the author teaches here.

will occur during these periods and infrequently throughout the study, but they are not a focus of our research because it would be difficult to map them, and is also because they are not part of the preplanned curriculum, thus showing the overall priorities of the program.

Another limitation is to focus on the specific journalism topics only, social science and communication and media theoretical subjects, and eliminate the more practical parts of the education, such as multimedia practice, and the more technical parts of the curriculum.

The outline of the research will initially be an analysis of each of the Bachelor programs, followed by a comparative analysis. Towards the end of the article, we will draw some conclusions according to the research problem, as well as some pedagogical reflections.

## Literature

Research literature on journalism education, as related to intercultural issues, has for the most part been about recruitment of journalists from minority groups (Alme 1997, Ansari & Fossum 1999; Andersen 2002; Cottle 2000, Dæhlen 2001 and 2002, Greek 2002; Jensen 2000; Ottosen 2002, Pham 2002, Svendsen 2000). Research shows that the future journalists in Norway are predominantly ethnically homogenous, with less than 3 per cent saying that both of their parents come from abroad (Bjørnson, Hovden and Ottosen, 2007).

Other researchers deal with the journalists' attitudes when they work in the field and portray immigrants (Bjørnson 2002, Brune 2000; Eide 1999, Eide & Simonsen 2004 and 2007, Fjeldstad & Lindstad 1999, Hussein & O'Connor 1997, Lien 1997), but this is not directly linked to journalism education.

Recent research addresses the journalism education situation (Bjørnson, Hovden and Ottosen, 2007), but the focus is mainly on the demographics of students, and the relationship to the media industry (Høyer & Ihlen 1998).

A survey on the future journalists' motivation for studying journalism, "informing about political issues" is among the most important in recent research. Another survey after three years in the industry, showed a similar result, where most of the journalists expressed that this was still important for them, as well as "watching over the powerful and reveal-

ing abuses of power.” The same research shows that journalism students would prefer more intercultural topics in the curriculum (Bjørnsen, Hovden, Ottosen, Schultz, Zilliacus-Tikkanen, 2007).

Little of the research literature directly addresses the actual content of the curricula, as to whether they address intercultural issues. Internationally, however, some similar studies have been done. Deuze (2001) compared curricula in the US, Australia and in The Netherlands. The results of this research will be dealt with later, as the results will be compared to the results of this study.

As noted in Bjørnsen, Hovden and Ottosen (2007), journalism education in the Nordic countries is extremely new, and has traditionally been highly practice oriented. Recently the shift towards a more academic emphasis in the curriculum has become more evident.

## **Learning theories**

Usually one recognizes several learning theories, such as the behavior learning theory, the constructivist learning theory and the social learning theory. It is beyond the scope of this research to discuss the kind of learning theories which lie behind the six journalism educations. Reading from the study plans’ objectives, we find knowledge goals, skill goals as well as goals concerning attitudes, and thus embracing cognitive, communicative and affective learning theories. According to recent signals from the Norwegian educational authorities (see NOKUT), the new focus should be on learning outcomes for the students. The education institutions therefore are asked to re-write their curriculum towards these ends.

Traditionally journalism education in Norway has from the beginning been basically teaching about journalistic skills, in a very practical way. The aim was to educate for the newsrooms. Lately, however, the focus has shifted to become more academic, to satisfy the academic world. Bjørnsen et. al call this “a kind of schizophrenia of Norwegian journalism education” (2007).

The following will present the six Norwegian journalism educations with Bachelor programs in journalism, and how and to what degree they focus on intercultural issues. The presentation will be in a chronological order related to the age of the institutions.

## Oslo University College

Oslo University College's journalism education has the oldest tradition of the six. It was initially a one year education in practical journalism, and called *Norsk Journalistskole*. In 1971, journalism education was extended to two years, and the name changed to *Norsk Journalisthøyskole*. In 1994 it became the journalism education at Oslo University College and is now a three year Bachelor program.

The learning outcomes of the study have, in addition to the general goal of obtaining ethical reflection and becoming critical towards the media's and the journalism's role in society, the program states that students should learn how "to work as a journalist in an internationalized and multicultural society". The paragraph with the overall objectives of the Bachelor program ends with a statement where it is stated that the students should work with different journalistic topics, with a special emphasis on freedom of speech, equal rights and minorities in the society.

The plan continues to state, under the internationalization paragraph, that a multicultural and international perspective is integrated into the education of the Bachelor study in journalism.

This perspective is particularly visible in the first three semesters in the course called "media and society", with a local, national and global perspective. The philosophy is to start with the local and practical issues that the students need to learn, and then broaden the perspective to the national level, and finally to a global level in the third year, when the students get to travel to another part of the world. This thinking is taken further in the Masters program, where global issues are predominant, and also the teaching language is English<sup>2</sup>

In the first semester, there is a subdivision called "media and society, equal rights and minorities". Here we find a book about "suspicious foreigners" (Eide and von der Lippe 2006) and an article on Islam (Khan-Østrem 2008). As recommended literature there is a book on the way foreigners are portrayed in the media (Lindstad and Fjeldstad 2005).

In the fourth semester, where social science and investigating journalism are in focus, there are two points, out of six, which deal with intercul-

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication with Harald Hornmoen, Oslo University College.

tural issues, namely “the Norwegian societal model in a global perspective” and “ethnic minorities in Norway”.

The sixth and final semester concerns international issues, such as globalization and comparisons to a four week reporting trip to a foreign country. This part of the curriculum is about globalization, development, environmental issues and international relations. Among the books here is one about the portrayal of non-western countries in the Norwegian press (Eide and Simonsen 2008) and a book on intercultural understanding (HyllandEriksen 2001).

## **Volda University College**

Volda University College was established by the state in 1971 as a two year program in journalism, and was placed in Volda for political and regional development reasons (Alme et al.1997).

The current study plan states that a central objective is to train the students to get good attitudes as journalists, and it aims to “give the students a conscious attitude to speech, photo and written language as social phenomena and means of communication”.

The students are able to choose 30 ECTS in “reporting from a foreign culture” and 10 ECTS in “introduction to Norwegian society”. The latter course will most likely be made obligatory in the future<sup>3</sup>.

Other than the usual textbooks about the media in society, there are no specific books or articles to be found in the curriculum on intercultural issues.

## **Bodø University College**

The journalism education in Bodø started in 1987. The overall goal for the current Bachelor program is to educate for “a conscious attitude to the tasks and role of the press in society”. When these goals are explained, two points have relevance to our problem statement. The goals are namely achieved when the journalist has a conscious knowledge about cultural, political, economical and technological preconditions for the journalistic enterprise, and has insight into current societal and cultural issues”.

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<sup>3</sup> Personal communication with Jan Ytrehorn, Volda University College.

These goals can be found more specifically in the course “media science”, where the goal is “to acquire basic theoretical knowledge about the media and their role in society. It is also to develop a critical and conscious attitude of the journalist role; and understanding of the cultural, social and political significance of journalism in society”.

Furthermore, when the content of the study is explained, the importance of language is emphasized, mentioning the need for a journalist to be conscious of the way they use the language. Among the nine different topics, one of them is “the new media, convergence, globalization and the multicultural society”. This is manifested in the actual curriculum through two articles, one discussing minorities in the Norwegian press through one hundred years<sup>4</sup> and the other one about a particular homicide in Sweden that caused discussions about the Nordic intercultural societies and media’s role in it. This course is a 10 ECTS course.

The University College of Bodø has, as a college in Northern Norway, a focus on the “northern areas”, such as northern Scandinavia and Russia. This part of the study plan does not have a specific curriculum, but is a 10 ECTS course in the 6<sup>th</sup> semester. Also in the 6<sup>th</sup> semester, some students choose to write their Bachelor thesis on intercultural issues<sup>5</sup>

Other than the general objectives for the whole of the Bachelor degree, and what is found in this “media science” course, there is not found any specific contents in the other parts of the curriculum on intercultural issues.

## University of Stavanger

The journalism program at the college in Stavanger, now a university, started simultaneously with Bodø, in 1987. Today, there are three courses in the Bachelor program, called journalism I, II and III, with 10 plus 20 plus 20 ECTS. There are also 30 ECTS for journalistic internship and 20 credit points for the Bachelor thesis in journalism at the end.

In the introduction to the first, Journalism I, it says that one of the objectives is to educate critical and concerned journalists with a reflective attitude of one’s own work. In Journalism III the students have one semester to write a term paper on a chosen topic. The objective of this

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<sup>4</sup> My translation.

<sup>5</sup> Personal communication with Dag Kristoffersen, Bodø University College.



semester is to learn about writing feature articles and discuss the production of it in relation to the curriculum. Here the university has arranged seminars on different, often intercultural topics and students many times chose intercultural topics for their term papers here<sup>6</sup>. In the curriculum, there is one article with a clear intercultural content about how foreigners are portrayed in the Norwegian press.

Other than this, there are general topics on media culture and media society in the course called “communication and media”, also found in several of the other schools (Gripsrud 2002; Schwebs and Østbye 2007), but nothing more specific on intercultural issues.

## **Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication**

Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication is the only private college among the six. It is owned and run by the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, and started with a one year media course in 1981. In 1996, the labor government accredited the school as part of the university system. The curriculum does not focus in particular on Christian issues, but is based on Christian value orientation with an emphasis on media ethics and world views<sup>7</sup>.

The Bachelor degree at Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication has five objectives under the heading “knowledge”. The first one is to give knowledge about journalism and media, and the political, social, cultural and world view connections, and, number three, to acquire knowledge about how society is organized, functions and current topics.

A large part of the first semester is a course called “communication and media”. This course contains topics on ethics, children and media, global media as well as intercultural communication theory. The course curriculum have books which also can be found on the curriculum for college’s curriculum in intercultural communication (Dahl 2001) and about Muslim influences on the society (Wikan 2003).

In the second year, social science for journalists is a 10 ECTS course, with general social science knowledge that is important to journalists as a

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<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with Ole Bjørn Rongen, University of Stavanger.

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication with Kenneth Andresen, Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication.

core element. Global news production and global news flows are another important element in the course. Also, in the first semester of the second year, there is an option of going on a study visit to Kenya to learn about Kenyan media and politics, or doing a theoretical term paper. For those who choose the Kenya trip, the objectives are to learn about politics and culture in a third world country. The idea is, among other things, that this will “enhance a better understanding of north south relations and respect for societies and individuals that live and work under different frameworks than ours”.

The third year of the Bachelor program may be composed of courses from other universities, or supplemented from other courses from the other study programs offered by the college. If the students choose to supplement the two year journalistic program with the first year of Bachelor program in intercultural communication. In this case, the students will be exposed by topics such as globalization, the construction of society, religion and society and Norway as an intercultural society.

## **University of Bergen**

The Bachelor program at the University of Bergen is built on the traditional journalistic skills, such as news production, reporting, ethics, press history and internship. One semester is open for the students to elect their own curriculum and/or study abroad.

According to the information found online, it was not possible to see any particular focus or curriculum about intercultural issues.

## **Discussion of the findings**

As mentioned above, journalism has traditionally been regarded as a handcraft that one needs to learn the hard way, through hands-on training. Job positions are acquired through proving oneself as competent journalists in the field. Taken the increased competition in the market of journalists and journalism, the latest years have seen the need for more educated journalists. The need to have journalists that are more competent in general societal and current issues seems to be expressed more frequently among journalism educators.

Based on the assumption that traditional journalism was developed to give potential journalists the best possible practical skills, the journalism schools incorporated this kind of teaching in their curricula, so that the education, to a high degree was hands-on training, with theoretical curriculum giving rather practical training.

When it comes to developing the curricula according to a changing society and changing needs of the society, however, this study suggests that the journalism education has not been able to follow the development. It seems to follow conclusions from other studies, that the global reality is not highly reflected in the curriculum (Gough 1999, 75).

The overall conclusion of this research shows that there is only a limited emphasis on intercultural issues in the journalism curricula. These issues are not prominent in the curricula in the same way as one might think would be natural, taken the contemporary debates in society into consideration.

Why is this so? One explanation might be that such issues would be covered anyway by the teaching in social science, and discussions in class on current issues coming up. Another reason that came up during the research was the limited space in the curriculum to promote these kinds of topics. There were so many good things that one wanted to include, but the editing of the curriculum made it impossible.

Some of the journalism educations have seen the need to focus on intercultural issues more than others. This is particularly the case for the most traditional journalism school, and one of the youngest one. Oslo University College has made this focus one of its central trademarks, and Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication has this as an important focus as well, especially if the two year journalism education is combined with an additional third year in intercultural communication, integrated into the Bachelor degree. In general, there seems to be given little priority to the teaching of intercultural issues, but to different extents.

In line with Bjørnsen, Hovden and Ottosen's arguments (2007), the schools are still very much characterized by being practically oriented and seeing journalism as a craft. Furthermore, they seem to favor an all-round model of educating journalists to become generalists, rather than specialists. Still, the colleges do have some other specialties, such as more

focus on scientific methods in Bergen, international affairs in Oslo and civic journalism in Volta (Bjørnsen, Hovden og Ottosen, 2007).

These conclusions are not surprising if they are compared to other research elsewhere. Deuze's research on the journalism curricula in the US, Australia and The Netherlands arrives at very similar conclusions. He states that "little or no evidence has been found in the curricula of accredited programs in the three countries under study of a specific awareness, that enhancing courses with multiculturalism may in fact challenge traditional, deep-seated and structural conventions of journalism" (Deuze 2001). Similarly to Deuze's study, it is quite possible in some of the colleges to go through the Bachelor program without ever actively having been confronted with intercultural topics, intercultural communication or multicultural journalism.

Taking our intercultural society into consideration, this might be highly debatable. It might be about time to have a thorough discussion about a need for revision of the journalism curriculum, as part of a broad pedagogical discussion. Up till now, the journalism education has been highly traditional. In a highly globalized world, it would be fruitful to discuss journalism education in this perspective.

Slattery makes a distinction between a modern and a postmodern curriculum. In a modernist way of planning a curriculum, he uses Tyler (1949) as an example (Slattery 1995, 46). Tyler sets up four basic questions for the production of a syllabus. These questions have been very influential in the school systems globally:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain? 2. How can learning experiences be selected which are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives? 3. How can learning experiences be organized for effective instruction? and 4. How can effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated? (Tyler 1949 pp.v-vi)

Slattery argues that there is a need of rethinking curriculum theory. There is no longer a metanarrative but "the postmodern curriculum must address issues of self-identity and dignity, not only to improve education but also to promote justice and compassion in society" (Slattery 1995, 126). Furthermore, he says that postmodernism is "an acknowledgment and celebration of otherness, particularly for racial and gender perspectives, postmodernism offers the best theoretical paradigm for exploring curriculum development" (Slattery 1995, 15, 20).

According to traditional modernist thinking about education, skills were in focus. In a post-modern philosophy, the objectives are not as clear-cut as to what a journalist should learn. Hallin characterizes the journalism education in the US as 'modernist' (1992).

In that perspective it is interesting to see the shift from the educational authorities from the preferred, knowledge skills and attitudes of the students when they graduate, to the actual learning outcomes of the individual student.

## Concluding remarks

This is not the place to discuss in further detail what kind of curriculum would be the best to enhance more knowledge and particular attitudes on intercultural issues among future journalists (see rather e.g. Costera Meijer 2001). One might suggest, however, that future journalists should be more trained to report critically about current, intercultural issues, such as ethnicity, immigration and integration than this study has shown. Some of the schools reported a decline in general knowledge of society which should be another argument for more general as well as intercultural knowledge about society.

This does not have to mean losing the focus of a practical, hands-on training of the traditional journalism skills, but an additional focus towards attitudes and knowledge, related to a new global reality. It is about internalizing attitudes and values, and not simply a transmission of knowledge, but knowledge for action (see e.g. Argyris 1993).

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## Tarpkultūrinis ugdymas Norvegijos žurnalistikos studijų programose

### Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjamos žurnalistikos studijų programos Norvegijoje tarpkultūriškumo kontekste. Remiantis šešių žurnalistikos mokyklų (Oslo universiteto kolegijos, Volda universiteto kolegijos, Bodø universiteto kolegijos, Stavangerio universiteto, Gimlekollen žurnalistikos ir komunikacijos mokyklos ir Bergeno universiteto) interneto svetainėmis, fiksuojami programų tikslai ir sandara. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, jog žurnalistikos studijų metu yra pabrėžiamas praktinių įgūdžių lavinimas, išsamiai analizuojant šiuolaikinės visuomenės problemas. Oslo universiteto koledže ir Gimlekollen žurnalistikos ir komunikacijos mokykloje daugiau dėmesio nei kitur skiriama tarpkultūrinei komunikacijai ir globalinėms problemoms. Straipsnyje aptariama keletas perspektyvų, kaip Norvegijos būsimuosius žurnalistus parengti globaliam pasauliui, kur daugiau nėra fiksuotų žurnalistų įgūdžių.

**Raktiniai žodžiai:** žurnalistikos mokymas, studijų programa, tarpkultūrinis, globalus, etniškumas, Norvegija.