

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISM SCHOOLS TAKE THE MEDIA DEBATE FORWARDS.

The value of thinking “outside of existing boxes” on media transformation was the broad consensus reached at a research colloquium on the South African media debate held at Rhodes University, Grahamstown on 16 and 17 October 2010.

Staged ahead of National Press Freedom Day on October 19, the event saw almost 40 journalism educators, scholars and researchers injecting intellectual contributions to the often-inflamed arguments around South African media.

Delegates presented 17 evidence-based research papers on different aspects of South African media, democracy and transformation since 1994. Engaging with the academics were Ismail Vadi, chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Communications and Pallo Jordan, chair of the ANC’s communications policy committee.

Other colloquium participants with influence on policy-making were Lumko Mtimde, active in the ANC, Aubrey Matshiqi, an independent public intellectual, and Ayesha Kajee of the Freedom of Expression Institute.

The gathering critically analysed the range of roles of the South African media, and the existing accountability systems of the Press Council and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa. Also under the microscope were the topics of ownership, access to information and the role of journalism teachers.

In the course of discussions, pre-conceived views amongst many participants were subjected to thorough examination, and efforts were made to find solutions beyond previously entrenched and polarised positions.

Many of the papers will be published in the academic journal *Ecquid Novi*, with extra copies being circulated outside of university audiences.

The participants agreed to encourage South African journalism schools to continue holding events and doing research around media challenges. Amongst the areas underlined for greater research were electronic media, quality journalism, ownership and its relation to content, language and media, accountability, media consumers and tabloid journalism.

The colloquium arose out of a joint statement in September by 20 South African journalism schools. In the statement, the schools registered fears that freedom of expression, media freedom and the right to information were at risk in South Africa, and expressed worry about the effect on their students.

At the same time, the schools voiced concern that much public discussion had taken on an antagonistic, and either-or character, which worsened tensions instead of working towards solving the underlying problems.

The statement then committed the schools to take part in a colloquium to address the issues in a more considered way. The October colloquium made good on this pledge.

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