

# **Journalism Heads From Around the World Identify Top Challenges**

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For the first time ever, those who lead journalism programs around the world – deans, directors and department heads – gathered at the World Journalism Education Congress in South Africa to discuss the most pressing issues that their programs face.

Twenty heads of journalism programs participated – one-half being delegates from African nations (Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Burkino Faso, Namibia, Morocco and South Africa) and one-half from other nations (China, Singapore, France, Qatar, United Kingdom and the United States).

Ten top issues emerged, some of them reflecting the substantive African participation in the process. While the results do not reflect a scientific process, the findings are illuminating as a first attempt to identify and rank-order the leading issues cited by journalism program heads who met face-to-face in two sessions spanning three hours.

**The 10 leading issues identified at the World Journalism Education Congress follow, in ascending order:**

## **#10 – Student enrollment demands**

While this appears to be a universal issue, it is particularly an issue in some African nations. Several journalism heads shared that they are able to enroll only a fraction of the students who want to major in journalism.

## **#9 – Faculty diversity**

In Africa, this means the need for more female faculty to better reflect the student body that is increasingly female. In other countries, especially in the West, the emphasis on faculty diversity focuses more on the need for racial minorities.

## **#8 – Changes in curriculum and the emergence of new media**

The challenge is staying abreast in an age of radical change, building and maintaining a balance of theory and practice, and revising courses and curriculum to reflect the growth of multimedia.

## **#7 – Specificity of journalism**

Delegates said journalism needs to remain a distinct discipline and should not be absorbed into the general world of communications.

## **#6 – Textbooks and instructional materials**

Journalism heads in African nations lament the shortage of books for their students – books that are affordable and books that are authored by Africans or relate to Africa. In the West, the challenge is a different one – getting students to buy useful books in an online age.

## **#5 – Electrical power and internet connectivity**

An unreliable energy supply appears to be a primary problem on the African continent. Education is disrupted when classroom lights flicker off, computers cannot be turned on, or access to the internet is interrupted.

## **#4 – Government issues**

These are “free press” issues revolving around licensing, restrictions, censorship and self-censorship, which appear more of a problem in Africa and Asia than in other regions of the world.

## **#3 – Faculty hiring and retention**

Salaries tend to be low, which has led to journalism programs in non-Western nations losing qualified faculty to industry or to exchange programs in countries that pay better.

## **#2 – An ethical disconnect with journalistic practice**

Journalism heads in Africa refer to a “disconnect” between the classroom and the newsroom. For instance, they teach ethics, then their students go into internships in which they see some journalists engage in payoffs and bribery.

And the leading issue facing journalism programs around the world, as identified by program heads attending the World Journalism Education Congress in South Africa:

## **#1 – Money**

This is the universal lament. For those on the African continent, the need for more resources affects infrastructure such as facilities and technology. For those in other parts of the world, programs are facing diminishing budgets because of a need for states and nations to control their burgeoning debt.

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