

Journalism Heads From Around the World Identify Top Challenges

By Paul Parsons
Moderator, Heads of Schools Forum
World Journalism Education Congress, South Africa

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 on July 5-7, 2010, to discuss the most pressing issues that their programs face.

Twenty heads of Journalism programs participated – half being delegates from African nations (Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Burkino Faso, Namibia, Morocco and South Africa) and 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.

These are the 10 leading issues identified at the World Congress, 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 increasingly is 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 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, 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 primarily to be a problem on the African continent. Education is disrupted when classroom lights flicker off, or computers can't 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 a problem in Africa and Asia than in other regions of the world.

#3 – Faculty hiring and retention

Salaries tend to be low, which cause Journalism programs in non-Western nations to lose qualified faculty to industry or to exchange programs in other countries.

#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 students go into internships where 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.

Paul Parsons, professor and dean of the School of Communications at Elon University USA, is 2010-11 president of the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication. He serves on the World Journalism Education Council as ASJMC's representative.

Identified participants: Enoch Tantong (Cameroon), Joe Foote (USA), Emily Brown (Namibia), Lai Oso (Nigeria), Misako Ito (UNESCO/Morocco), Pascal Guenee (France), Guo Ke (China), Chris Frost (United Kingdom), Benjamin Detenber (Singapore), Elizabeth Ikem (Nigeria), Lawrence Boyomo (Cameroon), Firmin Gouba (Burkina Faso), Janet Key (USA/Qatar), Solomon George Anaeto (Nigeria), Mudathir Ganiyu (Nigeria), Reginald Vacicson (Ghana), Etim Anim (Nigeria), Ralph Akinfeleye (Nigeria) and Paul Parsons (USA).