

## The once and future news industry

**MacEwan University panel discussion concludes  
business may be in trouble, but craft is doing just fine**

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UNCERTAINTY, dread and anxiety about the disappearance of the news business have formed a common cloud over journalism – to the point that it is questionable whether the field will survive at all.

So, what would happen if mainstream media outlets were to wither and die. That questions was addressed by a panel of experts in the field the evening of Thursday, May 26. at MacEwan University.

Titled *Journalist Interrupted*, the discussion of the future of journalism confronted the foremost issues of the news business today. The idea was born after Postmedia's made its massive newsroom cuts in January, which hit Edmonton exceptionally hard, with the top management of the *Journal* fired, and the *Sun* and *Journal* newsrooms merged.

Clips and streaming video by Kyle Muzyka, fourth year, Communication Studies

Moderated by Brian Gorman, associate professor of communication studies at MacEwan and author of *Crash to Paywall: Canadian Newspapers and the Great Disruption*, the panel was made up of four prominent members of the media:

- **Jorge Barrera**, Ottawa correspondent for the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network
- **Linda Solomon Wood**, CEO of Observer Media Group and editor-in-chief of *The National Observer*
- **Kelly Toughill**, director of the School of Journalism at the University of King's College, Halifax

- **Karen Unland**, entrepreneurial journalist and founder of *Seen and Heard in Edmonton* and the new interactive news website *Taproot Edmonton*.

The panel covered a broad range of issues such as the increase of online bloggers, diversity in newsrooms and, perhaps most important, the business model of journalism and where it is headed.

“We are going to have to make our own jobs and build on the connections we have with each other,” Unland said.

Solomon-Wood elaborated: “Some people are going to be working for entrepreneurial media. Some actual things that we would call reporting, that will be audience focused and good, will actually be done by companies who understand that good content marketing is audience first and sell your widget later. And we are already seeing that now, and that’s a trend that will continue.”

There was one theme all the panelists appeared to agree on. Gone are the days when journalists and reporters could count on a career with one media outlet.

“Very few people are going into one media organization and staying there for 20 years,” Toughill said. “They are going to go from organization to organization.”

“There will be a lot more self-employment. Some journalists will move in and out of the craft into other crafts. Fifteen years ago, as a journalist, if you took a job in PR, you were done as a journalist. I don’t think that’s true any longer. I think people will move in and out of journalism.”

Some panelists speculated that there will still be passionate reporters and bloggers who will write for free in their spare time regardless of a shift in careers.

The death of the mainstream press, the merging of newsrooms, and job losses throughout the country have created a general impression that journalism is dying.

Rather, panelists pointed out, journalism is being put together and packaged differently from the way it used to be. For example, election coverage is still watched and followed online – and maybe even more intensely.

Another thematic thread that ran through the evening was that we need to embrace today’s technology to create new and compelling forms of storytelling, as well as including the audience and serving the community.

“Nostalgia for losing those skills that we have in the past is sort of preventing us from current success and innovation,” Toughill said.

So, where is the future of journalism headed?

“Reporting in terms of the basics isn’t going to change,” Barrera said. “The way we gather stories, the way we verify. But the way we tell stories is probably going to shift. I think this era we are living in is really creating sort of an unlimited horizon in terms of how you can tell a story with melting of words with pictures, moving pictures, and computer generated images.

“I think one of the biggest issues we have to figure out is how to do some of this new storytelling quicker. In time, we can develop some templates and some ways we can tell stories visually just as quickly.”

Journalists are going to need to know how to cut video quickly, he added, and how to shoot video, tell stories with graphics and live stream from remote locations. And they need to know how to write.

The last, he said, is particularly important. The bedrock of the craft consists of compelling dramatic stories, particularly local ones that no big, international news agency can tell.

“We can’t rely on a big institution to create jobs for us,” Unland said. “We are going to have to make our own jobs ourselves and we are going to have to build on the connections that we have with each other more than the traditional journalism equivalent of the man in the gray flannel suit career path.’

- **A live-stream video of the panel discussion can be found on Periscope through Twitter. Follow @JRNLInterrupted.**