

Strengthening journalism careers in an age of mistrust

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A new study by researchers from the University of Adelaide and several U.S. universities has found solutions journalism could play a part in re-engaging disenchanted media students, strengthening their reporting

skills, and increasing recruitment into the profession.

Solutions journalism is the rigorous reporting on responses to problems, rather than reporting solely on problems themselves. University of Adelaide Ph.D. candidate, Katherine Roff, who was part of the research team, says solutions journalism is built upon four "pillars," used in training by organizations such as the Solutions Journalism Network in the U.S. and the Walkley Foundation in Australia.

"A solutions journalism story must focus on the response; provide insight into the response, such as how to implement it; report on evidence that the response has an impact (or not, because that could be insightful too); and acknowledge limitations, including gaps.

"It is a constructive journalism approach that has developed in response to the negativity bias we see so much of in our news and the news fatigue that stems from that. As scholars, we need to understand a lot more about what the approach means for the next generation of journalists," says Roff.

The study, which was [published](#) in *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, suggests solutions journalism education resonates powerfully with media students.

"Our findings suggest that introducing solutions journalism may present a pathway to increase recruitment and retention at universities, and to better engage students with the industry," says Roff, who conducted the study with Assistant Professor Kyser Lough from the University of Georgia and Associate Professor Karen McIntyre from Virginia Commonwealth University.

The research, which involved in-depth interviews with [professional journalists](#) who had encountered solutions journalism at university,

found there are still barriers to the implementation of the approach in newsrooms, such as deadline pressures and [time constraints](#), as well as implicit bias when pitching solutions stories.

However, participants said that they are still implementing the approach in some form, asserting that solutions journalism boosted their resumés, increased intentionality in their reporting, honed their interview skills, and applied a reflexive lens to their work. Solutions journalism often aligned with their world views.

"If this approach feels relevant for students, strengthens their reporting, and can give them an edge in the job market, then that has huge potential in the sector," Roff says.

The findings build on recent studies that have found that having a passion for [social justice](#) is one of the largest predictors in journalism students wanting to pursue a career in the field.

"As the approach to reporting evolves and university instruction increases, it will be important to continue to observe the impact of solutions journalism education on practicing journalists and the media industry here in Australia," Roff says.

"Although participants, overwhelmingly, discussed a positive potential impact of solutions journalism in wider society, it was often exactly that—potential. Evidence of its role, especially outside of a U.S. context, is still emerging, as editorial knowledge and support in the field grows."

More information: Kyser Lough et al, Beyond the Classroom: Evaluating Solutions Journalism Education From the Perspective of University Graduates, *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/10776958241254152](https://doi.org/10.1177/10776958241254152)

Provided by University of Adelaide

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