UniMuckraker proposal

A plan to create a dedicated website to display student investigative reporting and assignments.

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One of the outcomes of the Media, Investigative Journalism and Technology Conference, AUT University, Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand, 4-5 December 2010.

UniMuckraker

At the Media, Investigative Journalism & Technology conference in Auckland in December there was discussion about the creation of a dedicated website to display student investigative reporting and assignments. One idea was for students at participating universities to undertake common assignments so that a national or even global picture of an issue would emerge.

Once those assignments were completed, the best ones would be progressed to a publishable multimedia standard for a dedicated website, tentatively called ‘UniMuckraker’. Individual student projects also would be displayed.

The idea attracted enthusiastic in-principle support from Wendy Bacon at UTS, James Hollings at Massey and David Robie at AUT. Kayt Davies was keen to have students involved. Margaret Simons at Swinburne, who did not attend, supported the idea.

I would like to advance this by inviting universities that teach investigative reporting or in-depth reporting to contact me with an eye to forming a committee. Those interested could contact me here: bill.birnbauer@monash.edu

Here is the basic outline so far:

1. The committee would discuss and agree on a common assignment that students would be given the option of doing. The issue to be investigated must be common to each Australian state and also New Zealand and the Pacific – nursing home standards, river pollution etc.

2. From semester two, 2011, students would have the option of doing the assignment.

3. During the summer break, on a rotating basis, a participating university would select its best students to edit, pull together, film video, and develop the
project under supervision into an online presentation. (I’d be happy to do the first of these).

4. Participating universities would provide funding, say a few thousand dollars – it’s uncertain at this time as it would depend on the number of participants – to a central fund. The money would be used to pay the students involved in the summer project and for the creation and development of the website.

5. Great assignments, other than the common one, would also be worked up into a publishable form.

6. This idea is based on a couple of US models – see http://newsinitiative.org/news21/index.html and this one involving senior journalists: http://www.publicintegrity.org/investigations/icij/about/

I think UniMuckraker has the potential to accelerate and enhance student learning while producing quality content. Once the projects are completed online, individual universities or students could offer the stories to local media. I believe, if the initial iteration is successful, the concept could be expanded to the Asia/Pacific region and even globally within three or so years.

I’d be interested in the views of JEAA members – the template is by no means fixed. Any suggestions from wiser, more experienced members would be most welcome.

Thanks, Bill Birnbauer

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