

Beyond the Classroom: Solutions Journalism Education and its Impact on University Graduates

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Solutions journalism has gained traction as a compelling topic within collegiate journalism education, but what happens to those students once they head into the field? Recently, we explored that question in our research study published in *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*: “[Beyond the Classroom: Evaluating Solutions Journalism Education from the Perspective of University Graduates](#)” (email us if you don’t have access and would like a copy of the study). Through in-depth interviews with media professionals who encountered solutions journalism during their college years, our study sheds light on the profound and lasting impact of this educational approach.

Key Findings: Resonance and Retention

Our study reveals that solutions journalism education leaves a lasting impression on students, resonating both personally and professionally. Participants reported that their encounters with solutions journalism during their university education significantly influenced their reporting styles, interview techniques, and perspectives on journalism’s role in society. This educational approach has the potential to re-engage students who might feel disenchanted with traditional journalism. We also found that even if professionals weren’t producing stories that fully implemented all four pillars of solutions journalism, they were consistently still utilizing solutions reporting techniques and at least some of the approach in their work, suggesting that the effects may be more widespread and complex to measure than previously realized.

First Impressions: A Fresh Perspective

Participants' initial encounters with solutions journalism varied but it struck a chord with students, regardless of the introduction method. Many appreciated the rigorous and structured nature of solutions journalism and said it aligned with their personal and professional philosophies.

Perhaps most important is how they said it provided a refreshing perspective on journalism. One participant said: “I found it because I needed a different lens on journalism, but I stuck with it because it was such a rigorous form of journalism that I was interested in.” This sentiment highlights how solutions journalism can reinvigorate students' passion for their field, especially when they are feeling skeptical or burned out.

Educational Impact: Skills and Application

The educational framework, especially the four pillars of solutions journalism, was particularly memorable for the students. They emphasized the importance of rigorous investigation and critical thinking in reporting and said that these skills carried over to their other types of reporting.

Participants also valued the practical experience gained through projects and the influence of enthusiastic instructors and guest speakers. The hands-on approach, combined with mentorship from experienced professionals, helped students apply solutions journalism principles effectively

in their work and beyond. They shared that it strengthened their resumes going into the workforce, and the approach was discussed in several participants' job interviews.

Challenges in Professional Practice

Despite the positive educational experiences, graduates reiterated some of the implementation challenges that [we've heard from other professionals](#). Time constraints and tight deadlines were major barriers, making it difficult to conduct the thorough research required for solutions stories. Additionally, a lack of editorial support and skepticism about the approach posed obstacles. However, participants remained optimistic about the potential of solutions journalism. They believed that the approach could significantly impact the industry, particularly in combating negativity bias and fostering public trust. One participant said, "Solutions journalism is a really, really great tool that could solve a lot of the problems industry is facing about trust issues."

Conclusion

While our participants told us a lot that we already know about solutions journalism, they also gave us new insight on how their education had a positive impact on their career and on the field of journalism. We thought it was particularly insightful how so many had reached a breaking point of pessimism with journalism until they learned about a solution-oriented approach. It was also enlightening to hear how they applied the skills from their solutions journalism training to their everyday reporting, even if fully realized solutions stories weren't achievable.