

Dear students, partners and colleagues

This has been a most extraordinary and taxing year. Despite everything, 2020 has been a very good year for us at Wits Journalism. I'm grateful to everyone who made sure that we not only adapted to the new circumstances, but grew our activities in different ways.

When Covid hit us around March and the country went into hard lockdown, we quickly had to pivot our teaching to remote modes. Our teaching staff rose to the challenge without missing a beat – though by now we all have Zoom-exhaustion! Career-entry students practised their reporting skills at home, often from their stoeps, and were mentored and supported through Zoom, Whatsapp and other methods. Unsurprisingly, the topic for their capstone in-depth project was "Covid: counting the cost". (Watch out for their reporting on www.witsvuvuzela.com.) Many of our mid-career students took additional strain in balancing radically changed work circumstances with online classes. Almost all completed their courses, though some research projects have been delayed. Our ten international students – a record number thanks to significant growth in funded places – had a tough time under lockdown, being far from home.

The Advanced Radio Certificate programme was particularly challenging, as students are mostly from community radio and face tough challenges with connectivity. However, new modes were developed for these students and the courses were successfully completed in the second half of the year – one course remains to be held in early 2021.

Later in the year, we took advantage of the opportunities of remote teaching to offer Development Communication Certificate A to students from across the continent. Other remote courses will follow in the new year, also aiming to reach students in other countries.

Research output included our annual [State of the Newsroom, titled Before/After](#), and a series of essays by the Masters class about coverage of Covid-related topics. These are being published on www.AfricaPortal.org. We are currently working with Malawian colleagues to produce the first State of the Newsroom report for that country.

Several books were published by people associated with Wits Journalism. These included Anton Harber's *So, for the Record*; Lesley Cowling's *Babel Unbound: Rage, Reason and Rethinking Public Life* (co-edited with Carolyn Hamilton); Nechama Brodie's *Femicide in South Africa*, developed out of her PhD; and Shanthini Naidoo's *Women in Solitary: Inside the female resistance to Apartheid*, which grew out of an MA project.

Events, of course, had to be rethought. The first to fall victim to the lockdown was the announcement of [the Taco Kuiper Awards for Investigative Journalism](#), which had to take place online. Our two big conferences – [Radio Days Africa](#) in July and the [African Investigative Journalism Conference](#) in October – also took place online, and we found this attracted much larger audiences and much greater engagement. As a result, the 2021 events will include a strong online component. Even in the unlikely event that Covid is under control by then, we need to make sure we cater for a virtual audience. We also started a new series of [Midweek Webinars](#) to offer a virtual space to discuss the challenges of journalism under Covid. These proved very popular.



Our [Justice Project](#) saw a dramatic increase in output, as a number of enthusiastic new hires made their presence felt, with stories on issues in the criminal justice system appearing in a range of media practically weekly. We were also able to support journalistic projects in South Africa and across the continent with record numbers of grants, both through the [Henry Nxumalo grants](#) and through the [Africa-China Reporting Project \(ACRP\)](#). These included Rehana Rossouw's important book *Predator Politics*, a notable podcast series *One Night in Snake Park*, and a host of stories on water across the continent. The ACRP also proudly unveiled a new training website, www.africachinatraining.com.

Through our involvement with the Swedish-Sida funded Consortium to Promote Human Rights, Civic Freedoms and Media Development in Sub-Saharan Africa (CHARM), we were able to undertake several new activities on the wider continent. Our Journalism and Media Laboratory ([Jamlab](#)) ran its accelerator programme first for South African projects, but then also for innovators from Southern African countries including Zambia, Madagascar, Malawi and Angola. A plan to offer the inaugural Jamfest had to be put off because of Covid, but a virtual [Jamlab Meetup](#) was held in November under the theme "Reimagining Journalism".

Together with our CHARM partner the Fojo Media Institute at Linnaeus University, Sweden, we have been working to develop a network of journalism schools from across the continent. A planned round table meeting was another early victim of the hard lockdown, but was held virtually in May. We conducted and published a well-received [mapping study of journalism schools in sub-Saharan Africa](#), and a newsletter will soon be launched.

In our work with community media, [the Citizen Justice Network](#) grew its network of community paralegals and radio stations, while the [Radio Academy](#) revived the [Local Voices](#) platform for community news. The two projects are moving closer together, and will be co-ordinated jointly in the new year. The campus station [Voice of Wits](#) had a difficult year, with operations and income being hit hard by the lockdown, but has ended the year in a much improved position.

On the organisational front, progress on the proposal to transform into the Wits Centre for Journalism was somewhat delayed, but by year-end important steps had been taken. A detailed proposal document has been produced, and our current home, the School for Literature, Language and Media, has formally approved the plan. It will now be taken higher up the Wits structures for approval.

The above is just a very quick overview of our year – much else could be mentioned. But I want to end by expressing the warmest thanks to everyone who worked hard to make the year so successful. Academic staff worked tirelessly to adapt to the new circumstances and to ensure students were not left behind. Programme staff shifted gear quickly, and enabled significant growth in several areas. Administrative staff, as always, are the unsung heroes that make everything else possible. Our partners who showed flexibility in adjusting to the new circumstances also deserve our thanks, as do our students, for helping us adjust.

We look forward to an excellent 2021. It is already clear that we will have strong student numbers, while plans are well underway for further growth on the continent and in our digital focus. We also expect to move forward decisively in transforming our status in the university system.

For now, though, it's time for a break. Stay safe and sane, everyone.



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