

**Uni journalism degrees morphing into left-wing, anti-Murdoch indoctrination.** [Uni degrees in indoctrination] By: *SHARRI MARKSON, Media Editor. The Australian*, 13 October 2014.

**FIRST-year media students at some of the nation's most prestigious universities are being taught the federal government's media policy process is "corrupt".**

The 18-year-old students are also being told repeatedly that one of the world's biggest employers of journalists, News Corp, uses "naked political pressure" to the detriment of democracy.

*The Australian* obtained the first-year course material for media and communications at University of Technology Sydney and The University of Sydney to examine what students are being taught about the media industry.

Over a period of five weeks, *The Australian* attended some lectures on an undercover basis and obtained the audio recordings of other lectures from students.

The University of Sydney course in particular is leading students to form a critical view of News Corp.

Lecturer Dr Penny O'Donnell teaches students that News Corp newspapers' 2013 election coverage was driven by a corporate fear of the NBN — a claim that has no factual basis and is incorrect.

She also tells students, studying to become journalists, that the federal government's media policy process is "corrupted" because it sacrifices public interest objectives in favour of corporate interests.

"We elect governments to act on our behalf so what happens to those public interest objectives?" she asks her class. "They are typically sacrificed to a process that's very corrupted because it listens more to large corporations than it does to ordinary people. The latest battleground where you see this playing out is over control of the internet."

A similar claim was repeated by Dr James Goodman in a lecture at The University of Technology Sydney. "You can see individual media corporations having influence over the legislative process, saying what about tweaking this, what about changing this rule and the government quietly changes it partly to keep the media, to keep that organisation on side and it corrupts the political process," he said.

But the indoctrination appeared to be strongest at The University of Sydney where the entire first major lecture focused on News Corp's power and its impact on journalism, irrespective of the fact it is one of the largest employers of journalists in Australia.

"It's all about Rupert Murdoch today," Dr O'Donnell said.

"What is good for the commercial fortune of the media proprietor is not necessarily good for the democratic role. You need to go no further than the case study of Rupert Murdoch to get evidence that supports that statement," she said.

O'Donnell encouraged students to read well known News Corp critic Rod Tiffin and said she "highly recommends" Nick Davies' anti-Murdoch book *Hack Attack, How the Truth Caught up with Rupert Murdoch*.

"Thirdly, I'm sure you've gathered this from the readings today, I want to suggest that Australia's media policy fails miserably when it comes to supporting a healthy, competitive and quality newspaper sector. We have instead a very insular, oligopolistic and powerful press industry that spends too much time seeking to skew media policy to serve its own interests and not enough time doing the work that makes newspapers so important," she told her class. "The Murdoch way is political pressure. Naked political pressure. Nothing subtle. Get them Out. Australia Needs Tony. This is the way Rupert exercises power."

O'Donnell asked the class why Murdoch would want Abbott as Prime Minister instead of former PM Kevin Rudd.

With no reference to the fact Rudd was leading a dysfunctional government, she agreed with students that some of the reasons Murdoch supported Abbott were because: "All the elites stick together"; "We know Murdoch hates unions" but, she claims, it was primarily because of the NBN.

"Your challenge in the next two seconds is to work out why is the man who is tilting to take over Time Warner and become the most powerful media mogul on the planet, why is he worried about the NBN," she asks, before answering the question by alleging he is protecting his interests and the NBN represents competition.

Directly following this discussion, Ms O'Donnell then questions whether Murdoch is "publicly accountable".

She tells students of Davies' argument that Murdoch's statement "This is the most humble day of my life" was not genuine accountability but simply a "PR sound-bite". "A good sound-bite, but just a sound-bite," she said.

"We are left with a mogul and a company whose power is undiminished. In fact, it's growing."

In a 50-minute lecture, O'Donnell referenced positive aspects of News Corp only briefly, saying it employed some of the best journalists in the country, citing Hedley Thomas' reporting on Clive Palmer. But even this she qualified, saying the company also employed some "not so good ones as well".

On slides before the students, the concepts discussed include political pressure, fear-mongering, scandals and regulating media influence.

A lecture slide asks students to discuss how power is exercised through newspaper owners and "what measures, if any, should be taken to control press power."

Rather than be inspired by some examples of excellent newspaper journalism, students were asked whether they can "find evidence that the internet has replaced print journalism with superior, commercially viable digital journalism."

After being shown a transcript of the lecture on News Corp, the company's group editorial director Campbell Reid accused the University of Sydney of indoctrinating students, not educating them.

"Obviously I can't comment on the full breadth of the content of these courses but on the basis of what has been relayed here I have to wonder if we are dealing with indoctrination rather than education," he said.

"One of my deepest concerns is that when young people who want to be journalists ask me for advice on what education options are best I usually find myself saying 'not journalism courses.'

"I can't imagine a senior lawyer advising an aspiring counsel to not get a law degree but I am not alone in my suspicion that journalism as it is taught and journalism as it is practised are two different things."

Contacted for comment, O'Donnell said "We take our responsibility to educate students about the Australian media very seriously. We do it in public. Everything is recorded and available for review. The lectures are interactive and students are invited to challenge and criticise ideas and views that they do not agree with. That is what higher education is all about. We have no axe to grind against any media company but discuss them all without fear or favour. That is the university tradition. That is our job as media educators. Students are welcome to take any stance they wish on media policy and media politics. We encourage them to first investigate and debate contentious issues, including media power."

In the introductory lecture at the University of Sydney, Dr Buntly Avieson told students she hoped they were all subscribers to Crikey "if not, be so by next week." She also recommended websites New Matilda, The Conversation, No Fibs and Media Watch, along with two newspapers a day.

In another lecture, students were advised not to present both sides of the argument on climate change because, similar to the old tobacco debate of the past, there only was one side. The argument was that balanced reporting allowed sceptics to be given airtime. *The Australian* newspaper was labelled a "repeat offender" of this crime.

Dr Avieson described as "tedious" a Q&A episode where host Tony Jones asked Tanya Plibersek her view on global warming.

"I just about screamed at the television," she said, arguing global warming was an issue for scientists not politicians.

Students were asked to write an essay on news reporting of climate change in the Australian press and how it's widely criticised as "more partisan than professional."

"... Critically evaluate whether citizen journalism does a better job of animating public debate and pressure for change on this significant political issue, and provide one case study to ground your discussion and support your argument," it states.

UTS also focuses on media ownership, with students being shown a slide on "content and power" with images of Gina Rinehart, Lachlan Murdoch and James Packer.

When contacted for comment, a spokeswoman said: “The University of Sydney, while not endorsing the comments, defends the academic freedom of its staff. This means it neither censors nor approves the content of lectures and course material delivered by academic staff of the University. “

UTS’s Dr Goodman said he was “referring to the potentially corrupting influence on freedom of political communication, and thus on democracy, of a media system in which there are very few owners and/or dominant outlets. I don’t think this is especially controversial as a free and diverse press is widely recognised as a key precondition of democratic life.”