

# Experiences from the Innovation Journalism Pilot Course in Jyväskylä

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# Experiences from the Innovation Journalism Pilot Course in Jyväskylä

The paper describes experiences from the first Innovation journalism (InJo) pilot course for undergraduate students. The course has three main driving forces: first, interest undergraduate students; second, combine theoretical thinking and practical InJo work with the students' help; third, establish international co-operation in InJo education between The Department of Communication (University of Jyväskylä) and SCIL (Stanford University).

The course comprises 14 hours of lectures (2 hours produced by SCIL). The lectures provided basic knowledge about business, technology, science and innovation journalism but the main focus was on innovation systems (domestic and international). Course grades were based on the quality of the final InJo articles the students had to finish to receive credit points. The main conclusion from student feedback was that the InJo course was interesting and important for them, and they wanted more knowledge on InJo topics.

## 1 Background

This small paper explains how the first innovation journalism course in Jyväskylä was organized and executed.

The author of this paper has been teaching courses in foreign-affairs journalism for undergraduate students at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland for seven years. That course was started as a modest pilot program in 1999, the first of its kind in Finland. Since 2001 the course has comprised 24 hours of lectures, a “guru-seminar,” and home assignments. A study book by the author, *The New World of Foreign News Reporting*, will be published in Finnish in 2006.

The lessons in building this successful journalism-education course concentrated on foreign news practices, as a starting point, while creating the first innovation journalism (InJo) course for the students.

According to David Nordfors “Innovation journalism”<sup>1</sup> is journalism about innovation” and “Innovation journalism covers technical, business, legal and political aspects of innovations and innovation systems”<sup>2</sup>. Naturally, the first course for undergraduate students focused on these aspects. The lectures provided the

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<sup>1</sup> D. Nordfors. “The Concept of Innovation Journalism and a Programme for Developing it”, *VINNOVA Information* VI 2003:5, Oct. 2003. Also published in *Innovation Journalism*, Vol. 1 No. 1, May 2004. <http://www.innovationjournalism.org/archive/INJO-1-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> D. Nordfors. The Role of Journalism in Innovation Systems. *Innovation Journalism* Vol.1 No.7, November 8 2004. <http://www.innovationjournalism.org/archive/INJO-1-7.pdf>

basic theoretical knowledge of innovation journalism by introducing first business, technology and science journalism.

The main goals of the voluntary pilot course were:

- 1) Interest undergraduate students in the topic;
- 2) Combine theoretical thinking and practical work on innovation journalism with the students' help;
- 3) Establish international co-operation in InJo education.

The next five aims were described to the undergraduate students when the course was introduced to them in summer 2005:

- 1) Provide basic knowledge on business, technology, science and innovation journalism;
- 2) Give basic information on innovation systems (domestic and international);
- 3) Explain, basically, the world's principal economic and technological trends;
- 4) Create innovating innovation-journalism topics;
- 5) Publish students' innovation journalism stories when suitable.

## 2 Course Contents

This chapter introduces, briefly, lecture by lecture, the contents, main literary sources and student assignments of the lectures given by the author.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction to Innovation Journalism

#### 2.1.1 Contents

- Main concepts (innovation and innovation journalism);
- The short history of innovation journalism (David Nordfors, SCIL);
- Business journalism (history, practices, limits);
- Technology journalism (international, Finnish perspectives);
- Science journalism (international, Finnish perspectives);
- Future research (especially thinking with different scenarios);
- The theory or model of weak signals in innovation journalism.

*Student assignments*

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<sup>3</sup> All the lectures are presented in power point format at [www.cc.jyu.fi/~tuuskali](http://www.cc.jyu.fi/~tuuskali) (in Finnish).

- What is innovation journalism in practice? Analyse examples of domestic and international ‘innovation journalism’ articles;
- Homework: Invent new topics for innovation journalistic stories; Start to develop your own story;
- Monitor Digitodays<sup>4</sup> news flows (the material was pre-collected by the lecturer from Fall 2004 to September 2005);
- Test also the open-for-all web tool to find interesting topics for your story (<http://innovationandjournalism.blogspot.com/>).

### 2.1.2 Principal literary sources

- David Nordfors. 2004. “The Concept of Innovation Journalism and a Program for Developing it,” VINNOVA Information VI 2003:5, Oct. 2003. Also published in Innovation Journalism, Vol. 1 No. 1, May 2004. <http://www.innovationjournalism.org/archive/INJO-1-1.pdf>.
- Erkki Kauhanen. 1998. Thoughts about Science Journalism, from a book “Journalism! Journalism?” WSOY, Helsinki, 291–316.
- Turo, Uskali. 2005. The History of Business Journalism, its limitations and Future from a book Ojala & Uskali (eds.) “*Mediajättien aika – uusia heikkoja signaaleja etsimässä.*” (*The Era of Media Giants. Finding New Weak Signals*). Infor, Helsinki, 27–54.
- *Helsingin Sanomat, Kauppalehti, Talouselämä, Tietoviikko, Tekniikka & Talous, The Economist, The New York Times, Business Week, Technology Review, New Scientist, Financial Times, Fortune, Reuters, Physorg, and CNN Money.*
- Innovationjournalism.org, the web site.

## 2.2 The Structures of Innovation Systems and Institutions

Learning about the structures of innovation systems and institutions enables the students to seek the most relevant sources for their InJo stories.

### 2.2.1 Contents

- Finnish Research Organizations (Finnish Academy, Universities, other governmental research institutions, VTT etc., public companies and their research departments, Nokia etc.);

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<sup>4</sup> Digitoday is a Finnish web publication specializing in digitech news, <http://www.digitoday.fi/>.

- Finnish research funding organizations (Tekes, Ktm, Sitra, Fintra, et al.);
- Regional perspectives (University of Jyväskylä, especially nanoscience, human technology center etc., innovation institute initiative);
- International Research Organizations (Leading universities and institutes, OECD, The Economist Business Intelligence Unit).

### 2.2.2 Student assignments

- Where do you find the best sources for your stories?

### 2.2.3 Principal literary sources

- Gerd, Schienstock – Timo, Hämmäläinen. 2001. *Transformation of the Finnish Innovation System. A Network Approach*. Sitra Reports Series, 7;
- The web pages of the Research and research Funding Institutions.

## 2.3 Global Trends and Innovations

Knowledge on global trends and innovations enables the students to place their stories in a larger context.

### 2.3.1 Contents

- Injo-guru example (John Markoff/*The New York Times*);
- World Trends and Innovations;
- Visualizing Injo-stories;
- Writing and selling the Injo-stories.

### 2.3.2 Student assignments

- What are the main trends influencing in your Injo-story?

### 2.3.3 Principal literary sources

- Michael J., Mazarr, 1999. *Global trends 2005. An Owner's Manual for The Next Decade*. Palgrave, New York;
- Mika, Mannermaa, 2004. *Heikoista signaaleista vahva tulevaisuus. (From Weak Signals into Strong Future)* WSOY, Helsinki;

- Nicholas, Negroponte. 1996. *Digitaalinen todellisuus. (Being Digital)* WSOY, Helsinki;
- The Economist. *The World in 2005* and *The World in 2006*.

## 2.4 Meeting Innovation Journalism Seniors

Swedish InJo fellow Marcus Lillkvist and Innovation Journalism ‘father’ and SCIL program leader David Nordfors visited the course at the end of the intensive period. Lillkvist contributed a lecture of his own experiences and commented undergraduate students’ final works and InJo articles. Nordfors gave his talk live via Skype from Stanford, focusing on the latest developments of the international initiative. Both presentations were highly valued by the students. More feedback is presented below.

## 3 Results and Student Feedback

Twenty students applied for the course, twelve started, seven finished and at least four more wanted to join after the course had started.

The main message from the free InJo pilot course was that InJo is interesting and important for the students—they thirst for more knowledge on InJo topics. There is great potential for techno-, financial- and science-oriented students in InJo studies.

Only two students completed their stories in time. Others needed approximately one week more. Few would argue that one and a half months for an InJo story should be enough, considering the deadline-driven nature of much journalism. This author shares these concerns, but the students waited until the end of the lectures before starting their work, and this maturing process was needed by them.

Here are the titles of the InJo stories and the grades. Some stories were published in a major regional newspaper, *Keskisuomalainen*.

Innovation Journalism Story	Grade	Publ.
Radio breaks into Internet	5	Yes
N-a-n-o – Four Lessons about the Future	5	Yes
Internet Music Stores – The same Names again	4	Yes
Chips inside Footballs goes to Word Cups	4	
Wellness Dream Lab prepares Innovations for Sale	3	
Biometric-based personal identification/verification technology goes to Libraries	3	
Nokia starts new Mobile Search Services – tries to take the Lead	2	

What principal lessons were learned from the students' InJo stories?

- **The more sources the better the story.** With only one source, the story usually lacks objectivity and looks like an advertisement. Critical sources enrich the story;
- Historical, economical and other **statistical data help create necessary story backgrounds;**
- **Putting a person into the story helps in reporting difficult** (technological, scientific) **topics.** There are cultural differences in journalism, for example, the Anglo-American way of starting a story with a person (in action) is not common in Finnish journalism. Choosing good cases (companies, innovations) could also help the story building processes;
- **Regional views and examples were important in selling the stories to newspapers.** As Michael Porter has said regional aspects (clusters) are the driving force for national innovation systems<sup>5</sup>.

Based on the above, these future course improvements are envisaged:

- The course should contain more lectures (from 12 +(2) hours to 24);
- The course web tool should be developed (in international co-operation);
- The course should begin later in Fall (October), because of the extensions of the students' summer work;
- More advertising for the open visitors' lecture is needed.

## 4 Summary

The Finnish pilot-course for undergraduate students tested well the possibilities of Innovation Journalism. It combined theoretical thinking and practical working on such journalism with the help of the students, and established international co-operation in InJo education between The Department of Communication (University of Jyväskylä) and SCIL (Stanford University).

However, many more opportunities exist between journalism schools as well as communication departments worldwide. The challenge is to merge national and international objectives on Innovation journalism and create multilateral and lively links between students, educators, journalists and researchers. Fellowship programs are good examples of successful joint ventures, but other possibilities deserve exploration, especially via Internet and Skype connections or the like. Innovation

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<sup>5</sup> Michael E. Porter, 2003. "*Microeconomic Foundations of Competitiveness - A New Agenda for International Aid Institutions*", Workshop with the UNDP Leadership Team New York, NY November 18, 2003.



journalism also needs its first English study book for undergraduate students and others.

## 5 Acknowledgements

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