

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) presents
Rethinking higher ed: Beyond {the buzzwords}
November 7-8, 2013
Sheraton Centre Toronto

Day Two
November 8, 2013

Closing Plenary | Media lens: Illuminating or perpetrating
Are education issues exacerbated or enlightened by the media?

Facilitator: Anne McNeilly, Ryerson University
Scott Jaschik, Inside Higher Ed
Simona Chiose, The Globe and Mail
Léo Charbonneau, University Affairs

The most pressing issues facing higher education include the role of government, how technology can best be used in the classroom, student engagement including better integration of international students and a lack of data.

Panelists agreed Canada needs to provide more data on outcomes, so a prospective student could see, for example, the outcome of a political science degree 10 years down the road. More data would aid journalists in telling stories using more than anecdotes. Jaschik noted it's important to have a plan for data, because it may reveal areas that require financial commitment.

The focus then turned to what it takes for a story to make it into the news. In an era of budget cuts, the bar is set very high because there are not enough reporters or newsprint, said Chiose. Questions editors ask include: Has anyone else reported it? How does this affect students and their families?

Panelists said they'd like to see more stories on what it's like to be a non-traditional student, including varied socioeconomic backgrounds, ages and abilities. In addition, some topics have been framed in a problematic manner. MOOCs have been covered as a solution to help at-risk students, but caution must be exercised if there isn't research to back up the claim.

There's no shortage of story ideas in academia, however, it's challenging to cover higher education using journalism's simple narrative structure. And it's also challenging to talk about research in a way that non-experts can understand.

Academics do try to pitch stories about interesting research, but often have to learn to talk differently to the press because "we don't necessarily have PhDs in your field," said Jaschik, adding that professors should think about their role as teachers. Journalists are storytellers, so a good pitch needs to have a clear story, and not just be a topic.

Good pitches might focus on a unique niche or the way research is filling a gap in the world, or what a university has done first and how others are taking those results and building upon them. Some

institutions are doing better at highlighting their research in creative ways with video and engaging headlines.