# Conference 2002: East Timor

---

*Online Journalism Capacity-Building in East Timor*
by Sharon Tickle MBA, MA (Res), BSc(Hons), Project Leader – The East Timor Press Web Project
(http://www.easttimorpress.com)

Coordinator International Students and Lecturer Journalism
Creative Industries Faculty QUT Brisbane, AUSTRALIA (http://www.creativeindustries.qut.edu.au)
s.tickle@qut.edu.au Tel: 617 3864 1225/9649

**QUT's** East Timor Press Web
Project http://wwweasttimorpress.qut.edu.au (now http://www.easttimorpress.com) addressed two urgent needs. Firstly, a web presence for the developing independent news media in East Timor following the withdrawal of Indonesia post referendum, and secondly a valuable archival record of the local print news media coverage of East Timorese. Benefits for the university partner included a 'real world' international experience for students and staff and the development of relationships with East Timorese and Queensland news organizations and government representatives.

With most media outlets' capacity to publish and broadcast destroyed, the United Nations and the multinational peacekeeping forces' communiqués provided the only regular local sources of news media. East Timorese journalists and editors were quickly establishing media organizations to meet local needs but the almost total lack of infrastructure meant newspapers did not reach much beyond Dili.

In June 2000 Queensland University of Technology's journalism department partnered with Queensland Newspaper's The Courier-Mail to develop a Build-Operate-Transfer news web site for East Timorese news media. Run as a supervised student project for three semesters the web site was a runner up in the national Eriksson Innovations in Technology Awards 2001 and attracted a QUT community service grant to enable the transfer of the web site to local journalists under the auspices of the Timor Post.

The site was redesigned by QUT in first semester 2002 as a commercial database-driven ASP online news site http://www.easttimorpress.com in preparation for handover to the East Timorese journalists.

In June 2002 an international six-person team of academic staff, graduate journalists and students undertook three weeks news web site training in Dili for journalists, NGO workers and government officials. The grant provides for ongoing East Timorese staff salaries to maintain the site for six months while other sources of revenue are developed and the site staff will be supported by QUT staff throughout that period.

The genesis and aims of the project are documented in "Media democracy and development: Learning from East Timor", Asia Pacific Media Educator, No.9, July-Dec 2000. The JEANZ paper and multimedia presentation evaluates the project to date in order to inform journalism educators considering similar involvement in online journalism capacity-building partnerships in developing countries.

The East Timor Press Web Project http://www.easttimorpress.qut.edu.au (from July 5 http://www.easttimorpress.com) provides a model for effective and sustainable capacity-building in developing countries through a university-industry partnership based on applied teaching and learning and community service.

## The East Timor Press emerges from the ashes

The genesis of this project dates from a visit to Brisbane in February 2000 by a dozen East Timorese journalists, aspiring journalists and editors. University of Queensland's Centre for International Journalism (CIJ), together with the Reuters Foundation, had organized a weeklong post-conflict press workshop to assist the journalists to prepare for the challenge of reporting East Timor's transition to a democratic nation after 25 years of an oppressive Indonesian Pancasila Press system.

The Brisbane trip came six months after the referendum that decided East Timor's independence from Indonesia, a time when the East Timorese were trying to build an independent news media from the ashes of militia-torched ruins. Most of the journalists had worked for the pro-Indonesia Suara Timor Timor but had recently established their own fledgling press: The Timor Post newspaper and the news magazines Lalenok and Talitakum. They had also formed a professional body to uphold the principles of an independent press and freedom of information, the Timor Lorosae (East Timor) Journalists' Association (TLJA)..

As the workshop progressed it became clear to workshop coordinator John Wallace (Director of the CIJ), that whilst most members of the group were now well-versed in objective, independent news reporting, they would be returning to ground zero in terms of resources and infrastructure to support a free press. The most pressing needs were production equipment and print materials, which were sourced mainly from Queensland Newspapers through the efforts of Editorial Technology Manager, Bob Howarth. Howarth persuaded Queensland Newspapers, publishers of The Courier-Mail, The Sunday Mail and several other regional newspapers, to support the developing press as part of their community outreach program.

Because of the enormity of the task ahead for the East Timorese journalists, a group of interested people organised further support for the print news media in Dili. Members of the group – dubbed The East Timor Free Press Foundation- included Wallace, Howarth, Sharon Tickle (Indonesian-speaking QUT journalism academic who assisted with translations at the workshop), Shelley Woods (freelance journalist and part-time academic) and Jose Teixeira (at that time a Brisbane—based East Timorese lawyer).

Over the next six months computers, photographic equipment, cars, and print materials worth thousands of dollars were sourced by the ETFPF and shipped to Dili and Howarth visited Dili several times to report on events there for News Limited's papers and to assist with the start-up press.

**Enter the East Timor Press Web Project**

By mid-2000 The Timor Post in particular, whilst still hampered by unreliable printing equipment poorly managed by the UN-run print consortium and the lack of land-based telecommunications, was printing stories in four languages five days a week and had progressed a long way towards meeting the needs of local people for news in 'their own voices'. What was still conspicuously absent was the opportunity for those voices to be heard beyond East Timor via the World Wide Web.

Local newspapers were only distributed in the Dili area and were not archived. Howarth suggested to the ETFPF that building an online news site would meet both the wider dissemination needs (the only Internet access in Dili was a very expensive Telstra run Internet café) and the archival needs of the East Timorese print media (Newspapers are said to be the 'first draft of history'). As Howarth's job entailed oversight of The Courier-Mail's online news, he was experienced in online news and supervised online editorial staff. In addition he was able to secure the cooperation of the print news media in Dili through frequent visits.

Queensland University of Technology's then School of Media and Journalism judged Howarth's suggestion to be an appropriate applied teaching and learning and community-service project (the Journalism Dept had successfully run Communique Online, the student e-zine for two years), especially since it aligned with QUT's 'Real World' approach. Tickle took on the responsibility of directing the University's involvement.

The resulting project's terms of reference followed the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) model with the vision of developing an active online presence for the independent print news media in Dili over a period of two semesters (12 months). Integral to the plan was the winning a QUT Community Service Grant (an annual competitive grant round) to fund the final stage, that of handing over to the client (a cooperative of the independent press in East Timor) a commercially sustainable site when the infrastructure would allow it. This was scheduled for mid-2001.

The initial target of one year BOT (July 2000-July 2001) greatly underestimated the time it would take for East Timor's infrastructure to develop sufficiently to sustain the site in Dili.

The project was managed as a 13-week supervised interdisciplinary group project for between 9 and 17 students over four semesters from July 2001-June 2002. The students were typically second-year, third-year and postgraduate students of journalism, media studies and digital media who self-selected to enroll in this

subject in order to gain "practical web development experience in a project that would make a difference" (message emailed to attract enrolments).

There was no shortage of students keen to gain credit while they learnt about East Timor and developed very marketable skills. In January 2001 one of the students traveled to Dili to work as an intern with The Timor Post and was subsequently employed by the Australian Defence Force to co-present their weekly current affairs TV program.

Queensland Newspapers online news editor and journalism tutor John Cokley was employed for the first three semesters to teach and supervise the students through weekly three-hour lab-based workshops in which the developing field of online news theory was applied to the practice of designing and constructing the site through three phases. The initial site was http://www.easttimorpress.qut.edu.au

In mid-2001 the site was a finalist in the annual national Eriksson Innovations in Technology Awards.

For the final semester February –June 2002 Sharon Tickle supervised the project with part-time tutor, Nic Smythe, a graduate of the subject since Cokley had taken a full-time contract with Griffith University.

A project advisory group with representatives from journalism, media studies, production support, and computing services met as needed to give advice to Tickle and Cokley on resourcing, pedagocial and resourcing issues, and members of the group published a joint paper about the project in the special regional edition of Asia Pacific Media Educator .

Howarth continued to be involved in the site's development and Jose Teixeira and Editor in Chief of The Timor Post Hugo da Costa became the link people in Dili when it came to planning the handover of the site in Dili.

Although hampered by the parlous state of communications between Dili and Brisbane (Telstra mobile phones only), by mid-2001 the site design and construction phases were completed and Tickle's application for a AUD14,4000 of QUT funding for the transfer stage of the project was successful.

The Journalism section also contributed AUD2,000 to fund a Journalism student graduate of the project to go with the handover team to Dili to work as a journalist, filing stories back to Brisbane.

The goals for the third semester were to introduce more interactivity and news stories to the site (achieved), while the goals for the fourth and final semester were to seek ways to make the site commercially sustainable and to convert the complex frame-based site to a more robust and technically simpler ASP database-driven site judged to be more suitable for rapid updating in the four national languages (English, Tetum, Portuguese and Bahasa Indonesia).

The fourth semester goals were achieved by June with the site clinching a twelve-month sponsorship deal with Brisbane's largest Internet Service Provide WebCentral to provide unlimited web hosting, free registration of the domain name http://www.easttimorpress.com and email service. The new site was ready for the handover deadline of June 16. Students working on the project researched business models for online news sites and contributed a paper with recommendations for commercialization of the site.


**Handover Planning**

During the period June 2000-July 2001 a Faculty restructure saw QUT's Faculty of Arts become Creative Industries Faculty based around 11 media, communication, creative and performing arts disciplines. Journalism continued to take the lead role in the project and a six-member team was selected from graduates of the project to plan for the site's handover training. Most of the costs for the handover training were met by the Community Service Grant but the team also held fundraisers to generate a cash reserve for contingencies they expected to meet in Dili.

The handover team was led by Tickle (now working in both international coordination and journalism roles for the Faculty) and comprised members traveling to Dili – Tickle, Sally Eeles, Channel Nine news reporter and

postgraduate digital media student, Jess Daly final year journalism student, and postgraduate digital media grads and experienced webworkers, Bryan Person (Portuguese-speaking American student) and Leanne Zimmerman, as well as members of the team who remained in Brisbane to provide operational support -Nic Smythe, media studies graduate and Leigh Kluck, postgraduate digital media.

The team spent three weeks in Dili from mid-June 2002 delivering 12 free workshops to eight journalists and editors covering the skills and knowledge necessary to manage a news website. The grant also pays for the salaries of two part-time online editors for six months. All training participants received a detailed instruction manual in English, Bahasa Indonesia and Portuguese. In addition to the journalists and editors, the team trained seven civil servants, and 15 young members of the general public after hours in a range of computing skills.

The 12-module manual is copyright free for non-commercial uses and covers everything from a basic introduction to computing, through to Microsoft Word, Using the Internet, Online Newswriting, HTML, Web Development with Dreamweaver, Copyright, Image Management, Online News Sites, and Databases.

The Timor Post ran advertisements to attract participants. Training was delivered at The Timor Post, in a government office and at the Telstra Internet café. Two online editors were selected from the group to continue in the paid staff positions on web site managers for six months July 2002-January 2003.

The physical home of the web site is now in the offices of The Timor Post as it is the only independent local news publication printing regularly and the only one with the necessary equipment, Internet access, security and commitment to the project, however the site remains a forum for all East Timorese independent news media to publish to the world and will be managed and adapted by the East Timorese to best meet their needs. The Internet access is currently via the UN server and costs US50.00 a month.

**Client and Partner Evaluation of the Project**

The media client's composition changed during the project from being the The Timor Post, Lalenok and Talitakum to being The Timor Post only since it was the only organisation operating as a daily news publication. Whilst the client would have preferred more input into the design and development phases their priority was getting a daily newspaper published under very difficult circumstances. The formal evaluation and reporting of the project will be completed in February 2003.

Partners had a range of different reasons for being involved in the project but each achieved significant outcomes that assisted them reach personal, corporate or organizational performance targets.

The major partner, Queensland Newspapers, has expressed satisfaction with their involvement with the project. In October 2001 Howarth was appointed Managing Director South Pacific Post Limited in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea and John Grey took over Howarth's role at QN. Grey continued to assist the project, for example by hosting a visit to The Courier-Mail's online production offices. As a result of the success of the East Tim or project Howarth and Tickle are partnering in a web project with the Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands Media Council from 2003.

Teixeira has been based in Dili since August 2000 working for the East Timorese Transitional Authority initially, and was appointed Secretary of State for Investment, Tourism and the Environment in June 2002. Teixeira sees the web site as a key avenue to reach the East Timorese global diaspora who will be important consumers of the news via the site and who are potential investors in East Timor. The site is also expected to be useful for potential tourists.

Creative Industries Faculty has judged the project successful as it achieved a number of its objectives. Outcomes for students, partners and QUT include:

**Student Outcomes**

· Student satisfaction with applied 'real world' teaching and learning experiences has been high (from student evaluations) and students learnt many generic and specific skills that will help them in their careers.
· Several of the handover team members had articles about their involvement in the project published, citing

the project in their resumes assisted their job prospects, and in the case of Eeles, she won a QUT Outstanding Student award partially based on her contribution to the project
· Students from three disciplines and many countries were able to work together and many firm, long-lasting friendships were forged
· Graduates had an opportunity to be considered for an all-expenses paid trip to Dili to do the training and four were successful

## Faculty (and QUT) Outcomes

· A complete set of tri-lingual training modules have been developed and will be modified for other uses
· This was essentially a cost neutral exercise for the Faculty since the unit EFTSU enrolment paid the teaching salary
· The Faculty demonstrated its commitment to international community service in a developing nation (a Faculty Operational Performance Target)
· The project encouraged interdisciplinary cooperation between the journalism and media and communication disciplines
· Working together on the advisory committee encouraged closer working relationship between academic and general staff
· The project provided staff with an opportunity to build and maintain their new media skills
· Staff produced one refereed academic paper and this paper (which means income for the Faculty)
· Publicity about the project in Australia and East Timor and the success in the Eriksson competition raised the national and international profile of the Faculty as a practical, 'can do' new technology institution with a heart that can mix it out in the real world
· The team sought and was granted permission to commercialise the site while housed on the university's server. This was a first for QUT.

## Lessons learned

Several lessons learned from this project that will inform the next international community service development project include:

*Reliable Onsite Contact is vital*
· The lack of someone in Dili nominated by the client who could provide timely input and make decisions hampered the project at several key stages. Howarth's frequent visits to Dili were often the only opportunity the team had to get useful information out of Dili. We particularly needed advice about East Timorese preferences for site design and functionality but this was rarely forthcoming. Indeed the Print Consortium in Dili seemed to have great difficulty operating the press efficiently when it was operating at all, and did not appear to place importance on the opportunities afforded by an online news site. However as we well understood the difficulties the East Timorese journalists were facing we simply kept moving forward.

*Plan for Telecommunications Failure on Site*
· The lack of telecommunications, both affordable and reliable landlines and Internet connections, was an ongoing frustration. As mentioned The Timor Post was able to use the United Nations ISP in the latter stage but communication with the editor and journalists was still minimal. The pace of development was twice as slow as was predicted.

*Plan for Technology Failure at Home*
· As problematic as those telecommunications problems were our own Faculty restructure gave us many headaches as the computing networks were configured and reconfigured and responsibility for the servers that house the East Timor Press Web Project were passed from Computer Systems Officer to Computer Systems Officer. By day things would be working fine but by evening when we convened the classes (a more convenient time for postgraduate students) we experienced numerous file and server access problems.

*Language Competency is important*
· Language proficiency was a slight barrier. Although we had Indonesian and Portuguese speakers on the team during most phases, a Tetum speaker would have been an asset.

*Identify and Meet Students' Individual Needs*
· The students came along to the class with very different expectations and abilities and we learned that it is

best to spell out clearly in the first class what is achievable in the 13-week semester program and to have students identify their own learning goals early and then plan the weekly activities and assessment items to achieve them. Student-centred learning was more satisfying for both students and staff. By delivering the theory and discussion component of the class in the first hour we found we could have students work in pairs on self-selected tasks related to their learning goals while two staff were circulating to assist and critique as needed. The open access subject Online Teaching Web Site was useful for communication, planning and record keeping.

*Align goals with the university's strategic planning and operational performance targets*
· Gaining and keeping the support of Heads of Disciplines, Head of School (and later Dean), and PVCs was critical. Given the length of time the project ran it was important to keep them informed about the project's progress so they could take some credit for achieving the goals

*Choose Partners Based on Trust and a Common Vision*
· As a partner Queensland Newspapers was very easy to work with throughout the project. This is attributable to the deep level of trust that developed early between Howarth and Tickle when both were working on fundraising and sourcing equipment to send to Dili. The QN staff frequently gave generously of their time and expertise. To recognize their partnership Tickle negotiated with the University's Pro-Vice Chancellor responsible for Information and Academic Services a waiver of the ban on sponsor's logos appearing on QUT web sites and the QN stable of papers then had their logo on the site during semesters one-three. The Timor Post too has continued to be a reliable partner since a strong relationship was forged during the handover training.

http://www.easttimorpress.com has proven to be an effective model for a university-industry partnership which has tangible benefits for clients, partners, students and stakeholders and one that Creative Industries Faculty will use for future selected community service-industry projects.

**Footnotes**
Pancasila Press refers to the ideology and practices imposed by the Indonesian Government, ostensibly to promote peaceful nation-building through a kind of development journalism, but which was ruthlessly used by the Minister for Information to censor the press, most commonly by withholding or withdrawing publishing licenses.

Cokley, John, da Costa Aderito Hugo, Lonsdale, Jamie, Romano, Angela, Spurgeon, Christina, & Tickle, Sharon, "Media, democracy and development: Learning from East Timor", Asia Pacific Media Educator, No.9, July-Dec.200.