

## Greetings from the Home Office – Journalism Teachers and the Corona Crisis

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**The coronavirus epidemic has caused universities to change their teaching and move to distance work. How are journalism teachers handling the situation? We asked some colleagues, who are now sitting in their homes and directing teaching under exceptional circumstances.**

Journalistic practice is typically taught hands-on in small groups of students. Classroom interaction has played a central role in training sessions. Now instructors at journalism schools in the Nordic countries, as all over the world, are envisaging a completely new situation: how to transfer the training newsrooms into virtual newsrooms, and still keep the pedagogical activities as meaningful? Three colleagues from Finland, Norway and Sweden told how they and their students have experienced the situation.

### Video Lectures Require More Concentration

**Marko Ala-Fossi, Senior Lecturer, University of Tampere, Finland**

“Given the large deviation from the normal situation we are in – and how quickly we have had to adapt to it – it can be stated that all telework has started with surprisingly few problems.

In the first stage, I was hit by occasional technical problems such as broken computers or missing software. But we were able to handle these even before the campus was closed down, and now we continue to solve problems remotely. We have realised that we have relatively good technical preparedness: we have already used the learning platform Moodle on almost every course before, we have laptops as job computers, and mobiles with the university's data connection. So, there has previously been the potential for teleworking.



*Working from home: university lecturer Marko Ala-Fossi enjoys his coffee on the terrace. Photo: Marko Ala-Fossi.*

At the same time, it can be pointed out that it is relatively difficult to convert courses into digital form if they initially had an educational arrangement based on classroom teaching. If lectures were not recorded, then they must be recorded now. And the exercises must be thought about in whole, or at least in part. Nevertheless, many teaching opportunities that require interaction can be realised and recorded on Zoom. However, longer teaching sessions, or several short ones in a row, require such intense concentration that it becomes much more strenuous than a corresponding occasion would be in the classroom.

“The threshold for using digital tools will be much lower now” –  
Marko Ala-Fossi

I guess this spring term will be a kind of breaking point, and digital work will be taken into account in a completely different way in the future. In any case, the threshold for using digital tools will be much lower now – and the use will be perceived as meaningful”.

### The Crisis of Media Houses Affects Journalist Interns

**Hege Lamark, First Lecturer, Northern University, Bodø, Norway**

“Here in Bodø we have a special situation this year – we have only one group of students in progress with their education. They were admitted in the fall of 2017 and started their internships on 3 February, which are scheduled to last until 30 April. When the coronavirus crisis occurred, Norwegian universities closed, and our employees were given orders to work from home. Northern University then stopped all internships requiring physical presence. In other words, students should not physically meet at the practice site during this period – only practice from a home office is accepted. This was later extended to Easter.

We have 20 students in internships in 16 different newsrooms – from Finnmark in the north to Trøndelag in the south. When the crisis occurred, the instructors were visiting the interns, and we later continued to maintain this contact by telephone. In recent weeks, we have spent a great deal of time communicating almost daily with the individual students and supervisors. The goal is for as many students as possible to get their internship approved so that they can complete the final exam this spring.



*Hege Lamark is participating in a virtual teacher's meeting from her home office in Norway. Photo: Freben Markbak.*

In most cases, this seems to be going well; students attend morning meetings and other editorial meetings via Skype. Like most other journalists, they work from home, contact sources through digital platforms, and publish issues as best they can. Many students state that they experience the situation as very educational.

“The goal is for as many students as possible to get their internship approved” – Hege Lamark

But – at the time of writing, new problems are looming on the horizon. The first media houses are now announcing they must lay off employees, because advertising revenue has plummeted during the crisis. We don't know if this will affect any of our students. At the same time, there are a number of positive signals from the editors, not least because a large proportion of the students have been offered summer jobs. Journalism is needed more than ever!

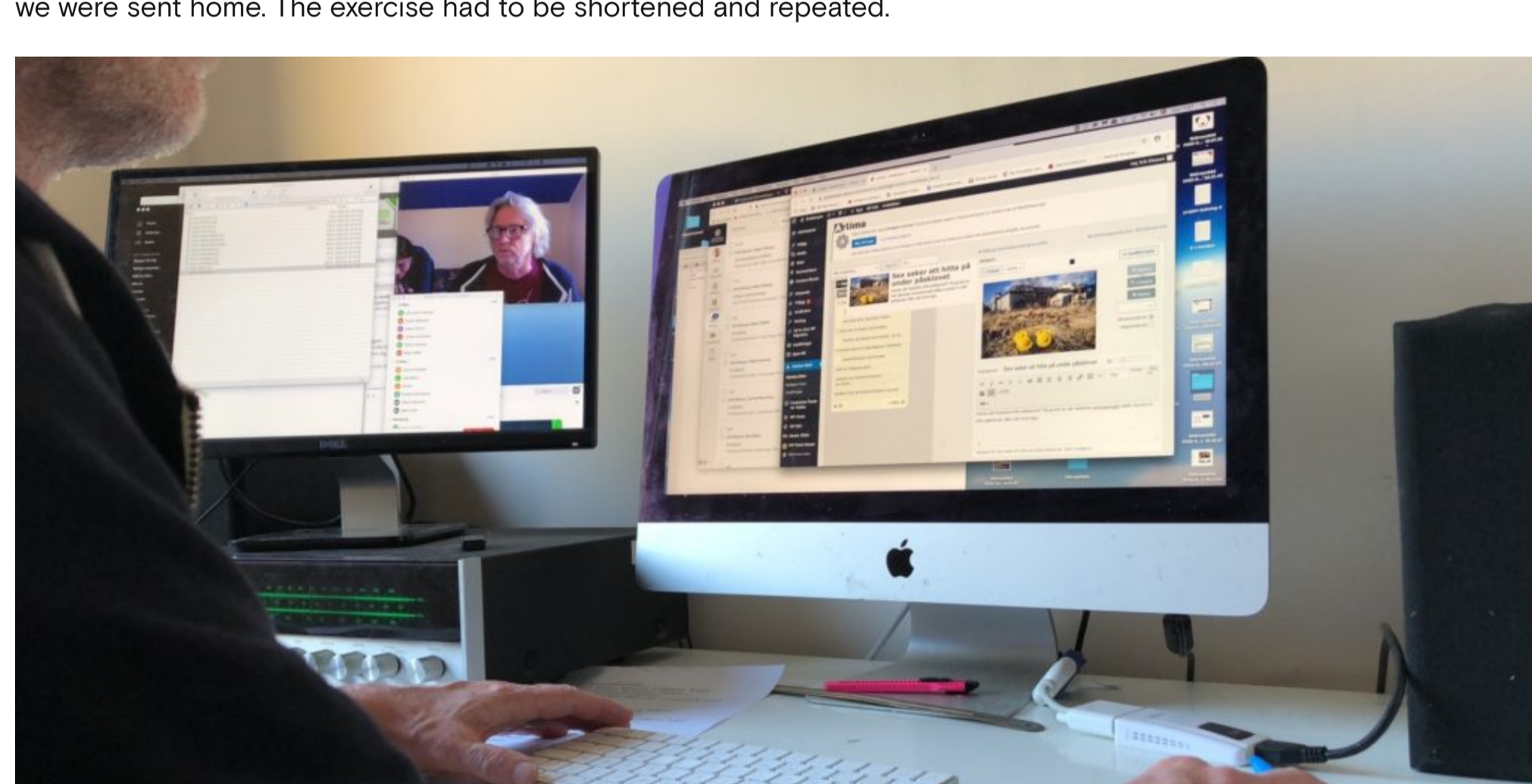
Otherwise, the teachers are working from home, with almost daily teacher meetings on Skype. We try to carry on research work, chair exams, write applications, and do what we had otherwise planned. It's “so-so” in this strange situation, but we have that in common with everyone else.

I hope our Nordic colleagues stay healthy and productive”.

### Students Feel Better Connected

**Erik Eliasson, Lecturer, University of Gothenburg, Sweden**

“Here in Gothenburg there was a big change – we just planned a big editorial exercise for 56 students in term 2 when we were sent home. The exercise had to be shortened and repeated.



*Erik Eliasson leads the production of the online student magazine from his home office. Photo: Maarit Jaakkola.*

“This is so good! I love Zoom!” exclaimed a student yesterday, and I'm actually inclined to agree. Zoom programmers should get some sort of prize: always stable, user-friendly and with just the right functions.

We have three branches: sound, motion picture, and text. How it works in detail with audio and motion picture I don't really know, but I can tell you that with the help of Zoom we have done something that is probably similar to the situation in real newsrooms right now. In Zoom, I first gather the students in the morning; we talk about what's going to happen, and then I divide them into three “breakout rooms” – one domestic, one foreign, and one Gothenburg/entertainment/sports. I myself sit in my meeting room and wait for someone with a question to pop up on my screen. It happens a couple of times an hour.

“I'm happy today for the tutorials I've recorded before” – Erik Eliasson

We have skipped the paper editing this time. The three editors publish directly in our online exercise magazine **Göteborg Nu**. It's going well, really good. And the students' mood is good. Yesterday we conducted reporting seminars in Zoom. Six students in each seminar group – three hours. This, too, exceeded expectations. It does not differ much from physical seminars, and I think learning will be at least as good – perhaps better. I felt a willingness to discuss things that I didn't really recognize from regular seminars.

As for lectures, I intend to run them in real time in Zoom. Recorded lectures lose all the interactivity that I think is the very point of a lecture. However, there will be a challenge next week, when I will give lectures to 65 students. Hope my meeting room holds so many...

I do, however, record tutorials: on news graphics, Photoshop, InDesign, WordPress, and so on. But I have always done that, in order to be able to refer students there who have missed workshops. I'm happy today for **the tutorials I've recorded before**”.

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