Best Practices in Teaching

Information Gathering

Sponsored by
The Teaching Committee
of the Association for Education
in Journalism and Mass Communication

Wednesday, August 6, 2008
11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m.

AEJMC Annual Convention
Chicago, Illinois

Best Practices in Teaching Information Gathering

Panelists for the Session:

First Place: Barbara Feinman Todd and Asra Q. Nomani, Georgetown

Second Place: Rex A. Martin, Bowie State

Third Place: Patricia C. Baldwin, North Carolina at Asheville

Honorable Mention I: Kathryn B. Campbell, Mark Blaine and Tracy Miller, Oregon

Honorable Mention II: Mead Loop, Ithaca

Honorable Mention III: Cory L. Armstrong, Florida

Discussant: Robert D. Richards, Pennsylvania State, 2006 Scripps Howard Journalism Teacher of the Year

Moderating/Presiding: Debashis 'Deb' Aikat, North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Elected Members of the AEJMC Teaching Committee (2007/08)

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Sheri Broyles, University of North Texas
Kenneth Campbell, University of South Carolina
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Copy Editing: Jennifer H. McGill, AEJMC
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Foreword

Rudyard Kipling, English author and poet, wrote in his 1907 classic "The Elephant's Child":

> *I keep six honest serving-men;*
> *(They taught me all I knew)*
> *Their names are What and Why and When*
> *And How and Where and Who.*
> *I send them east and west;*
> *But after they have worked for me,*
> *I give them all a rest.*

[From page 85 in **Just So Stories**, Doubleday]

The winning entries for this year's Best Practices in the Teaching of Information Gathering Competition feature a wealth of ideas. They covered strategies, skills, methods, concepts and theories relating to the process of collecting and collating information in journalism and mass communication.

The AEJMC Teaching Committee blind judged 26 excellent entries. Six were selected for presentation at the 2008 AEJMC convention in Chicago, August 6-9, 2008.

I take this opportunity to thank the competition judges, Bill Christ (Trinity), Ken Campbell (South Carolina) and Robert D. Richards (Pennsylvania State), the 2006 Scripps Howard Journalism Teacher of the Year, for their time and energy.

I am grateful to Jennifer H. McGill, AEJMC, for pivotal contributions to the Best Practices Competition. Thanks to Kysh Brown, AEJMC, for design and production help, Mich Sineath, AEJMC, for competition publicity and Rich Burke, AEJMC, for accounting support.

The AEJMC Teaching Committee has sponsored the Best Practices Competition for the third successive year. The competition topic was the First Amendment in 2006 and media ethics in 2007.

I hope you decide to enter the AEJMC Best Practices in Teaching Competition next year.

Deb Aikat, North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Vice-Chair, AEJMC Teaching Committee

The Pearl Project:
Teaching Students Information Gathering
While Protecting the Enterprise of Investigative Journalism

First Place Winner
Barbara Feinman Todd and Asra Q. Nomani, Georgetown

Abstract: The Pearl Project, named for *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, is a collaborative investigative reporting course in which students learn to employ the same information gathering skills used by working journalists. The project is organized like a newsroom. Students receive a real-world assignment, choose beats, map reporting strategies, develop primary human sources, conduct interviews, cull databases for information, collaborate, collate complicated information, resolve ethical dilemmas, analyze information, write stories and create multimedia packages. By doing first-hand reporting, students gain an appreciation for the challenges of reporting and the deep sense of accomplishment that comes from successful information gathering.

Rationale: The Pearl Project is designed with the belief that students learn best by doing. The course is designed to introduce students to the most rigorous information gathering challenges that working journalists face and to help them develop the skills, strategies and methods to collect, collate and analyze information for multimedia publication and broadcast.

With the model of the Innocence Project, headquartered at the School of Law at Yeshiva University to investigate alleged wrongful convictions, the Pearl Project is designed to be a collaborative investigative reporting team project conducted in journalism courses. And in the spirit of the Arizona Project, an investigative reporting project by journalists into the 1976 murder of *Arizona Republic* reporter Don Bolles, the Pearl Project centers on investigating the death of a journalist in the line of duty and completing that journalist's work, or investigating the circumstances around a journalist in peril and completing that journalist's work.

With more than 300 journalists killed worldwide over the past five years, investigating their deaths and continuing their work has become a critical component in protecting the enterprise of journalism in the 21st century, and there are no purer hearts than students to do noble work. The first Pearl Project investigated the kidnapping and murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, who was kidnapped and murdered in Karachi, Pakistan, in 2002. The project gives students a tangible link to journalists who are dedicated to the craft and gives students a real-world appreciation for the challenges facing journalists in the modern day.

Methodology & Implementation: As professors of the Pearl Project, we identify the focus of our investigation in the semester before the start of the course.

We register the class with a course description detailing the subject of the investigation, and we instruct students to submit 500-word essays to explain why they want to be in the course. This is important toward identifying writing and critical thinking skills in students, as well as recognizing students who will take initiative, show personal commitment and be positive team players.

Launch: The first day, we introduce the reporting assignment and give students a chronology of facts. We attempt to instill in the students a sense of the noble history of investigative reporting that they are inheriting. We discuss the assignment as a newsroom, and the class defines the reporting beats that it deems most relevant to completing the project. Since the investigation typically involves crime or suspected crime that has received media coverage and gone through some process in the judicial system with possible political overtones, beats include: the journalist (through at least their work and correspondences), the journalist's family, friends and colleagues, law enforcement, intelligence, government, attorneys, media and politics.

We give the students reading assignments related to the investigation, including books, articles and radio and TV interview transcripts. The students are assigned the task of writing 500-word essays on the beats on which they would like to work, the reporting strategy they would take and possible human sources they would interview.

Beats: By week two of the course, the students are assigned their beats and their beat partners. A specific student is assigned to be the videographer, and another student is specifically assigned to be the project photographer. The beats are organized into teams with a team leader designated to coordinate the team members' work.

Research: Students immediately look for open source information, such as media articles, related to their beat, using Lexis-Nexis and other online database searches.

Gumshoe reporting: Students identify human sources with first-hand information. Early in the course, we conduct interviews in the classroom together so students can practice gathering information from sources using deft interviewing skills. We encourage students to meet sources face-to-face, whenever possible, to solicit better interviews.

Investigative reporting 2.0: Using WikiMedia, the software used to create Wikipedia, we create a private, password-protected wiki that acts as a virtual filing cabinet for the information that students gather. We call it a "Pearlpedia." It is easy to create using one of many publicly available Internet service providers that support WikiMedia software. On our wiki, we post classroom essentials, including our syllabus, class schedule, assignments and reading materials.

We use the wiki like an electronic newsroom. Students create their own pages where they post sources, reporting strategies and story drafts. They create pages for each source and post contact information, questions, bios, arti-

cles and interview transcripts. While students develop one-on-one relationships with sources, they can all contribute their collective intellect to questions for the sources. We create a page with a chronology of the facts, and a page for all articles and documents related to the case. The Pearlpedia is an effective teaching tool because professors can edit student work and monitor student activity by examining the "history" of pages.

In addition to the Pearlpedia, students subscribe to a group listserv to share tips and breaking news. We use Google Groups. The students create business cards, establish a tip line, available by email or phone, and create a Facebook to solicit possible sources in an example of reporting in the 21st century. Students learn to share sources, tips and ideas, instilling in them a spirit of teamwork.

Social network analysis: Students use technology to organize the information they gather. We use social network analysis–a fancy term for the kind of family trees used in genealogy studies–to visually map the investigation. We received an in-kind donation from i2, a software company based in Reston, Va., with a collegiate philanthropy division, for Analyst's Notebook, mapping software typically used by students of forensic science and criminal justice. We ground our next generation of investigative reporters in technology tools that supplement old school gumshoe reporting.

Outcomes: Students create a multimedia package with the following elements: a written narrative for publication in a professional media outlet; a multimedia production with a slideshow, audio and video; a digital archive with original documents scanned into it, much like done by SmokingGun.com; and a publicly available edited version of the Pearlpedia to share how the Pearl Project was organized from teaching and journalistic points of view. In completing the Pearl Project, students receive a deep reward beyond the byline: a sense of accomplishment in protecting the franchise of investigative reporting before even entering the profession.

Vision: Foundations, philanthropists, and universities recognize the critical watchdog role that investigative journalism has in any robust democracy, and are more and more providing the support that traditional media outlets are not. The Pearl Project has been blessed by the support of both a foundation and a university, The Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation and Georgetown University. Without their generous support, guidance, and encouragement, our project would have remained just an unrealized dream.

We seek now to institutionalize the Pearl Project as an investigative reporting venture done by students around the world, reporting on the death of a journalist or finishing the work of a journalist in peril. Toward that end, we have created the Pearl Consortium of Faculty-Student Investigative Reporting Projects. Pearl Projects would be organized through the consortium. In addition, the consortium would include the many faculty-student investigative reporting projects that are emerging at universities around the world, filling the gap created by the elimination of investigative reporting teams in this age of media consolidation.

The consortium is an effort to organize a community of like-minded individuals at other universities. This consortium will be a place, virtual at first, where we can come together to talk about what we're doing, to brainstorm about particular challenges of various natures—creative, legal, ethical or practical. Over time we will meet in person, for panels, coffee, brainstorming sessions and to celebrate the publication of our work and the accomplishments of our students. In this consortium, faculty and students will come together to discuss, blog about and share ideas regarding their reporting projects.

The consortium is committed to nurturing a new generation of investigative reporters trained in old school gum shoe reporting combined with new media expertise. We invite the participation of our colleagues in the consortium. If you're interested in joining, please send us an email at pearlproject@georgetown.edu. For more information, please visit the Pearl Project website at http://scs.georgetown.edu/pearlproject/.

About the Authors:

Barbara Feinman Todd, associate dean of journalism for the masters of professional studies at Georgetown University, is a co-professor of the Pearl Project, an investigation into the murder of Daniel Pearl. She has worked in Washington as a freelance editor and writer for more than two decades, assisting as ghostwriter, editor or researcher for senators, journalists, and business leaders on several high-profile books including Bob Woodward's *VEIL*; Carl Bernstein's *Loyalties*; former Congresswoman Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky's *A Woman's Place: The Freshmen Women Who Changed the Face of Congress*; former Washington Post Executive Editor Benjamin Bradlee's *A Good Life*; Palestinian spokesperson Hanan Ashrawi's *This Side of Peace*; former First Lady Hillary Clinton's *It Takes A Village*; and former Nebraska senator Bob Kerrey's *When I Was A Young Man*.

Asra Q. Nomani, a former reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, is an adjunct professor of journalism at Georgetown University and a co-professor of the Pearl Project. She is the author of *Tantrika: Traveling the Road of Divine Love* and *Standing Alone in Mecca: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam*. She has written for the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post*, *TIME* and other publications and received a 2007 opinion writing award from the American Academy of Religion. The American Association of University Women named her a 2007 Woman of Distinction. She is a distinguished alumnus of the College of Arts & Sciences at West Virginia University. She has commented on Islam, motherhood and journalism in venues from CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera to NPR. She delivered an NPR commentary that the same spirit of investigative journalism that imbued Pearl's work lives in the students of the Pearl Project.

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Into the Field

Second Place
Rex A. Martin, Bowie State

Abstract: For the past four years, advanced journalism students at Bowie State University have been challenged to gather information under field conditions by being "embedded" with ROTC squads during mock combat field exercises. During such field-training exercise, held either on campus or at nearby military bases, the novice reporters accompany the "troops" throughout the day, usually in wilderness, occasionally in adverse weather. Following this, they are required to produce two news items, having learned first-hand just how difficult obtaining accurate information can be in the midst of confusion, physical and psychological strain, from a limited vantage point and sometimes less-than-sympathetic sources.

Activity: Upon taking on the task of teaching journalism at Bowie State University, I immediately began seeking ways to give my advanced students practical experience in news gathering under adverse conditions. Given my background and interests, I made contact with the commander of the university's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) "Bulldog Battalion," Lt. Col. Charles Marshall. I proposed a number of cooperative learning activities, which he and his cadre of instructors warmly greeted.

Each spring, the Bowie State "Bulldog Battalion" either hosts or takes part in a multi-school two-day field-training exercise (FTX). The centerpiece of this event is a series of single-squad combat exercises, always filling a Saturday from dawn to dusk. In this mock combat, the junior and senior cadets from all schools are mixed together and randomly assigned to ten-man squads. These squads form the offensive elements that will individually face a number of training "lanes," ranging from a recon sweep through hostile territory to a planned assault on a fixed, "fortified" position. After each challenge, usually taking two to three hours to complete, the squad leaders are rotated and the squad moves to the next lane. The defensive elements, of varying sizes depending on the challenge, are composed of the freshmen and sophomore cadets from the participating schools. These too are rotated from lane to lane, so as to experience all the variety of tasks they may face in combat. All of the cadets are in full gear, but armed with paintball guns and protective eyewear.

During the week prior to this Saturday, my advanced journalism students will have been briefed by a senior cadet on the event and on safety issues (protective vests and goggles are provided to my students by the Bulldog Battalion). On the morning of the FTX, my students meet me at 6:00 a.m., and are assigned to either an offensive squad or a defensive element by the ROTC

commandant. Usually, only one journalism student is attached to each squad or element, so they are operating independently among individuals they do not know. The "embedded" journalists accompany these troops throughout the day, through the several lanes, and even spend the midday break with them (the first encounter of my students with MREs has provided many amusing stories). At dusk the FTX ends, with each group of cadets having experienced three or four lanes during the day. Throughout, even as the ROTC instructors are positioned on each lane, I range the area observing and advising (occasionally comforting or berating) my journalism students. At the end of the day, my students gather with me at the starting location to return their protective equipment and for a few comments and reminders from myself.

Under a Wednesday deadline, the journalism students are required to produce two news items. Aware of subject matter before the FTX, typically one of these stories is a hard news item of 1000-1200 words on one of the combat lanes, written as though it were an actual firefight. The second piece is a feature item, of no set length, on any aspect of the day's experience they wish. Inevitably, most of these are personality profiles on cadets or personal recollections of the reporter's travails, but I have received stories on subjects ranging from field medicine to women in the military and even on the nutritional value of MREs.

Rationale: Information gathering in the field, whether accompanying troops, disaster relief workers, police or emergency personnel, is the toughest challenge reporters face. Unfortunately, many journalism students are ill-prepared for this. Most journalism students spend their academic careers in comfortable surroundings, with willing and sympathetic subjects. I seek, through this and other exercises, to teach ours that news reporting is not always a 9-5 activity undertaken at a desk, or in comfortable surroundings. There is no better way to understand this than through experiencing it.

Outcomes: In several class sessions following the Saturday FTX, the students and I talk about the challenges they faced in obtaining information. For instance, it is not unknown for them to be ill-prepared for the unexpected, notably in their ability to record information. Despite my warnings not to rely on recording devices and to bring duplicate pens and notebooks, inevitably some find themselves having to depend on memory when they draft their stories. Preparation also includes being ready for the weather and terrain, in terms of dress and discomfort. Simply functioning at this early time of day, and for the long hours afterward, can be a topic of discussion.

We talk about the challenges of obtaining information from busy participants, who may distrust an "outsider" in their midst. Often the novice reporters find the cadets in command of squads or defensive elements resentful of what they consider an imposition, a burden they must deal with while themselves trying to accomplish a difficult mission. Making dealing with the "soldiers" even more challenging is the fact that the journalist is operating alone, without a "sup-

port group" ready with advice and comfort.

Perhaps the most interesting topic during these discussions is that of objectivity. Having spent a day sharing the rigors of the field with the cadets of their squad or element, writing a balanced hard news story of the combat is a challenge with which many of the students struggle. Moreover, during the day some even become involved in the "combat," and this is a subject of lively debate. Despite my admonitions, my students have helped build defensive positions, plan assaults, and acted as scouts or decoys (for ambushes). In one memorable instance, one even took up a paintball gun from a fallen "soldier" to engage the "enemy." They learn that objectivity is more than just a matter of presentation, it can be an emotional issue as well.

These and a host of other issues become more than just lecture notes when my students are "embedded" for a day with the ROTC in the field.

About the Author:

Following completion of his B.A. in 1973, **Rex Martin** headed the Montana Historical Society microfilm project and did free-lance writing for publications on local history, military history and gaming as diverse as the *Pacific Northwesterner, Hoofprints, The General,* and *Xenocogic*. In 1981, he accepted the position of Managing Editor for the Avalon Hill Game Company, the oldest commercial publisher of board wargames, a post he held for 13 years. In 2001, he was awarded his PhD from Penn State University. For the past four years, while continuing to work as a consultant in the videogame industry, Dr. Martin has taught courses in journalism and print communications at Bowie State University. He also serves as the faculty advisor to the university's student newspaper, *The Spectrum*.

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A Case Study: Mysteries versus Puzzles in Information Gathering

Third Place
Patricia C. Baldwin, North Carolina at Asheville

Abstract: In this special topics class and information-gathering project, students use the distinction between <u>puzzles</u> (questions with answers) and <u>mysteries</u> (questions to which no one knows the answer) to enhance their reporting skills beyond data collection. They ask probing questions and synthesize quantitative and qualitative information. Solving puzzles depends on what they are told. Solving mysteries requires them to learn to listen. As a model for their information gathering, they use Malcolm Gladwell's *New Yorker* article (Jan. 8, 2007) in which he proposes that the Enron bankruptcy was a mystery, not a puzzle. Information was not withheld, Gladwell said. The problem was too much information.

Methodology. Students read "Open Secrets: Enron, intelligence, and the perils of too much information," by Malcolm Gladwell and published in *The New Yorker,* January 8, 2007, which explains the concepts of mysteries and puzzles as related to Enron. (Note: Gladwell also is the author of *The Tipping Point The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* and *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*.)

Students select an ongoing story in the news for further investigation and analysis as a case study. They determine whether the case involved a mystery or a puzzle. Through three homework assignments and ongoing class work and discussion (including the study of analytical decision-making and ethical frameworks), students compile a written case study and present their conclusions in a class presentation.

Rationale. Journalism and mass communication education should require students: to solve mysteries as well as puzzles; to ask good questions and not simply collect facts; to synthesize quantitative as well as qualitative information; to think critically and independently; to question assumptions; to deal with incomplete information; to analyze ethical values in decision-making models; to communicate insights; to make thoughtful analyses; and to derive recommendations from analyses.

A case study is an educational experience that is very different from the model of lectures-and-book learning. Training students to solve mysteries is fundamentally about engaging them well.

The basic challenge of this case study method is the distinction between puzzles and mysteries, as presented by Gregory F. Treverton in his book

Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information. Treverton says puzzles are questions with answers, such as "How many missiles does the Soviet Union have?" He defines mysteries as questions to which no one knows the answer, such as "Will North Korea fulfill its nuclear agreement with the United States?" He says puzzles involve facts; mysteries involve intentions. In other words, it is possible to gather near-infinite numbers of facts, while still being unable to discern any intentions from those facts. Treverton also points out that the abundance of information available via the Internet and other online sources poses a formidable challenge to analysts.

This abundance of information also poses a challenge to journalists. Journalist Malcolm Gladwell applied Treverton's concepts in discussing the Enron corporate bankruptcy/criminal case in his article in *The New Yorker,* January 8, 2007. Gladwell's article followed the imprisonment of former Enron CEO, Jeffrey Skilling. Gladwell observed that Skilling received a stiff sentence (24 years) based upon evidence that Skilling withheld information and that "we were not told enough." However, Gladwell wrote, "the prosecutor was wrong. Enron wasn't really a puzzle. It was a mystery."

For journalists, solving puzzles depends on what they are told; solving mysteries depends on what they hear, on listening well.

Outcomes. The basic outcome of this approach to information gathering is high-engagement learning. While many rules of reporting can be captured in the classroom, the best information gathering is often a combination of things you can't teach. This case study approach, using the concept of mysteries versus puzzles, help students marshal their best instincts and hone their individual talents.

The goal is to improve the way students address mysteries — both a challenge and an opportunity for communication schools. Students learn to add a depth of inquiry to their information gathering. They follow Gladwell's example and transition from fact-gathering to true analysis. They isolate analysis done by the left side of the brain — a logical process of collecting data. In other words, get enough data points and the puzzle is solved. On the other hand, solutions to a mystery live on the right side of the brain — the artistic, creative and non-logical side. Solving a mystery usually takes leaps of faith and judgment.

Students learn that detail is essential, precision matters and context tells the story. For those who aspire to the peak of the profession, news means much more than reporting fact. News helps the audience see and frame the world. It is the history of yesterday and the still-forming vision of tomorrow. Students who understand that can lead not only in the newsroom but also in the culture well outside those walls.

About the Author:
Patricia Baldwin, Ph.D., joined the University of North Carolina at Asheville as an Assistant Professor in Mass Communication in August 2007. During the previous decade, she served as Editor in Chief of *Private Clubs*, a 22-year-old,

bimonthly lifestyle magazine published by Dallas, Texas-based ClubCorp. She served as Editor in Chief of *Golf for Women* magazine in Lake Mary, Florida, from May 1994 - August 1997. She previously had been a business writer and columnist at *The Dallas Morning News* from 1989-1994 and at *The Dallas Times Herald* from 1987-1989. She also has 10 years experience with business journals in Houston and Austin, where she was a co-owner of *Austin Business Journal* from 1983-1985. Prior to joining UNCA, she had served as an adjunct at five universities.

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Modeling Organization and Linear Thinking for Information Gathering

Honorable Mention I

Kathryn B. Campbell, Mark Blaine and Tracy Ilene Miller, Oregon

Abstract: A successful, inspiration and memorable Information Gathering course must not only point students toward databases, books, periodicals and people, it must also model effective methods of organizing massive amounts of information. Most students have never been asked to think clearly and deeply for many weeks about a single topic, much less to do so on an issue of public policy. Organizing a large body of information is a major challenge for most. We also believe that teaching in-depth research without teaching time management skills is inadequate. Thus, we have developed explicit instructions for each activity, including samples of every assignment.

Explanation: Every component of this course is carefully planned, calibrated, and coordinated to contribute seamlessly to its mission, which is to introduce students to ways of making sense of the vast quantities of information that bombard them every day. Their challenge is to learn how to take the abstract concept "information" and transform it into knowledge—knowledge applicable to the rapidly changing political, economic, social and professional environments in which they live. Among other things, the course teaches students how to:

- plan and use search strategies for information on a public policy topic.
- use library resources, especially reference materials and government documents.
- gain access to useful government and corporate information.
- distinguish among online sources and to evaluate them.
- analyze and evaluate evidence.
- plan and conduct personal interviews.
- identify and analyze conflicting points of view among expert sources.
- organize evidence gathered from 35 diverse sources into a reasoned, credible argument on an important public policy question.
- use online course materials and information to guide and assess their work.
- appreciate the contribution that careful research and analysis will contribute to their professional skills in newsgathering, public relations and advertising.
- organize their research, their time, and their life to meet critical deadlines, including the final project of approximately 100 pages.

Rationale: We believe it is imperative that students spend their scholarly

energy and intellectual creativity thinking about their public policy issues rather than designing a complicated presentation of their research. Because we have a complementary course in visual communication, we can insist that our Information Gathering students pay attention to words and their meaning by forbidding any attempts to create new formats for the material. This focuses their attention on the content. We fully intend for the content to be repurposed in later classes and rendered with as much multimedia content as possible; but for this course, we firmly believe that nothing must distract the students from learning several important skills: time management, linear thinking, and good writing. We have developed a number of forms and sample assignments to assist students in this endeavor.

Outcomes: Students routinely tell us that they are astonished by what they have accomplished in this course. Apparently, their parents are too, as we often get a hearty handshake at commencement from a parent who gushes, "Oh, YOU are the Info Hell professor!" several years after the course had been completed by their new graduate. Every term, students stop us in the hallways to exclaim that no paper, no assignment, no project has ever seemed too tough again. Students return to their Information Gathering outlines to organize senior projects and honor's college theses. They chafe at the strict formatting system but generally come to appreciate the boundaries and guidance such rules provide. Here are excerpts from two students' assessments of the course, written as part of their introductions to the final project:

> *"Advice that I would give to another student who will be taking this course is to learn time management and apply it. Make yourself a written schedule and stick to it. Do one annotation a day or spend about an hour and a half; and while that might seem tedious, it beats trying to do all the annotations in a week and never seeing the sun or leaving your computer chair."*
>
> *"If I had to do this over again, the thing I would do differently is that I would narrow my question sooner, and get a working outline as soon as possible. As soon as I had that working outline, my life improved 100%. My hair became more manageable, and my teeth were brighter! Well, okay, not really. But the outline made the search infinitely easier — I cannot stress enough how much more organized I was after that. . . . This is a damn tough class but what a ride!"*

About the authors:

Kathryn B. Campbell is Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies for the School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon. Her expertise includes the area of news-editorial, communication history, and civic journalism. Dr. Campbell is an award-winning teacher and an academic leader in the field of civic journalism. She holds an M.S. from the University of Oregon and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Mark Blaine is an award-winning writer, investigative reporter and editor. Most recently, he was the editor of Forest Magazine, a national environmental magazine dealing with public land policy issues. Blaine worked for four

years at the Asheville (N.C.) Citizen-Times as an editor and investigative reporter. He is a graduate of the Literary Nonfiction program at the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication and earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Blaine teaches in magazine courses, directs the publication of the School's nationally known magazine Flux, and advises students on long-form writing projects. His own writing interests include environmental issues and adventure sports.

Tracy Ilene Miller taught her first University of Oregon reporting class in 1997. With her interest in storytelling, she took a break and earned a master's degree from the School in Literary Nonfiction and returned two years ago to teach editing, writing, and information gathering classes as well as grammar. Miller has worked for nearly two decades as a PR writer as well as a magazine editor, feature writer for magazines and newspapers, desktop designer and, more recently, Web designer. Miller also taught eight years of computer classes.

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Kathryn B. Campbell, 541-346-1327.

Exceeding Expectations in Creating
a Journalism Culture

Honorable Mention II
Mead Loop, Ithaca

Rationale: Author created a journalism culture at two public high schools where no culture existed previously by focusing on three best practices: 1) Underpromise, and overdeliver during interviews with sources to demonstrate credibility; 2) use identical tools and technologies in lab instruction that would be used during publishing; and 3) teach skills in lab settings in shorter time periods to mirror high schoolers' typical experiences. At both schools, high schoolers: 1) received college instruction; 2) became peer teachers to other students upon return to school; and 3) created an ongoing journalism culture with regular publishing of school newspaper.

Methodology: In the past 10 years, my college has partnered with two public high schools serving high-achieving students in challenging socio-economic areas to produce journalism where no culture of it existed previously. In both partnerships, I taught journalistic concepts and skills during weeklong summer workshops, and produced full-color, four-page newspapers as a result. In both, specific techniques were used, taking into account the students' education, experiences and subject knowledge.

My college entered into a partnership with the Frederick Douglass Academy Junior/Senior High School in Harlem, N.Y. FDA is a competitive public school in New York City, drawing many of the brightest and most motivated students in Manhattan. College preparation is the paramount goal at FDA. About 80 percent of students live in central Harlem, and according to a profile of the partnership in Chronicle of Higher Education, "most of the students come from households earning less than $10,000 a year." No journalism curriculum or school newspaper existed at FDA at that time.

Most of the journalism focus began as one-way: My college donated 30 computers and relevant software, and FDA created a journalism lab from a classroom. I decided to test the possibilities of this partnership by publishing a newspaper at FDA in one class day. Teaching by doing and teaching by showing were my hands-on methods, but with some organization and several interested high school students, we published and made sure all 1,100 students had a paper in their hands by the end of one school day. This certainly piqued FDA's interest and possibilities for a school without a journalism class, paper or culture. I also attended high school English classes at FDA to teach journalism and its possibilities.

To create a journalism culture at FDA, the students needed instruction.

The permanent culture grew when I created a weeklong class in journalism, and six FDA students came to our school to participate. In one week, however, how does one teach enough news-gathering skills to be credible?

Best practice #1: Underpromise, and overdeliver. Rather than be underestimated, the students proved their credibility with sources in interviews by asking tough questions first. Typically, we teach student journalists that interviews are up to a 10-stage process, as Ken Metzler's Creative Interviewing text recommends, but here we taught high schoolers to establish their knowledge of a subject immediately with their first question rather than lob sophomoric softball questions. This was a conscious strategy for demonstrating their worth to sources who might doubt a high schooler's subject preparation. This strategy was particularly helpful in reporting a story about a local science center in which concepts of play were explained using scientific principles.

Best practice #2: Use identical technologies. The students who took the workshops would become the teachers upon return to school, and would be required to teach others. We decided we would teach the workshops using the same tools that students would. In photography, that meant the same digital cameras that were donated were the ones we taught on. In page design, that meant Quark software.

Best practice #3: Teach skills in shorter periods of time. My college's lab environment uses 100-minute periods, but I consciously chose to shorten teaching times to 45 minutes of instruction, and then have the students demonstrate what they had learned in 45-minute periods, to mirror typical high-school class periods. I treated that week as an accelerated Introduction to Journalism course that I teach to college students, emphasizing practical publishing skills.

What did the students report on? A highlight one year was a visit to a farm to interview migrant workers. Another year we profiled a documentarian whose Emmy-winning work was airing that week on public television. For each story, we treated the assignment as a beat-reporting course would – getting students up to speed on a content area, then preparing to impress interviewees with insightful questions. Because some urban students were experiencing a rural environment for the first time, the process of gathering information and the subjects they covered were new to most students.

With this model established and working well (we continued to teach at FDA, and students continued to publish at school and be trained during summer workshops for three years' running), my college developed a new, similar relationship with Global Media Arts High School in Rochester, N.Y. Because of previous success, we continued the formula with one expectation change: Because GMA essentially was a magnet school for high-achieving students interested in media, we increased the journalism expectations successfully.

Outcomes: Some lessons learned: 1) Had the college been in these partnerships just to recruit minority students to diversify the college for public rela-

tions, these partnerships wouldn't have worked. Those attempts would have been transparent to all, and that would have worsened relations and reinforced stereotypes. To my school's credit (and I say this as a former journalist turned professor who is not naive about these situations), it has acted honorably throughout.

2) I've learned more from the students than I've been able to offer. A true partnership does that. Teaching white, upper-middle-class honors students at a private college is comparatively easy, so I have thoroughly enjoyed the challenges of stretching myself, and the summer workshop includes students from seventh grade through 11th grade. I am a better professor today because of my work with these students.

3) Partnerships take work. It's not enough to play host to a weeklong workshop, then send students back and never follow up. Before I set up the media workshop, I went to FDA, met with the principal, vice principal and relevant teachers, and offered my expectations on performance and follow-up. That turned out to be a wise move as I created expectations that have since continued. Continuity among FDA faculty overseeing journalism has been a problem, however, as each summer a different faculty member has been "volunteered" to oversee journalism. That is one area in which FDA could improve because continuity is important for building relationships.

4) High-achieving schools are challenging environments because their college-preparatory curriculum sometimes crowds out what some consider nonessential offerings. The curricular obstacle has turned out to be bigger than the cultural one.

Finally, a January 2001 report by a group led by former Education Secretary Richard Riley called on colleges to increase the quantity and quality of educational partnerships with high schools. Part of our success can be attributed to our practices in building these relationships. I can report proudly that I know of no finer model than the one between my school, and GMA and FDA.

About the Author:
Mead Loop is an associate professor of journalism, inaugural Master Teacher and former department chair in the Roy H. Park School of Communications at Ithaca College. His work has been published in *Journalism Quarterly*, *Journalism Educator*, *Mass Communication & Society* and *Newspaper Research Journal*. He has served as Vice President for Campus Chapter Affairs of the Society of Professional Journalists and is currently Campus Adviser at Large. He also has served on the board of directors of the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation and currently serves on the board of directors of the National Scholastic Press Association. Before coming to teach at Ithaca College, he was National Editor of the *Nashville Banner*, and an editor at the Intelligencer Journal in Lancaster, Pa., and at the *Kansas City Times* and *Star*. He received a master's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri.

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Perusing a Property through Public Records: Learning about Information Gathering through a Comprehensive Examination of Land Parcels

Honorable Mention III
Cory L. Armstrong, Florida

Abstract: This assignment is a comprehensive project investigating public records related to a parcel of land. Assigned during the first weeks of class, students are required to track all public records related to this property—property information, neighborhood/community overviews and records pertaining to individual owners. The project provides evaluative and understanding skills, as well as applying course concepts.

Explanation of Teaching Practice or Activity: This is a semester-long project in which students are placed in groups of three and asked to investigate a local residential property. The groups are assigned a house—through random draw—and asked to gather all of the public information available, providing copies where appropriate. Records include school zones, crime reports, property ownership, voter registrations, campaign finance, zoning and owner-specific public records.

Once students gather this information, they are asked to synthesize it, telling the history of the property from the time it was developed until its present status. They are asked to write a narrative chronology, employing the records. The narrative is more elaborate than a summary, as they are required to examine the records and determine what the records can explain about the property. What is the news value of the information gathered?

The main criteria for the project are:

• Demonstrate of a complete knowledge of fact finding and public records.
• Interpret of the information rather than merely list facts found. Generally, this will include a 5-10 page narrative at the beginning of the report to accompany the documentation.
• Provide a full background on your property that could be used in the preparation of a news story.
• Show initiative and aggressive research techniques in uncovering uncommon information that would provide the basis of news coverage.
• Employ charts, graphs and other computer-assisted reporting techniques (using Excel) where appropriate to explain your data documentation.

Although there is no page limit, many of these projects approach the 250-page mark, by the time all information is included. Roughly the first 25 or so pages are related to the narrative, table of contents and data analyses, while the remainder of the project includes copies and examples of public records

related to the property. It is worth 30 percent of their final grade in the class.

Rationale: This project is designed to demonstrate the breadth and depth of public information available. The assignment attempts to employ all information-gathering skills of the students, from online searches, to available and appropriate public records, to creative ways of gathering information. Although all of the properties are single-family residential homes, no additional research is done to into ownership or background to determine the ownership and available records. The list is compiled from current properties for sale in the city where the university is located, which allows for students to work through each investigation critically. The students are asked to follow each lead. In effect, they are expected to follow the direction that each piece of information goes until it dead ends.

Therefore, this project serves as application of the skills learned and understanding of the research and information-gathering process. We spend the semester talking about records and information relate to various newspaper beats and stories. However, this project allows them to cut across beats and think about how to conduct an investigation. They learn where to look and how to interpret public records, but they also learn to evaluate the quality of their information. Invariably, students talk about how much they learn from being forced to interpret the records and the types of information available.

Outcomes: The main outcome is an understanding of how to work through a research project. The students learn critical thinking skills related to evaluating records and learn creative ways to get information without using human sources. For example, I've had students contact the realtors when they realize their properties are for sale. They then learn more about the property and how to track information about it. They also learn patience—which may be the key element of this assignment. Research is not a linear process, so their tenacity in acquiring information is necessary. The best projects are those that try multiple angles to figuring out their "subjects."

The scope of the project is such that students are gathering records about individuals, properties and neighborhoods, so it encompasses nearly all of the basic records and information employed in most news stories.

While not the main purpose, I've learned that students also gain outstanding organizations skills through this project. In addition to finding the records, they are required to organize them into a "story" about the property. Most come up with creative and logical ways to develop the project. In one case, I think one group used a ream of construction paper to showcase their project on an elementary school teacher's home. Some students enthusiastically embrace their project and find enjoyment in learning what's available—I wish I could harness that for all students in a required-of-all-majors class.

About the Author:
In 2004, **Cory Armstrong** joined the University of Florida College of

Journalism and Communications, after receiving her PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has more than eight years of professional journalism experience. She has received AEJMC research awards from both the Newspaper Division and the Commission on the Status of Women. Armstrong has had articles published in *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *Mass Communication & Society*, and *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. Her main undergraduate teaching assignment at UF is Applied Fact Finding, an information gathering course required of all journalism majors. At the graduate level, she teaches Issues in the Press and Race, Class, Gender and Media. Her research interests are: influences on news content, media credibility, gender and media and effects of news coverage.

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August 10-13, 2011

Best Practices in Teaching Information Gathering