

# INFORMATION GATHERING

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AJEEP

# AJEEP

## Information Gathering

### Course Description

Emphasis on reporting—gathering/verifying facts for news stories through observation, interviewing, attending press conferences/meetings, and using public records, electronic databases and the Internet/library. Writing enterprise, trend, feature, profile and investigative stories.

### Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

#### Course Content Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- LO1. Create news content that is free of factual errors, style errors, errors of omission, spelling errors, punctuation and grammar errors, and usage errors;
- LO2. Know where and how to find and develop ideas for news and feature stories;
- LO3. Know how to locate and verify information for news and feature stories through the Internet and traditional sources;
- LO4. Demonstrate knowledge of the resources available to students through the SJSU library;
- LO5. Be self-critical in editing and evaluating your own work;
- LO6. Accept criticism from your instructor and respond to instructor's suggestions;
- LO7. Develop ideas for publishable news or feature stories.

### Required Texts/Readings

There is no assigned textbook for this class, but students will be expected to read news articles and other material posted on the class Web page. New material will be posted weekly.

### Assignments and Grading Policy

This course will be driven by current events and in-class exercises, as well as discussion and lab instruction. Lectures are designed to provide students with information and material useful in the reporting work throughout the course. Lectures may occasionally be conducted by guest speakers.

You will be responsible for following the news daily to keep up on current events. At the very least, you must:

- Read the *Spartan Daily* to keep up on campus goings-on.
- Watch Update News every week (airs on KICU Channel 36 every Sunday morning, also available on the Web at [this link](#)).
- Read a major Bay Area newspaper, generally either the *San Jose Mercury News* or the *San Francisco Chronicle*. You can read it on paper or online.

Feel free to supplement this with news from any other sources you desire. Exposure to different outlets gives you a broader base of information, which in turn broadens the horizons of the whole class during discussions.

**Exercises.** I will assign many in-class exercises throughout the semester. These are designed to get you up to speed at gathering information for publication both quickly and accurately. These will sometimes be assigned by the instructor in class and other times via e-mail and/or on the class Web page.

**Quizzes.** As noted above, since this class relies heavily on current events, you will be expected to follow the news closely to stay informed of local, national and international news. I have scheduled two current events quizzes during the semester to see how closely you are following the news.

**Exams.** There will be a midterm and a final exam during the semester. Each will involve finding and reporting information on subjects revealed at the beginning of the exam. I will provide more information on these exams as the dates approach.

Assignments are weighted as follows:

- Quizzes: 20 percent (LO1, LO2, LO3)
- Midterm exam: 25 percent (LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4)
- Final exam: 25 percent (LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4)
- In-class exercises: 20 percent (LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4, LO5, LO6, LO7)
- Class participation: 10 percent (LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4, LO5, LO6, LO7)

## Information Gathering / Course Schedule

Schedule is subject to change; any changes will be announced a minimum of one week in advance, with students notified via e-mail.

Class	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	Aug. 22	Journalistic curiosity; gathering information online (and off)
2	Aug. 29	Resources available through the SJSU library <b>In-person library visit; meet with Paul Kauppila</b>
3	Sept. 5	Web searching and resources <b>Current events quiz 1</b>
4	Sept. 12	Interviewing tips <b>Midterm exam</b>
5	Sept. 19	Investigative reporting <b>Current events quiz 2</b>
6	Sept. 26	Generating story ideas <b>Prep for final exam</b>

### October 3

Final exam, 12:00-1:15 p.m. in regular classroom.

## AJEEP

# Information Gathering

### Key Terms

- **Database** – a collection of data (usually digital) organized so it can be easily accessed and sorted.
- **Journalistic Curiosity** – reporters’ ability to uncover huge amounts of information through simply listening and thinking about the answers to their questions and following up on those answers.
- **Commercial Database** – a collection of data made available only through paid subscription or membership.
- **Microfilm** – a roll of film containing a tiny photographic reproduction of printed material, usually of a newspaper, magazine, book, transcript or other document.
- **Microfiche** – a flat sheet of film formatted for easy filing, usually containing a miniaturized reproduction of printed material, usually of a newspaper, magazine, book, transcript or other document.
- **Keyword Search** – a search of a database or other electronic record using words that are believed to be contained within the desired documents.
- **Search Operators** – keystrokes and characters that allow online keyword searches to be more specific and productive.
- **Investigative Reporting** – a form of journalism in which reporters spend time digging deeply into a topic through interviews and research, generally in the interest of uncovering information of significant use to the general public.
- **Yellow Journalism** – sensationalist journalism in American newspapers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- **Muckrakers** – nickname for reporters in America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century who exposed corporate corruption and abuses.
- **Watchdog Role** – function of journalists who actively seek out and attempt to reveal wrongdoing in government, business and other large institutions.

## **AJEEP: Information Gathering, Lecture 1**

### **Introduction**

This class is designed for advanced journalism students who want to learn how to do a better job of putting together information for their stories. While anyone with a computer can now do a Web search, the best reporters know how to quickly access material that might take less well-informed reporters hours or days to locate.

This class, more than most journalism classes, is not really about writing. You will do a certain amount of writing in here, but it's more to demonstrate your research skills than your writing ability. There is also a lot of in-class discussion about different ways to get access to certain kinds of information. We're going to look at different sources for information and compare how effective they might be in getting certain kinds of material.

Throughout the semester there are two current events quizzes, one midterm assignment and one final exam. In each of these cases, you'll have a certain amount of time to find out and verify all they can about a particular subject. Unlike most traditional classes, you will not necessarily be expected to complete all the elements on each quiz or exam – you'll be graded on how much information you can track down and verify, and how complete that information is. It's rare when a student actually finishes everything before the end of one of these exams or quizzes.

This class also relies heavily on current events – you will need to regularly follow current local, national and world events. The first thing we do in every class is discuss current news and where they might go to find more information about each of the top couple of items. I use current events as material for in-class quizzes and exercises, which means you'll need to stay on top of the most significant news events throughout the semester.

## **Journalistic curiosity**

I like to think that the first day of this class is vitally important – not because of any assignment or exercise, but because we’re going to discuss a new way of thinking. As much as I like to think of journalism students as curious people who are determined to get to the bottom of a story, the fact is that you’ve often cruised through other classes on the strength of their writing ability. I want to establish right away that this class is going to be different – for the purposes of this class, writing ability matters much less than tenaciousness about pursuing information.

I’m going to start off asking you all a question. “If I gave you an assignment right now to look up a certain piece of information, how would you go about it?” (DISCUSS – MOST OFTEN STUDENTS WILL SAY THEY’D DO A GOOGLE SEARCH.) Suppose your Internet hookup was down. Then what would you do? (DISCUSS – IF STUDENTS SAY THEY’D GO SOMEWHERE ELSE TO GET INTERNET, THEY’VE MISSED THE POINT.) You need to consider your options beyond Google, and beyond the Web. We’ll certainly talk about Google and other search tools throughout this semester, but in this class, we’re going to look at all kinds of different ways to get information. Many of them are online, but many others aren’t.

The good news about this is that you’re at a great place to gather information – a university – which gives you many advantages over the general public in that pursuit. Many students have become so dependent on the Internet that they can forget about the information resources at the university they attend – sometimes they forget that there’s an on-campus library. (AT SOME UNIVERSITIES, THERE ARE MULTIPLE LIBRARIES WITH SEPARATE SPECIALTIES, AND THOSE CAN ALSO BE FEATURED IN THIS DISCUSSION IF THEY’RE AVAILABLE. YOU WILL HAVE TO TAILOR THE DISCUSSION HERE TO

YOUR OWN UNIVERSITY’S RESOURCES.) We’ll dig deeper into library resources as we move forward.

Okay, we know the library is here and has all kinds of resources that you can use. But can anyone identify an information resource available at universities that isn’t electronic, isn’t in a database, isn’t in a book or journal or any kind of print publication? (DISCUSS – THIS OFTEN GENERATES LOTS OF SILENCE) They’re called ‘people.’ You have this class of people called ‘professors,’ and their job is basically to be an expert in their field. Beyond that, you also have lots of people called students and staff. They have areas in which they know things, too. If you’re writing a story about the construction of the new Student Union on campus, the most knowledgeable people you could talk to might be administrators, who would have access to information you couldn’t find online. If they don’t have it or won’t share it, find someone on campus who will share it, or find out how to get it as a piece of public information.

(MANY UNIVERSITIES NOW HAVE SECTIONS OF THEIR WEB SITES THAT LIST FACULTY EXPERTS ON DIFFERENT SUBJECTS, SO THAT RESEARCHERS, REPORTERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC CAN QUICKLY FIND FACULTY WHO HAVE STUDIED GIVEN AREAS. IF YOUR UNIVERSITY HAS AN EXPERTS LIST, THIS IS A GOOD TIME TO INTRODUCE STUDENTS TO IT. EVEN IF YOUR UNIVERSITY DOESN’T HAVE IT, STUDENTS CAN ALSO CONTACT EXPERTS AT OTHER UNIVERSITIES TO GET INFORMATION.)

It’s easy to think in terms of electronic resources to the exclusion of everything else. When we have assignments throughout the semester, you won’t just be asked “Which database would you use to find this information?” but also “Who would you contact for more information?”

You never know who might have useful or interesting information. (AT THIS POINT, YOU CAN RANDOMLY SELECT A STUDENT AND START ASKING HIM/HER QUESTIONS ABOUT THINGS THEY KNOW A LOT ABOUT.) You simply start out with

asking them who they are, what they're interested in, what they know a lot about, and keep going until you find an area of expert knowledge that they can share. (YOU CAN THEN HAVE A STUDENT TO THE SAME THING TO YOU, IF YOU'D LIKE.)

This is where we need to reinforce the notion of **journalistic curiosity**. A good interviewer peels back layers of information little by little, often without the interviewee even knowing it's happening. Simple curiosity can unearth all kinds of material – the simple art of listening and thinking about answers is vitally important in gathering information (and in reporting in general). Sometimes students get so obsessed with coming up with questions in advance of an interview that they forget to listen to the answers and ask follow-up questions. Too often young reporters are too busy worrying about the next question to spot the holes or omissions in the answer they're receiving. You need to listen to the answers to your questions, think about them and respond accordingly. If you must make a list in advance, list the handful of most important questions you don't want to forget, then consult that when needed.

The central point here isn't about interviewing, though – it's about simply being curious, about examining the information you have and asking “What's not here? What are the unanswered questions or missing elements that would make this add up?” We'll return to this topic a lot throughout the semester.

### **Gathering information, online and off**

The idea behind this class is not only to engage your curiosity, but also to familiarize you with the array of techniques and resources available to you, so that you will be able to act quickly and decisively to find information when assigned a story. With that in mind, it's useful at this point to stop and discuss the possible purposes behind looking for information. In

general, reporters and editors will use searches for one of four functions, which often correspond to different stages of writing a story:

1. **To come up with a subject for a story.** This is for when you're starting from the beginning, looking for topics for a new story.
2. **To locate information on a newly chosen subject.** Once you've picked a story topic, you might not know much about it, and need to learn more before you can start interviewing and writing.
3. **To find supporting information on a subject.** You may want to learn more about the story topic you've chosen or been assigned, to help you decide about possible directions for the story.
4. **To check facts.** You may do some of this as you go proceed, but you'll want to give most stories a round of fact checking before submitting them. This is true even if your news organization employs a face checker – your story has your name on it, and you should take first responsibility for the material it contains.

Each of these uses calls for a different searching strategy for a reporter. The first requires an open-ended, broad approach – “What about this?” – that can take lots of time and should be avoided near deadline. Even when you look at a localized version of a search engine, this can be an enormous waste of time. You're better off to look at local events and contact sources than to simply take shots in the dark by typing in random keywords. (I've found numerous students doing this over the years when searching for a story topic for a class assignment.)

The second function, locating information on a subject you've chosen or been assigned, can also take some time, depending on how much you already know about the chosen subject. Most often, the more you know about the topic and the directions your story might take, the

more specific your search can be and the less time you'll waste sifting through unrelated results. You should be able to get even more specific when finding supporting information – at that point, focus on tying up loose ends, answering lingering questions and otherwise making the story complete. Students sometimes get to this point and try to rethink the whole story, which is almost always a mistake. If necessary, you can take a new approach to the same topic with a follow-up later.

The fact-checking function is at once the most necessary and most frustrating of these four uses. As will be discussed later, you should not rely solely on Web searches to verify information – use all media available to you. In addition, as with any information, you'll need to consider the validity of the source – there are plenty of pages with dubious information out there. This is why you should verify facts with as many solid sources as possible – and here, I should stress that you should talk to people, not just look at press releases on the Web site of the company or institution you're writing about. Even a company's own home page may well contain information that is, if not blatantly inaccurate, at least outdated. When it comes to checking facts, you want **both** quality and quantity of sources.

The key for reporters is to identify the function for searches before beginning the process. If you're not clear about exactly what you aim to find, you can easily get sidetracked and waste time on tangential subjects. Paradoxically, this is where the trait we've spent so much time praising – curiosity – can become troublesome. If you catch yourself going off the subject and into an unrelated area that you'd like to return to later, jot down the URLs in question or bookmark them, then get back to your original task. You can't aimlessly Web-surf all night when you have a story to write.

### **First-day assignment**

AT THIS POINT I ALWAYS GIVE THE STUDENTS A SMALL ASSIGNMENT TO GET THEIR FEET WET IN TERMS OF FINDING INFORMATION. USUALLY I JUST HAVE THEM E-MAIL ANSWERS TO ME WITHIN A DAY OR TWO.

SINCE THE CLASS WILL INVOLVE CURRENT EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER, I SELECT A MAJOR NEWS STORY FROM THE TIME AND DO A LITTLE RESEARCH OF MY OWN. NORMALLY THIS INVOLVES FINDING A FEW ASPECTS OF IT THAT AREN'T WIDELY REPORTED OR NORMALLY INCLUDED IN MAINSTREAM NEWS COVERAGE, THEN ASKING STUDENTS TO FIND THOSE BITS OF INFORMATION. SOMETIMES IT'S GEOGRAPHICAL ("WHAT'S THE MAJOR CITY 200 MILES SOUTH OF WHERE THIS HAPPENED?") OR CONTEXTUAL ("WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME THIS SORT OF EVENT HAPPENED IN THAT AREA?") OR JUST PLAIN ODD ("WHAT WELL-KNOWN FIGURE IS A DISTANT COUSIN OF THE SUSPECT?").

THE IDEA IS SIMPLY TO GET THEM TO LOOK BEYOND MAINSTREAM COVERAGE AND FIND OTHER SOURCES. IN EACH CASE, I HAVE THEM TELL ME WHERE THEY GOT THEIR INFORMATION AND WHY THEY BELIEVE IT TO BE A CREDIBLE SOURCE ON THIS SUBJECT.

## **AJEEP: Information Gathering, Lecture 2**

### **Introduction**

(THE OUTLINE OF TODAY'S CLASS WILL BE SOMEWHAT BRIEF BECAUSE THIS IS NORMALLY WHEN I HAVE THE CLASS VISIT THE LIBRARY AND TALK TO OUR LIBRARY REPRESENTATIVE. WHAT I'LL DO IS GO THROUGH SOME OF THE SUBJECTS WE NORMALLY DISCUSS IN THAT SESSION, RECOGNIZING THAT THERE WILL BE SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WHAT WE'RE ABLE TO DO IN AMERICA AND WHAT'S AVAILABLE ELSEWHERE.)

### **Libraries – then vs. now**

For those of us of a certain age, libraries will probably always be associated with card catalogs, the Dewey Decimal System and plowing through shelf after shelf of books. Young students – not just in America – often think of libraries more as places to study or check out movies than a place to do research for journalism projects. It's true that most information services these days are available online, but in many cases you must be a student with a library login to access those materials. In addition, there are many other library resources that students should use as they gather information for stories.

I mentioned last time that students sometimes overlook one of any university's great resources – people. This is especially true of library staff – you have no idea how well trained most university reference librarians are, and how much help they can provide. Larger university libraries often have staff members who specialize in certain subjects, but even smaller facilities have reference staff that are paid to know how to take advantage of the collections and databases the library has on hand. For longer-term research projects, you can take advantage of inter-library loan programs, and library staff are the ones who know these things best.

It's not unusual for professional reporters to cultivate library staff as sources – they're often willing to look up facts while you're working on something else, or at least point you in the right direction. Most textbooks talk about developing news sources that work in positions within government, the military or business, but in many cases library friends can be as helpful as “traditional” sources.

### **Electronic resources**

The kinds of material you can get with university library access are numerous and incredibly varied. Often journalists are drawn to news databases – to be able to look at previous coverage of an issue to help inform their own coverage. A certain amount of this is available on the Web, but news outlets have become increasingly reluctant to offer their archived material to the general public for free. Fortunately, many outlets' material is available through commercial databases accessible to university students and faculty.

Probably the most widely-used of these is Lexis-Nexis, which hosts material from more than 40,000 sources worldwide in dozens of languages and is available in more than 100 countries (including Afghanistan). For reporters, having access to this offers the immediate ability to find material available nowhere on the Web. In many cases, material from over many decades is available, which helps greatly in researching the history of institutions, companies and people. It doesn't have everything, but it's a great jumping-off point. Similar services include Dialog and ProQuest.

Other news databases are more tightly focused on archives of certain types of news. For example, World News Connection focuses on non-U.S. sources, Alt-PressWatch concentrates on the alternative and independent press, and AP Images is a massive photo database. Your library

might not have any or all of these, but you should find out what news databases are available to them through the university and pass that along to your students.

Some individual news outlets have huge archives available to universities through private databases. For example, libraries can frequently get material from local, regional and national news outlets, sometimes covering many decades. Obviously, these won't be needed for every story, but providing a historical context for current events is a great way to add depth to coverage of an issue or institution. More of these types of documents are being made available through databases all the time, all over the world.

There are also numerous private subject-specific databases that can be very handy for student reporters. Business databases can help young reporters greatly in learning about companies and executives, in many cases providing numbers of employees, revenues, holdings and other useful material. Polling databases are rarely shared with the general public but are often available for student use, which is especially helpful for political and budget stories. For example, students at state-run universities can examine public support for school funding and other education-related issues over time.

An often underappreciated type of resource that's often available to students is the biographical database. Too often students reflexively rely on Wikipedia and nothing else for background information on notable figures who make news or appear on campus. This creates a sameness among stories – they all highlight and omit the same elements of a person's background. By using more comprehensive sources, students can discover more detailed and useful information, and end up asking better-informed questions and writing richer stories.

One resource that is useful to any students writing about international issues is called World Factbook, which provides all kinds of information and statistics on countries of the world,

broken into categories (maps, population, economy, government, military, etc.). It's a helpful resource whenever we have stories in which students are from other countries or if groups are traveling internationally, but I think it's useful for an additional reason. Too often students fail to look beyond their own country or region in completing their work. This is why you should take a look at international material available through databases like this.

For reporters on college newspapers, academic journals can be useful resources, especially when writing about professors' achievements or other research-oriented topics. Many American libraries have moved from physical to electronic archives of journals, and this has made them available worldwide when they might have otherwise primarily been available in the U.S. Library databases are useful both for searching for subject matter across many journals but also in many cases for accessing the full text of journal articles.

### **Physical resources**

Obviously, libraries are great resources for books on all kinds of subjects that might help reporters on their stories. However, books aren't the only useful physical items in libraries. In many cases, whole categories of government documents are only available in print, and many university libraries are designated depositories for government material. In America, government materials are slowly being made available online, but in many other countries students are still better off looking for physical documents, even if they're indexed electronically. In the U.S., the Government Printing Office has a web site devoted to easy searching of its publications, but it's often much more difficult to find indexes for other countries' documents. This is where a librarian can be a huge help to a reporter. Their knowledge of their libraries' holdings and resources can often speed the process of finding information across international boundaries and on unfamiliar subjects.

While the text of thousands of newspapers and magazines is available through Lexis-Nexis and other database services, actually being able to look at stories as they appeared is often much more difficult, and is another area where librarians can help. **Microfilm** and **microfiche** copies of newspapers, magazines and other publications are still available at many libraries, which can help reporters examine how something was covered many years ago. For stories of anniversaries or other history-related topics, this can be of great value. Sometimes full-text databases omit information on accompanying photos, illustrations and graphics that can add to a reporter's understanding of a past event and its context. It's true that Google and other organizations are working to make images of books, newspapers etc. available for Web users, but this effort is in its early stages and much more material remains available privately in libraries than to the general public.

In some cases, libraries still keep physical copies of magazines, newspapers and other publications. Bound volumes of print items can provide material unavailable electronically, again giving reporters information unavailable to the general public (or their competitors). Sometimes the bound volumes maintained by libraries are surprising – a library at one of my universities had a huge collection of fashion magazines bound by year, for example. Student reporters interested in having lots of different kinds of information available to them quickly might spend some time familiarizing themselves with these kinds of holdings.

Something important to remember – everything you learn in college will eventually come in handy – you just don't know when or where.

### **Conclusion and exercise**

Even with all of the material available to student reporters through university libraries, none of it matters if you simply seek the quickest and easiest way to complete assignments.

Library resources are there for the curious, for the reporter who not only wants to get the story done, but wants it to be engaging, accurate and complete. To paraphrase John Updike, for reporters curiosity is often “the tissue-thin difference between a thing done well and a thing done ill.”

(AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE LIBRARY VISIT I ASSIGN AN EXERCISE THEY CAN COMPLETE AND E-MAIL TO ME WITHIN THE FOLLOWING 24 HOURS. I CHOOSE THREE CURRENT NEWS TOPICS, HAVE STUDENTS NUMBER OFF AND RANDOMLY ASSIGN THEM ONE OF THE TOPICS, THEN HAVE THEM USE A MINIMUM OF THREE LIBRARY DATABASES TO COME UP WITH INFORMATION ABOUT THAT TOPIC. STUDENTS SHOULD ALSO BE REMINDED THAT THE NEXT CLASS WILL BEGIN WITH A CURRENT EVENTS QUIZ THAT WILL OCCUPY THE FIRST 15 MINUTES OF CLASS.)

## **AJEEP: Information Gathering, Lecture 3**

### **Introduction**

Having spent last week's class discussing material available to students through the university library, this week we'll examine material available on the Web. We'll spend some time looking at different ways to improve standard Web searches, then look at some lesser-known information resources available on the Web.

First, though, as I noted last time, we'll begin today's class with a current events quiz.

(ADMINISTER QUIZ, DISCUSS ANSWERS WHEN FINISHED)

### **Keyword searches**

In this class, we will discuss how to best approach keyword searching on Web search engines. Students tend to believe that they can simply type a quick search into Google and find anything worth finding right away, but as reporters they'll need to know how to find information quickly and move on. As we noted in a previous class, this is an instance where curiosity can actually hurt a reporter. At one time, we've probably all started out searching for a particular piece of information, only to follow a link or two (or three) and end up spending lots of time reading about something interesting but unrelated to our original query. When you're a reporter on deadline, you have no such luxury – you can't spend an hour Web-surfing when you have a story to write.

For the purposes of this class, we're going to assume that you are using Google to search – it's clearly the top search engine worldwide. Also, its syntax and protocols are increasingly followed by other search sites, so what we discuss will likely work on any search site, and if it doesn't, there's usually an equivalent command.

The most important thing for reporters to keep in mind when searching for material is to be specific. I encourage my students to think before they search, even writing out exactly what they want to find ahead of time, to help them focus on the exact terms they want to use and to avoid the lengthy and unproductive tangents we've discussed.

(SHOW THE FOLLOWING ON SCREEN)

I'll use one example throughout our discussion to illustrate ways to search for particular topics. If you're at your computer and it's online, you can follow along with this example. Let's say you're looking for information for a story looking back at the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. An ordinary Web surfer might simply find a search site and type in the following:

```
breakup of soviet union
```

If you do this, you're going to get a whole lot more information than you'll ever be able to read. For example, this exact search done on Google produced 2,270,000 hits. This is way too many results to sift through quickly. By simply typing in these words in this fashion, you're telling the search program to locate every document in its database that contains all of these words, regardless of context or whether they appear together.

A non-specific search like this almost always points you to a huge number of pages that are useless to you. In this case, there are business pages, personal home pages, newsgroup and chat conversations, and all sorts of disconnected material, little of which would be useful to you.

This is where good search syntax can help you immensely. The words "soviet" and "union" often appear together, but the way the search was typed allows for all kinds of results that don't keep them together. We're not interested in those. So this is a good point to use what's called a "search operator" – a symbol that helps make searches more specific. The first

and most commonly used one is quotation marks around a phrase. So let's try this keyword search instead:

```
"breakup of soviet union"
```

By using this operator, you've eliminated more than 92 percent of the pages returned in the first search, most of which were probably useless to you.

Unfortunately, there are two problems with this. First, having started with such a large number, eliminating 98 percent of the hits still leaves 181,000 pages to shuffle through, though some near the top might be helpful. The larger problem, though, is that by phrasing it like this, you're eliminating lots of sources that might help you. You're limiting your results to just sites that use this exact phrase, which is too exclusionary. The more common phrase, "breakup of *the* Soviet Union," is eliminated, as is anything using something other than the word "breakup" in the phrase. Anything using a synonym for breakup – dissolution, disbanding, splitting up – is eliminated.

Here is where understanding how syntax works can help. The only exact phrase we need to search for is "soviet union," so let's try the search this way:

```
breakup "soviet union"
```

The good news is that this improves the quality of the search results. The bad news is that the number of results is up over 2 million again. Since you're not going to look at every result, that doesn't matter too much – you're more concerned with how well the top results fit your needs – but you can still get more specific.

Virtually all search sites display results according to "relevance" – a calculation of how prominent your search term is within the page. Frequently, however, when you start looking at

the pages listed in the results of a search at this stage, you'll discover there are still many pages of dubious value.

For example, in our Soviet Union search, at this point several of the first few dozen hits pointed to excerpts from the work of the renowned Soviet novelist and poet Vladimir Nabokov. While he's certainly a prominent figure in Soviet literary history, he died in 1977 and had nothing to do with the breakup of the country in 1991. Thus, even though these were among the first few pages of results, they're basically useless.

The way to get around this is to take a look at your results and see if the unnecessary pages have anything in common that you can exclude from the search. In this case, we don't care about the Nabokov writings for this assignment, so we can employ another search operator to eliminate them. You can simply use the minus ("-") sign to exclude terms. So you can eliminate those unneeded results by typing this:

```
breakup "Soviet Union" -nabokov
```

This knocks out references to the author, but it's still not as specific as it should be. You're usually better off adding keywords than you are subtracting them. Adding more specific terms to the search, based on your knowledge of the subject and the focus of your story, usually is the best way to go. In our example, we know that the Soviet Union split up in 1991, so we'll add that to our search to narrow it down some more:

```
breakup "Soviet Union" 1991
```

This cuts our number of results in half and leaves us with a batch of results we can probably use. However, this is still a lot of results to look through. Again, adding a term depending on exactly

what you're looking for can help. Maybe you're mainly interested in the coup attempt in August 1991, when the KGB tried to seize power from Mikhail Gorbachev. You might try the following search:

```
breakup "Soviet Union" 1991 coup
```

This radically changes the nature of your top results. You now have very specific pages that are closely related to your main subject matter. Now you can begin to look at what you've found, keeping your original assignment in mind and looking specifically for information that relates to that assignment.

A number of other operators can also help fine-tune searches. For example, everything we've looked at so far uses the word "breakup" exclusively, which may exclude some useful sites. To find sites that use a different word, there are a couple of operators that can help. The operator OR finds sites that use one keyword or a second one. Here's a way to use that operator to include more possible matches:

```
"Soviet Union" 1991 breakup OR split
```

This brings in some sites that simply chose to use the word "split" instead of breakup. Note that the OR operator must be capitalized. This syntax can be used on almost all major search sites.

One related feature that's specific to Google might be even more helpful. This is the operator to include words similar to the keyword you're using. Rather than simply trying to come up with synonyms for "breakup" on your own and place OR between them, you can use the "~" symbol as an operator to do it for you. So you would type the search in like this:

```
"Soviet Union" 1991 ~breakup
```

This provides results that use “breakup,” “split,” “collapse,” “fall” and other terms, so again you’ll include some meaningful results you might have otherwise missed.

One operator that can come in handy if you’re looking for a specific outlet’s coverage is “site,” which allows you to look for results from a specific Web site. So if you wanted to look at the *New York Times*’s coverage of the breakup of the Soviet Union, you could try this variation on our keyword search:

```
breakup "Soviet Union" 1991 site:nytimes.com
```

The more specific your keyword search is, the more manageable and useful your results will be. I like to get my students used to the idea of smarter searching before they actually work on our student newspaper – it helps them greatly in trying to meet deadlines while balancing their newspaper duties with their jobs and work for their other classes.

(REFER TO FIG. 1 FOR MORE DETAILS ON SEARCH OPERATORS)

Google also has other tools that can help reporters make their searches more productive.

At the left of Google’s search results pages is a series of links that allow you to narrow your search results by searching the same term in news, images, maps and other areas. Usually the one of most interest to reporters is news – it narrows your results to news sites, which can help if you’re looking for what other outlets have reported. The maps feature can also help if you’re unfamiliar with the area where something took place.

Below these links is another link that reads “Show Search Tools.” (GO THROUGH ON SCREEN) Most notably, this allows you to narrow results by date, which can be very handy for many reasons.

## **Other Web resources**

As we noted earlier, there are plenty of resources beyond Google for reporters who want to quickly find certain kinds of information. As with the library resources we discussed last time, the Web is full of all kinds of reference materials, from dictionaries to encyclopedias to almanacs and practically anything else you can imagine. Dictionaries and thesauruses can be handy, though many word processing programs have these built in along with spell-check. Online calculators can help students in a variety of ways beyond simple math, including currency conversion, costs of living, price indexes and other number-driven information. Directories of phone numbers, e-mail addresses and other information can be vitally important in contacting people involved in stories and possible interviewees.

In the U.S., most federal, state and local government agencies have Web sites that can be helpful in locating sources within those institutions and sometimes checking the specifics of new laws or programs. Since most reporters aren't legal experts, sites that explain the language behind various laws are often important (FindLaw.com is a useful U.S. example). Similarly, medical and disease-related issues often require explanation to students, and sites like WebMD are enormously useful.

While information on private businesses is often hard to get, there are Web resources beyond the private ones mentioned last time that can help students learn more. Company profiles are available on many sites (Business.com is an example), and corporate annual reports are usually made available to the public (though it may require some searching). For multinational corporations, Columbia Journalism Review hosts "Who Owns What," a listing of the holdings of the largest corporations worldwide.

Having said all this about Web resources, we always stress to our students that the best way to get information is to talk to people. All this information online is great for background, but you're much better off talking to real sources. We've noted all kinds of sites that have information on business and law, but we have experts on those subjects teaching on our campus. Ideally, journalism students learn to use human sources first and electronic ones second.

(AT THIS POINT I WOULD REMIND STUDENTS THAT NEXT WEEK IS THE MIDTERM EXAM. THE MIDTERM FOR THIS CLASS WAS PUT TOGETHER AS AN ONLINE SCAVENGER HUNT – THEY HAVE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF TIME TO LOOK UP INFORMATION THAT WILL ANSWER THE QUESTIONS I GIVE THEM. I'LL SHOW YOU THE EXAM NEXT WEEK AND DISCUSS HOW I CHANGE IT EVERY SEMESTER. )

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## **JOURNALISM 132 – CURRENT EVENTS QUIZ #1**

**This quiz is in two parts – Facts and Short Answers. Facts are worth one point apiece and Short Answers are worth two points each, for a total of 10 points. There is no extra credit for answering more than is required. You have 15 minutes to complete the quiz, so budget your time accordingly. Please note that all names of people, places and organizations must be spelled correctly to receive credit.**

### **I. Facts (6 points):**

**Answer six of the seven questions below – skip one question of your choice.**

1. Over the weekend, Illinois Senator Barack Obama won Democratic primary elections in Louisiana and the U.S. Virgin Islands and caucuses in Nebraska and Washington State. Obama has now won 16 primaries. How many has Senator Hillary Clinton won?
2. Last week four presidential candidates met in a debate sponsored by what two media companies?
3. A report of a bird flu strain led to the destruction of 12,000 chickens last week on a farm in what U.S. state?
4. More than 90 people were killed in bombings on Monday in what country?
5. A Bay Area city is embroiled in a controversy over asking a military recruiting office to close. What city is it, and what branch of the service is involved?
6. A bullet that struck an SUV over the weekend has been linked to 23 other shootings near what major city in Ohio?
7. An NHL hockey player sustained a rare and frightening injury in a game Sunday night. What is the player's name, and what was the injury?

**CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE**



Fig. 1. Google search operators

<p><b>Search for an exact word or phrase</b> <i>"search query"</i></p>	<p>Use quotes to search for an exact word or set of words in a specific order, without normal improvements such as spelling corrections and synonyms. This option is handy when searching for song lyrics or a line from literature. [ "imagine all the people" ]</p> <p><i>Tip:</i> Only use this if you're looking for a very precise word or phrase, because otherwise you could be excluding helpful results by mistake.</p>
<p><b>Exclude a word</b> <i>-query</i></p>	<p>Add a dash (-) before a word to exclude all results that include that word. This is especially useful for synonyms like Jaguar the car brand and jaguar the animal. [ jaguar speed -car ]</p> <p><i>Tip:</i> You can also exclude results based on other operators, like excluding all results from a specific site. [ pandas -site:wikipedia.org ]</p>
<p><b>Include similar words</b> <i>~query</i></p>	<p>Normally, synonyms might replace some words in your original query. Add a tilde sign (~) immediately in front of a word to search for that word as well as even more synonyms. [ ~food facts ] includes results for "nutrition facts"</p>
<p><b>Search within a site or domain</b> <i>site: query</i></p>	<p>Include "site:" to search for information within a single website like all mentions of "Olympics" on the New York Times website. [ Olympics site:nytimes.com ]</p> <p><i>Tip:</i> Also search within a specific top-level domain like .org or .edu or country top-level domain like .de or .jp. [ Olympics site:.gov ]</p>
<p><b>Include a "fill in the blank"</b> <i>query * query</i></p>	<p>Use an asterisk (*) within a query as a placeholder for any unknown or "wildcard" terms. Use with quotation marks to find variations of that exact phrase or to remember words in the middle of a phrase. [ "a * saved is a * earned" ]</p>
<p><b>Search for either word</b> <i>query OR query</i></p>	<p>If you want to search for pages that may have just one of several words, include OR (capitalized) between the words. Without the OR, your results would typically show only pages that match <i>both</i> terms. You can also use the   symbol between words for the same effect. [ olympics location 2014 OR 2018 ]</p> <p><i>Tip:</i> Enclose phrases in quotes to search for either one of several phrases. [ "world cup 2014" OR "olympics 2014" ]</p>
<p><b>Search for a number range</b> <i>number..number</i></p>	<p>Separate numbers by two periods (with no spaces) to see results that contain numbers in a given range of things like dates, prices, and measurements. [ camera \$50..\$100 ]</p> <p><i>Tip:</i> Use only one number with the two periods to indicate an upper maximum or a lower minimum. [ world cup winners ..2000 ]</p>

## **AJEEP: Information Gathering, Lecture 4 – INSTRUCTOR NOTES ONLY**

### **Introduction**

Today's class, halfway through the semester, is when I normally give the midterm exam. Therefore, **all the notes for this class are for instructor use only**, to plug in during the semester when you have time.

### **Interview Preparation**

One big problem I find with my students is that for some reason they're interested in journalism but scared to interview people. Maybe it's just the unknown, maybe it's just having grown up in the digital age, but most of my students would be perfectly happy to do all interviews without ever talking to anyone in person. Of course, the best way to get the richest interview material is to talk to people face to face, so I almost always have to work with them to get them to feel somewhat comfortable doing interviews.

One thing I tell them is that better preparation leads to less anxiety and to better interviews. Preparing for the interview begins with preparing for the story, so I tell them to do some research before picking interviewees. As we discussed in previous classes, they need to learn as much as they can about their story topic, then letting that guide them in choosing people to interview. The simple question is this: Who is in a position to have information about this topic? Sometimes this is obvious – if a topic points to specific individuals, you try to interview them or the people closest to them.

Some students simply want to end there – on my student newspaper, we have to get them out of the “path of least resistance” approach. Too many stories are turned in with “Talk to the student, talk to the teacher, talk to the classmate” and nothing more. We tell students that they should dig a little deeper – look for other people in positions to know the answers to the central

questions of the story. They should become familiar with experts on the topic, or in certain cases the spokespersons for organizations connected to the topic. Using the search techniques we talked about in the last class is a good start.

Another problem students often have is only representing one side of an issue. If they're going to write fair, non-opinionated stories, they need to know the dynamics of debate on the subject long before writing. This can guide the questions you form along the way – how does one side respond to another's policies, statements or allegations? This can also point you in the direction of a second wave of interviewees – those who oppose your primary sources, or who approach the issue from a different point of view.

It comes back to being curious – curious reporters come up with questions that lead them to potential interviewees, which in turn leads to more questions and more interviews. An inquisitive reporter often comes up with more questions (and more interviewees) than can realistically fit into a story.

When you do a good job of research, the process feeds upon itself. I tell my reporters to create a new Word file when they're assigned a story, and type in questions, key terms, possible interviewees and anything else related to the story. This is essentially electronic brainstorming, and can help them conceptualize a story as they learn more about the topic. As they jot down questions, they can start deciding who can best answer these questions. Once they've started a list of potential interviewees, they can start to do some background research on each one, thus leading to more questions based on those people's backgrounds and positions in the subject area. These may, in turn, lead to other sources with contrary opinions. As they learn about these secondary sources, this should lead to even more questions. For a smart reporter, the process only ends when the story's turned in.

Preparation is important for any interviewer, but especially for students. Even students who are veterans of the school newspaper can become intimidated when doing off-campus interviews with public officials or other important people. This is particularly true when they interview a well-known local or national public figure – there is a tendency to become nervous or star-struck at the expense of conducting a useful interview. I always tell them that the best way to fight this is through rigorous preparation. The better you know the subject matter, and the more thoroughly you know what you want to find out from this person, the less likely you'll be rattled or intimidated in an interview. I tell them there's no reason they can't be just as well prepared as a professional reporter.

### **Interviewing tips**

After all of this, students need to remember that interviewees, even at universities, will have their own agendas and ways of dealing with (or misleading) reporters. Some sources genuinely know lots of useful information and are willing to share, while others may know a lot about a specific area, and others may just pretend to know a lot. Sometimes the information they give you may be accurate; other times, they may give you a version of the truth that makes them or their bosses look good, and on some occasions, the information is completely false.

Too often students simply want to believe whatever they're told, but I stress that they need to ask questions about the credibility of both the information and the source:

- **Why should I believe this information?** This is the most important question you can ask yourself when talking to a source. Is this person giving you information because he truly believes it should be known, or is there something else going on? For any reporter, if there's any reason at all to question the information, you need to spend more time confirming it with other sources.

- **Who is this person?** This has become a very important question in the digital age. These days reporters can get story tips through e-mails from people within major companies or institutions that won't share their real names or positions. When all you have is an e-mail address, you can't assume the source has credibility. You need to get as much information about the source as possible – name, position with the company or institution, how long they've worked there, etc. We tell our students never to use unnamed sources except in the rarest of all possible circumstances, even if it means losing a potentially big story.
- **Is this person in a position to know this information?** Lots of people at universities and other institutions think they know a lot about what's going on around or above them, but how many of them really do? Sometimes staff members are great sources, but not always. Reporters should always find out how their sources know what they know – if they're not willing to share this, they may just be speculating.
- **Does this person have an ax to grind?** Whether at a university, an institution or a corporation, this is always a concern. If someone is trying to promote a particular agenda, there's reason to believe they may be slanting the information they give you. This is something students understand conceptually but rarely recognize when it's happening to them.
- **Is this person using me for personal gain?** This is another issue that students rarely recognize until after the fact. They need to get in the habit of seeing whether the source will benefit personally from any shakeup that may take place in the aftermath of a story. I tell them if they get the feeling they're being used to further a source's career, find another source.

It's also important to get students to recognize the types of people who may not be well-known or recognized but may turn out to be your best sources. Good sources can be high-ranking officials or spokespersons or desk clerks, as long as they give you accurate and useful information. In the traditional media, reporters have gotten the majority of their information from official sources – PR people, spokespersons, officials speaking on the record and such. I always tell students to look for unofficial sources – basically, anyone whose job doesn't involve talking to the media. Depending on the type of story, reporters can also consult experts on the subject – oftentimes professors on their own campuses – who have specialized knowledge of the topic. If the story is about an event, we always encourage student reporters to get interviews with people involved in the event or eyewitnesses in addition to official spokespersons.

One more important thing that student journalists overlook is that sources often lead to other sources who might have relevant information. A question they should ask in nearly every interview is, “Who else do you know who might know something about this?” They should immediately get contact information and ask if they can use the first source's name to establish credibility with the second source (i.e. “Sarah Jackson told me to give you a call”). As you ask each source for names of people who might have information, your number of potential interviewees quickly adds up. This is how a reporter can start with one or two sources and end up with a dozen or more. I'm amazed how often professional reporters fail to do this.

Lastly, my students are always worried about asking “stupid questions” in any interview. This is an area where I disagree with some of my colleagues. I've heard any number of journalism instructors tell their students “There's no such thing as a stupid question.” From my point of view, that's incorrect. Given the fact that both you and your interviewees may have tight schedules and limited time for interviews, I think that any question you ask during an

interview that's based on a lack of preparation can qualify as a stupid question. If you've learned what you can about the topic, the interviewee and his/her place within the context of the story, you won't ask stupid questions. Any questions based on preexisting knowledge, whose answers will fill in gaps in information or get this person's individual point of view on the subject is useful. Even verifying information you already know is worthwhile, because you'll be getting the interviewee's own words on the topic.

Next time there's another current events quiz and midterms get handed back, and the subject for discussion is investigative reporting.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**JOURNALISM 132 – MIDTERM EXAM**

Your exam for Information Gathering consists of an online scavenger hunt. You are to find as many answers to the questions below as you can. Below your answers, list the Web sites where you found the information – just list the domain (for example, “www.cnn.com”), not the full URL.

The exam is worth 100 points, 10 points per question, and I will award partial credit for portions of questions answered correctly. I’ve also included an extra credit question at the end worth 5 points, but you must answer that question in its entirety to receive credit. You have one hour and 15 minutes to complete the exam; please budget your time accordingly.

Please write all answers on the exam sheet in the space provided. Don't forget to write your name on the exam sheet.

1. In October 1974, President Richard Nixon ordered the U.S. attorney general to fire the special prosecutor handling the Watergate investigation. The U.S. attorney general refused and was himself fired, and the deputy attorney general also refused and was fired. The U.S. solicitor general finally fired the special prosecutor.

Who were:

- a. the special prosecutor who was fired \_\_\_\_\_
- b. the attorney general who refused to fire him \_\_\_\_\_
- c. the deputy attorney general who refused to fire him \_\_\_\_\_
- d. the solicitor general who did fire him \_\_\_\_\_

And finally,

- e. why did the solicitor general later become famous? \_\_\_\_\_

Sources: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What was the most popular model of automobile in England in 2007, and what is the current suggested retail price of its least expensive model there?

- a. Car model \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Current suggested retail price in England \_\_\_\_\_

Sources: \_\_\_\_\_

**CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE**

3. In 1995, a band led by singer/songwriter Peter Stuart released its first album. On that album was the only song by that band that ever made the Billboard Hot 100 music chart. What is the band's name, the name of the song that made the charts, and what are the song's first seven words?

- a. Band name \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Song title \_\_\_\_\_
- c. First seven words \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

4. In 1990 and 1991, during the first Bush administration, who was the chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, and who was the executive director?

- a. Chairman \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Executive director \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

5. In this week's newspaper ad for Best Buy, what is the advertised price for the HP Pentium 4 Processor 3.2GHz with Hyper Threading Technology Extreme Edition notebook computer, and how much would a buyer save over the regular price? (Yes, you *can* find this online.)

- a. Advertised price \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Savings over regular price \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

6. What Israeli artist, born in 1928, is considered a pioneer of kinetic sculpture, what are three notable places where his art appears, and at what gallery in what Northern California community is his art featured and sold?

- a. Artist \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Places where art appears \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Gallery \_\_\_\_\_
- d. City \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE**

7. Seven U.S. presidents legally changed their names at some point before they became president. Some were renamed as children, others did it themselves as adults; some of the changes were dramatic, others less so. Name all seven presidents, and include their previous names.

	<b>President</b>	<b>Previous Name</b>
<b>1.</b>		
<b>2.</b>		
<b>3.</b>		
<b>4.</b>		
<b>5.</b>		
<b>6.</b>		
<b>7.</b>		

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

8. What major American university's football field is surrounded by hedges, what is the name of the stadium in which the field is located, what is the name of the school's mascot and what type of animal is it?
- University \_\_\_\_\_
  - Stadium \_\_\_\_\_
  - Mascot's name \_\_\_\_\_
  - Type of animal \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

9. To take a train from San Luis Obispo to San Diego and leave at a time between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m., what time would you need to leave, how much would the trip cost for a single adult, and what time would you arrive in San Diego?
- Time of departure \_\_\_\_\_
  - Train fare \_\_\_\_\_
  - Time of arrival \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE**

10. What major American medical facility features one of the finest public art collections in the world, including pieces by Andy Warhol, Alexander Calder, Auguste Rodin and Henri Matisse? Where is that facility located?

a. Medical facility \_\_\_\_\_

b. Location \_\_\_\_\_

Sources: \_\_\_\_\_

**EXTRA CREDIT (5 points):**

11. What were baseball player John Lowenstein's batting averages for the years 1974, 1975, 1976 and 1977, and for what team did he play during those years? (NOTE: Batting average is a three-digit number starting with a decimal point and is often denoted in statistics as "AVG." or "BA.")

1974 \_\_\_\_\_

1975 \_\_\_\_\_

1976 \_\_\_\_\_

1977 \_\_\_\_\_

Team \_\_\_\_\_

Sources: \_\_\_\_\_

**GOOD LUCK, AND ENJOY YOUR BREAK!**

## **AJEEP: Information Gathering, Lecture 5**

### **Introduction**

Today's class begins with another current events quiz and ends with midterms getting handed back. We'll also get started talking about investigative reporting. (ADMINISTER QUIZ, GO OVER ANSWERS)

### **Investigative reporting**

First, a six-week term is not really enough to include a full investigative reporting project among the assignments for a class, but you should become familiar with the concepts behind investigative reporting.

In America, investigative reporting has a history dating back more than 100 years. In the late 1800s, as America was industrializing, the social changes that took place proved to be a great source of stories. While many American newspapers were caught up in building circulation with "Yellow Journalism," hyping dubious stories, stunts and contests with banner headlines, some magazine publishers saw the opportunity to draw new audiences with looks into the rapidly developing corporations of the period. Magazines exposed corruption and horrible working conditions in the factories that were starting to define American cities. These reporters came to be known as "muckrakers," from a derogatory comment made by President Theodore Roosevelt about journalists "raking muck" – what we would now refer to as "digging dirt."

Obviously, the most well-known American investigative story of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was Watergate, which brought down a president. However, there have been many others over the years that have made substantial changes in policies and practices in government, business, the military and other institutions. Within American journalism, investigative reporters have assumed what's called the "Watchdog role" – actively working to hold institutions accountable

for wrongdoing and abuses. Journalists see this as serving their readers and the community as a whole. The best news outlets also hold themselves accountable, encouraging reader feedback and frequently hiring ombudsmen to serve as liaisons between the organization and the audience.

Still, this doesn't really establish what we mean by investigative reporting. Normally an investigative piece starts with one or more tips from a source that something is wrong within a company or institution. Sometimes this leads to a single story or multiple stories. But when there seems to be a larger pattern, when abuses of workers seem to be involved, when the public interest is compromised, or when there seems to be corruption or deception that may reach to the top, this indicates that maybe an investigation may be warranted.

The individual journalist can rarely take on a major investigative piece alone. The largest American news organizations have given investigative reporters months to work on their stories, taking time away from their regular reporting duties. It's often said that an investigation is like a research project – it involves bringing together all sorts of seemingly disconnected information from disparate sources, putting it all together and making it have a collective meaning. Often the research doesn't lead the writer in the exact direction originally intended, but the writer must take what is learned and build on it, adjusting the goals when necessary and accepting that the conclusion might not fit the original hypothesis.

Since investigative reporting is meant as an act of public service, an important element of any such project is that it be relevant to the audience. Too often journalists get so caught up in the idea of being the next Woodward and Bernstein that they can get carried away with going after something that serves their own purposes (trying to win awards) more than it serves the community. A criticism of investigative journalists over the years is that some have become more obsessed with ruining careers than serving the public. Yet the best investigative reporters

look out for the public interest first and foremost, and have helped improve conditions for workers and consumers in all kinds of industries.

Now, we can talk about things like this and use all sorts of examples from the professional ranks, where journalists exposed corporate wrongdoing and may have even helped save lives. We can talk about how you should approach such assignments as a reporter. But whether you say it out loud or not, a common student reaction is, “What does this have to do with covering the same old stuff on campus?” “Why are you telling me this when I’m covering meetings all the time?” “Isn’t this wasting my time when all I do is write about the football team?”

Well, the best answer to that is to discuss some investigations that have been done at college newspapers in recent years. I’ll discuss these and then look at what the student reporters did throughout the process that you can learn from.

A few years ago, a student reporter got a tip about the director of his university’s Associated Students, the student governance group on campus. This man was a former student, hired by the group as a professional administrator to oversee its affairs. The idea was that rather than having new people learn how handle its budgets, events and elections every year, a full-time administrator would gain experience and make fewer mistakes over the years. While this made sense, for a variety of reasons he was one of the highest paid employees on campus, paid entirely through student fees. There were complaints related to this that he was able to work the system and get large increases for the A.S. budget (and his own salary), and that he spent somewhat lavishly on events for the group’s elected officers. Still, there was nothing actionable until one of our reporters found out details of one particular event. Apparently the group had gone on a retreat out of town, during which this administrator took the group out for dinner and bought

alcohol for two underage students, then later took the group to a bar and bought alcohol for three underage students.

Upon finding out about this, a couple of student reporters worked for weeks on the story, verified that this had taken place, interviewed a number of people who were there, and wrote about it. The university then conducted its own investigation. Eventually the A.S. Director was fired and other officers resigned in the wake of the incident. The reporters and editors who worked on the story did what investigative reporters do – they talked to dozens and dozens of people with knowledge of the situation from the point of view of students and the organization, as well as lawyers and campus administrators to see what the consequences of this could be. They were persistent – most of those involved didn't want to talk at first – and they tried to be as fair as possible to all involved. In the end they produced award-winning coverage that helped them establish themselves as investigative journalists and get good jobs in the business.

Another example involved the death of a 20-year-old student in a fraternity house. The death had been ruled a suicide, but almost immediately there were rumors that this wasn't the case. A student reporter spent six weeks gathering information about the case, and finally published a story that contained some information that made the suicide ruling look questionable. The student had been found hanging in the basement of the fraternity house from an electrical cord attached to a pipe along the basement ceiling. The reporter found that the ceiling pipe was only five feet, 10 inches from the floor, and the student was six feet two inches tall. There were also members of the fraternity who saw the body who said there were no marks on the student's neck in spite of the report saying he'd been hanging for at least 90 minutes. There was also no suicide note found, and the student had apparently shown no behaviors indicating he was depressed to friends or family in the days and weeks leading up to it.

Beyond gathering all this information, the reporter also talked to the student's parents, who were also convinced this was not a suicide. They were upset not only about the suicide ruling and the inconsistencies with the evidence, but that they weren't allowed to see his body until more than a week after his death, and that the area where it happened had been completely cleaned and evidence removed before they could see it. Eventually, there was an external investigation that's still ongoing. Again, the reporter was persistent and thorough, talked to everyone he possibly could about the story, and did his best to make sure all sides were represented. Like the students who worked on the A.S. story, this reporter ended up with awards and a job in the journalism business.

There are plenty of examples of this type of thing in student media. These examples show that young reporters – even students – can engage in investigative journalism just like the professionals. You just need to keep a few things in mind:

- Stay curious at all times. In the digital age, too often students walk the campus staring at their iPods or cell phones rather than paying attention to what's going on around them. Student reporters often get some of their best tips by simply hanging around campus and talking to their fellow students.
- Be persistent. Investigative stories aren't the kind of thing you can turn around in a day, a week, or often even a month. You need to be fearless in continuing to dig for information – you can't just give up if the first, second, third or fourth potential source won't talk to you. You need to believe strongly enough in what you're doing to keep plugging away.
- Keep everything. If you record interviews, make sure you have them transcribed AND backed up somewhere. Start a computer file or a physical file for

everything you collect on an investigation. Sometimes the most innocuous comment or seemingly insignificant piece of evidence can prove vital to a story.

- Keep in touch with sources. This goes for any kind of reporting, but it's especially true for investigations. If you're in regular contact with sources from all the areas related to your investigation, you're much more likely to hear from them if something useful pops up.

Now I'll return the midterms and we can go over them. (RETURN EXAMS, TAKE QUESTIONS ABOUT EXAM ITEMS)

Next time, we'll conclude the semester and talk about the final exam.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## **JOURNALISM 132 – CURRENT EVENTS QUIZ #2**

**This quiz is in two parts – Facts and Short Answers. Facts are worth one point apiece and Short Answers are worth two points each, for a total of 10 points. There is no extra credit for answering more than is required. You have 15 minutes to complete the quiz, so budget your time accordingly. Please note that all names of people, places and organizations must be spelled correctly to receive credit.**

### **I. Facts (6 points):**

**Answer six of the seven questions below – skip one question of your choice.**

1. What country's military attacked Kurdish rebels last week in northern Iraq?
2. What longtime consumer advocate announced over the weekend that he's going to run for president as an independent this year, as he did four years ago?
3. A double murder-suicide Monday at a military campus home happened in what U.S. city?
4. What small U.S. city was hit by a 6.0 earthquake last Thursday?
5. On Tuesday, four major Internet service providers announced that they had filed lawsuits meant to shut down a number of leading senders of unsolicited junk e-mail (spam). What were the four companies?
6. Democratic presidential candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton met in a debate last week on what day and in what city?
7. The dean of what U.S. university's medical school made a public apology last week after it was disclosed that a school employee had been selling body parts for profit?

**CONTINUE ON THE NEXT PAGE**



Journ. 132: Prof. Craig: Investigative Reporting Project

## INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING PROJECT

### Summary

The investigative reporting project counts for 20 percent of your course grade. You will write an in-depth story *between four and five double-spaced pages in length* (not including any references, tables, or other additional material) that follows one of the following approaches:

1. Expose wrongdoing within a company, organization or institution using your own primary research. This should be as multisourced and well documented as possible, presenting as complete a picture as you can.
2. Look into the ownership of a local newspaper, TV station or radio station, then find out what other companies are owned by this one or linked to it in some way. Look at audiences, boards of directors, advertisers, and anything else that might offer clues as to potential influence on the company's entertainment and/or news product.
3. Explore the background of a prominent citizen and examine the positive and/or negative elements of that person's past that shed light upon his/her current status. This is often particularly effective with someone who has recently come to prominence and whose background is not well known, but you are not limited to such people.
4. Examine an important company, organization or institution that does not have a high public profile despite its power or significance. Use your own research to shed light on the background, events and connections that have allowed that organization to achieve its position of importance.

If you have an idea for a project that doesn't conveniently fit into any of these formats, please feel free to check it out with me.

### Background

The act of being a daily newspaper reporter involves first the quick gathering and confirming of facts and quotes, then the assembling of that information into a story that gives readers the essential elements of an event. Journalists gather all the details – the traditional “who,” “what,” “when” and “where” – and crank them out into daily stories.

But what about the big picture, the “how” and the “why” of an event, condition, issue or other topic? Beyond this, what about stories that aren't best explained through day-to-day fact gathering? While reporters always gather facts, they are often too busy to thoroughly research a topic over days, weeks or months. In short, while daily journalism lends itself to **covering** stories, it often does not allow time for truly **investigating** stories.

### The Assignment

It is often said that what separates investigative reporting from daily reporting is actual research as opposed to simple fact gathering. As such, the investigative reporting project is as much

about research as about writing. You will be expected to perform your own original research, not simply base the paper on someone else's work.

Your story must include a list of sources, including names, e-mail addresses, phone numbers and/or other contact information. I will contact sources randomly to confirm their participation and evaluate your interview techniques. You must identify all sources in this assignment.

This assignment isn't necessarily about "digging dirt," but rather exposing something important or significant, informing readers about something they were likely not familiar with before.

**Rules:**

You are to turn in all elements of this assignment **on time**. Extensions will be granted only with an extremely good and well-documented reason (i.e. extreme emergency explained to Prof. Craig *before* the due date). Any unexcused papers turned in **after class** on the due date **will not be accepted**.

**You are required** to keep an electronic copy of your assignment. You are also required to keep all your notes, research materials and rough drafts until the papers are returned. Both of these are to protect you in case of any question about plagiarism, duplication, fabrication or missing work. See the course syllabus supplement if you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism and/or fabrication.

Most importantly, if you have any questions or problems whatsoever involving paper topics, research materials or methods, computer availability or anything else, please ask me before or after class or during office hours.

## **AJEEP: Information Gathering, Lecture 6**

### **Introduction**

In today's final session we'll discuss the development of story ideas for investigative projects and go over the final exam, which I've attached to the end of this document.

As I noted last time, a six-week term isn't really enough to complete a full investigative reporting project, but there's value in discussing how to generate investigative story ideas, because they can be used for smaller projects as well. Hopefully these ideas will help you change your thinking about how to approach reporting.

### **Reporting vs. college life**

There are often a lot of differences between the mindset of a college student and that of a professional reporter. Students are accustomed to signing up for classes, attending them and doing what the instructor asks. It's not a pursuit that often asks you to strike out on your own and do something different. If you have a job outside school, you must juggle assignments and work tasks, plus any family obligations they may have. As a consequence, the student mindset tends to be simply to take care of the next item on your schedule, followed by the next, followed by the one after that, and so on. This is one reason why college campuses are full of students walking purposefully between parking garages and classrooms, seemingly unaware of their surroundings.

In contrast, a professional reporter's job is to be observant – to step back and see the larger picture of what's happening in the community, in government, in business and such. It's a job that rewards people who can look at society and pick out the elements that are newsworthy – the interesting, the unusual, the unjust, the corrupt. In many ways, the job requires young people fresh from the college experience to completely change the ways they think, function and behave

in society. There's still time pressure with deadlines, but it forces their focus to turn outward to function, whereas before it was always inward to survive.

In many ways, investigative reporting is even more of a stretch. Investigative pieces frequently look at large, systemic problems in hierarchical institutions, requiring an understanding of how an organization is meant to run or the goals it is supposed to accomplish. Investigations often require in-depth learning about power structures, fiefdoms, budgets and other issues that make no sense whatsoever to the average observer. They can require becoming enough of an expert on a subject to ask challenging questions to someone who is paid to know that subject.

This is why students often have a hard time generating ideas for investigative stories. It's easy to go cover a meeting, a game or a protest rally – find out what it's about, talk to a few people, write up a story and then grab some dinner before your next class starts. This is why a class like this one is as much about teaching a way of thinking and approaching reporting as it is about writing.

With this in mind, and knowing it's important to get you to think differently to develop provocative story ideas that will get you a job when you graduate, here are some ways to get you to approach the formulation of story topics.

### **Generating story ideas**

The purpose of this section isn't simply to list ideas for stories – it's to present some behaviors and habits that can lead to finding good material for investigative pieces. These are modes of thinking and acting that have worked well for professional reporters in developing in-depth story ideas.

**Be active.** Successful investigative reporters don't spend their days sitting around waiting for stories to come to them. It's true that many stories come from tips, but tips are usually generated by sources who have been cultivated by reporters over days, weeks and years of regular contact. Sources you've contacted regularly and chatted with are much more likely to share something weighty with you than people who don't know you at all. Beyond your "usual suspects," you should physically make the rounds of your campus and community and become genuinely knowledgeable about what's going on within its neighborhoods, workplaces, shopping areas and police stations. As people get to know you personally, they'll be much more likely to share not only what they consider story ideas, but also what's going on in their lives, which can lead to entirely different kinds of stories.

**Be curious.** We've already discussed this, but it's especially necessary in investigative reporting. The path of least resistance is never to ask "Why?", but asking that question is an absolute necessity for an investigative reporter. Why did a seemingly successful business suddenly close? Why are people quitting their jobs at a major local employer? Why has an up-and-coming local politician suddenly dropped off the map? Questions like these are often at the beginning of successful investigations. Even something as innocuous as "Why did this restaurant stop using that cheese I like on my tacos?" (CAN INSERT A MORE CULTURALLY RELEVANT EXAMPLE HERE) can result in a meaningful investigation. Following one small thread and simply being curious and not taking "No" for an answer can lead to amazing things.

**Listen to people.** When you come to campus, rather than simply heading from one class to another or listening to music or hanging out with friends, try instead using that time to just listen to people. You'll likely discover that there are lots of stories out there to be pursued if you just listen to the people around you. One student in a past class took the train to school every

day and got literally dozens of story ideas by simply listening to people every day during her commute. She ended up being very successful on the student newspaper largely because of these ideas. Even people complaining about their jobs can be useful – “My boss doesn’t know what he’s doing” begs the question, “If that’s true, how did he get to his position of power?”

**Read. A lot.** Even when you’re engaged with the people of your campus or community, sometimes others will publish information that leads you in an unforeseen direction. This is true not only of other journalists, but ordinary people as well. Many professional journalists in recent years have gotten story ideas from local blogs, message boards, social media postings and other online chatter. (Always be sure to credit your sources, of course.) Often small news items, complaints and discussions leave questions unanswered that are worth pursuing. You should develop the habit of reflexively digging deeper when you discover unresolved issues, problems or concerns. While regularly visiting areas on your campus or in your community keeps you physically engaged with it, reading up on local issues keeps you mentally engaged.

**Look for changes.** Is something you encounter regularly suddenly a little bit different? Change occurs constantly in every area of society, and reporters who notice changes and follow up on them are often rewarded with material that leads to big stories. While most students might see a fenced-off area on campus, think “I wonder what they’re building there?” and then forget about it, a good reporter will take note of it and find out more. Buildings aren’t built on a whim – the steps involved in getting to that point (including why the previous building was torn down) are often the sort of information that can lead to a good investigative report at the student level. Even less obvious changes can lead to investigations. Why were the bike racks outside a campus building replaced with lunch seating? Why were the recycling bins on campus changed over the

summer? Why is there a sidewalk where a grassy field used to be? These are seemingly simple questions about relatively unimportant issues, but they can all lead to bigger things.

**Examine institutions.** While the previous example looked at seemingly simple and benign issues, this area seems complex from the start. Institutions – campus administration, organizations and services, as well as those in the larger community – are inherently complex operations. Yet the best approach a reporter can take in examining these institutions is to start with the basics. What is the organization’s mission, and how does it go about accomplishing it? Does it use public or private money? How did its leaders reach their positions? Did they work their way up through the organization, or were they brought in from outside? Are its employees promoted based on seniority, merit or other factors? These are questions that can be applied to practically any institution, and the answers to any one of them can lead to further questions. Please note at this point that you should not assume that an institution you’re investigating is corrupt or otherwise dysfunctional, even if you’ve been tipped that it might be. You need to be scrupulously fair in any investigation, and not just because the company you’re examining has lawyers. To do the job well, you must keep an open mind and be willing to accept whatever conclusions your investigation uncovers, good or bad.

**Follow the money.** It’s a cliché, but it’s true. The sources of funding for just about any project can be the beginning of an investigative story. Decisions about all kinds of ventures are made based on the desires of the people and companies that have paid for those projects, and not necessarily those who will most directly be affected by them. While this is vitally important for any reporter, for college students at public learning institutions it’s especially so. Universities in America and elsewhere are often reshaped and refocused by people and companies who aren’t involved day to day with those universities. Was a building built to fulfill a genuine campus

need, or because a tycoon had a whim and wrote a check? Was the engineering building expanded because classrooms were too full, or because an alumnus wanted to see his name on the building? Was one project cancelled and another fast-tracked because of changing community needs, or because a new chancellor of the university system wanted it that way and pulled some financial strings? Stories like these can provide great opportunities for student journalists to get their feet wet in investigations, and prepare them for similar pursuits in the professional ranks.

**Be persistent.** This may be the single most important piece of advice to reporters under any circumstances, but especially if they want to do investigations. Daily news reporting never breeds patience, particularly at a university where you have other classes to take and activities in which to take part. As a young reporter it's often hard to convince yourself to stay the course and keep pecking away at an investigation when there's a soccer game you could cover to get a quick story into the paper. University administrators, faculty and staff may get tired of hearing from you and perturbed at your unwillingness to leave them alone, but as you develop an investigative piece, you may need to contact the same people over and over to ask new questions and get a fuller understanding of what's going on. If you've kept track of all your research and conversations and you feel like there's something worth following but you haven't gotten there yet, you'll need to trust your instincts and keep digging. In my experience, persistence usually pays off, even if it takes longer than you'd ever imagined to get the information you need.

ANY QUESTIONS about these tips?

I've left time at the end of class to answer questions about the final exam. (DISCUSS EXAM FORMAT AND ANSWER QUESTIONS)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**JOURNALISM 132 – FINAL EXAM**

**Your final exam consists of an online scavenger hunt. You are to find as many answers to the questions below as you can. Below your answers, list the Web sites where you found the information – just list the domain (for example, “www.cnn.com”), not the full URL.**

**The exam is worth 100 points, 10 points per question, and I will award partial credit for portions of questions answered correctly. I’ve also included an extra credit question at the end worth 5 points, but you must answer that question in its entirety to receive credit. You have one hour and 15 minutes to complete the exam; please budget your time accordingly.**

1. In early November 1986, Lebanese newspapers reported that the U.S. was selling arms to a Middle East nation in order to secure the release of American hostages. U.S. news agencies subsequently learned that money from these transactions was being funneled to rebels in a Central American nation who were aiming to overtake its anti-American government. A special prosecutor was named to investigate the matter, and three main figures testified in congressional hearings on the matter: two former National Security Advisors and a Marine Lieutenant Colonel.

Who/what were:

- a. the Middle East nation \_\_\_\_\_
- b. the Central American nation \_\_\_\_\_
- c. one former National Security Advisor \_\_\_\_\_
- d. the other former National Security Advisor \_\_\_\_\_
- e. the Marine Lieutenant Colonel \_\_\_\_\_

And finally,

- f. what does the Marine Lieutenant Colonel do now? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

2. What corporation owns 15 CBS TV affiliates, 18 UPN TV affiliates, and more than 175 radio stations in the U.S., and what is the name of its broadcast subsidiary?
  - a. Corporation \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Broadcast subsidiary \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

3. The 2004 commencement speaker at a particular Ivy League university is a noted political activist with a long history of supporting liberal causes. He was a nominee for the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize, has long supported Greenpeace and Amnesty International, and has co-founded an organization to draw attention to Africa and the crises of poverty and HIV/AIDS. He also plays in a rock band.

- a. Speaker's name \_\_\_\_\_
- b. University \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Name of speaker's organization \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Name of speaker's band \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

4. A number of high-ranking officials in the Bush Administration were successful in the business world before working in the White House. In fact, six top officials were Chief Executive Officers of corporations before they took posts in the current White House. Name all six by position, and list the corporations each served as CEO.

	<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Former Corporation</b>
<b>1.</b>	Vice President		
<b>2.</b>	Chief of Staff		
<b>3.</b>	Secretary of Commerce		
<b>4.</b>	Secretary of Defense		
<b>5.</b>	Secretary of the Treasury		
<b>6.</b>	Secretary of Labor		

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

5. Name five former mayors of San Jose.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_
- e. \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

6. Please provide the current list price in U.S. dollars for the following consumer items:

- a. Reebok Men's Answer VII Mid Athletic Shoes \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Philips 30PW850H 30" HDTV-Ready TV \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Eureka 4870DT Upright Vacuum Cleaner \_\_\_\_\_
- d. The Flintstones - The Complete First Season DVD Set \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Snap-On Tools KRA4055 5-Drawer Tool Chest \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

7. The fathers of six current U.S. Senators were also U.S. Senators. Name all six of these current Senators, the states they serve, and their fathers who served before them.

	<b>Current Senator</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Father (Former Senator)</b>
<b>1.</b>			
<b>2.</b>			
<b>3.</b>			
<b>4.</b>			
<b>5.</b>			
<b>6.</b>			

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

8. What major American university was primarily founded by two former U.S. presidents, one of whom served as its main architect? What year was it founded, and in what city is located?

- a. University \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Founder/architect \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Co-founder \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Year founded \_\_\_\_\_
- e. City \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

9. Alphabetically, what compound is first among the periodic table of elements, what is its symbol and atomic number? In addition, name two other elements that have geographic connections to where we live (and their symbols).

- a. First compound (and its symbol) \_\_\_\_\_
- b. First compound's atomic number \_\_\_\_\_
- c. One element with a geographic tie (and symbol) \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Another element with a geographic tie (and symbol) \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

10. Within 25 miles, how far is it to drive from the Mexican border to the Canadian border on Interstate 5? In addition, name five other Interstate highways that intersect with Interstate 5 along this route, and the cities in which they intersect.

- a. Distance in miles \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Intersecting freeway 1 and city \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Intersecting freeway 2 and city \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Intersecting freeway 3 and city \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Intersecting freeway 4 and city \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Intersecting freeway 5 and city \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **EXTRA CREDIT (5 points):**

11. One of the world's most popular sports is Cricket, and the man known worldwide as the "Babe Ruth of Cricket" died in February 2001. What was his name, what country did he represent, and what was his batting average in test matches?

- a. Name \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Country \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Batting Average \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources:** \_\_\_\_\_

**GOOD LUCK, AND HAVE A GREAT SUMMER!**