Greetings from IRE

JUNE 5-8

HOST:
The Miami Herald
and *El Nuevo Herald*

The best in the business will gather for panels workshops and special presentations about covering public safety, courts, national security, the military, business, education, local government and much more.

Visit www.ire.org/training/miami08 for more information and updates.

IRE offers several programs to help women, members of minority groups, college students and journalists from small news organizations attend the conference. Fellowships typically provide a one-year membership, registration fees, and reimbursement for hotel and travel costs. See details at www.ire.org/training/fellowships.html. Apply by April 7 for the Miami conference.

If you have hotel or general conference questions, please contact conference coordinator Stephanie Sinn, stephanie@ire.org, or 573-882-8969. If you have registration questions, please contact John Green, membership coordinator, jgreen@ire.org or 573-882-2772.

REGISTRATION

You can register for this conference online at www.ire.org/training/miami08.

To attend this conference, you must be an IRE member through July 1, 2008. Memberships are nonrefundable. From April 1 to May 19, the early registration fee is $175. After May 19, the on-site registration fee of $200 applies.

REGISTRATION FEE:
(main conference days)

$175 (Registrations made from April 1 to May 19) Professional/Academic/Associate/Retiree

$100 Student

Optional computer-assisted reporting training

Thursday, June 5 (requires additional fee)

$50 Professional/Academic/Associate/Retiree

$35 Student

BLUES BASH

Thursday, June 5 at 7 p.m.
Advance tickets are $20.
Ticket prices on site, if available, will be higher.
Limit of 2 tickets per registrant.

Conference Hotel

InterContinental Miami
www.ichmiami.com
100 Chopin Plaza
Miami, FL 33131

Miami

2008 IRE CONFERENCE

THE IRE JOURNAL

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MARCH/APRIL 2008

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As technology drives conversations about the future of media, investigative journalism appears online in new forms, often created outside the boundaries of a traditional newsroom. "Alternative investigations" describes the search for new forms for investigative traditions, as well as many new and evolving outlets producing the work.

Cover photo illustration:
By Wendy Gray
The IRE Journal

Cover stories:
Pages 16-33

THE IRE JOURNAL

VOLUME 31 | NUMBER 2

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The IRE Journal (ISSN0164-7016) is published six times a year by Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. 138 Neff Annex, Missouri School of Journalism, Columbia, MO 65211, 573-882-2042. E-mail: journal@ire.org. U.S. subscriptions are $70 for individuals, $85 for libraries and $125 for institutions/businesses. International subscriptions are $90 for individuals and $150 for all others. Periodical postage paid at Jefferson City, Mo. Postmaster: Please send address changes to IRE. USPS #451-670

Alternative investigative forms can empower reporting and make new stories accessible

MARK HORVIT
IRE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Many journalists are skeptical about their newsrooms' scramble to embrace new technologies.

They see such efforts draining resources—and attention—from traditional investigative reporting, at the same time that budget cuts leave some staffs dangerously thin.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

As the articles in this month's edition of the *Journal* attest, much of the new technology can be used to add depth to enterprise stories and can provide new ways to present data gathered through old-fashioned reporting techniques, from open records requests to following money trails.

Many journalists are doing what the best reporters have always done: taking the resources available to them and making use of them as tools for investigation and analysis. Some are taking greater advantage of the interactivity offered by the Web; others are finding new venues through which to get their work to the public.

A healthy debate is ongoing in newsrooms (and on blogs) about the value of putting searchable databases online for the public, particularly when the data is seen as an end in itself. There are pros and cons to that approach. At IRE and NICAR we stress the value in bringing meaning to the data, and some news outlets are finding creative ways to do just that. They are layering additional reporting, history and context into the numbers to create something new. (See p. 27.)

These sites also create a rich resource for the investigative reporter, something of a jumping off point from which deeper research can follow.

New technology has created new ways to forge direct connections with the public, in effect creating whole new armies of journalists who are starting to provide tangible contributions to the enterprise work occurring in newsrooms. (See p. 24.)

And thanks to this new world order, new avenues have opened up for getting investigative work to the public.

A number of organizations, many of them nonprofit (see articles on pp. 17 and 20), are producing in-depth journalism and making it available through the Web. Such stories are often accompanied by interactive databases and other elements that weren't possible only a few years ago.

IRE continues to expand our training to help journalists keep up with new tools and resources and is developing new programs that will help us take the lead when it comes to dealing with databases and investigations on the Web.

At our recently completed Computer-Assisted Reporting conference in Houston, we offered a series of panels that focused on interactive databases, wikis, mash-ups and other new technologies, all with a mind toward how they can be applied to build in-depth stories. Panels exploring new ways to present investigative journalism will be featured at our annual conference in Miami, June 5-8.

And even as newsrooms focus on the Web, many continue to invest money in training their reporters in the fundamentals of investigative reporting. IRE has trained several hundred journalists in the first three months of this year at our workshops and conferences.

So yes, the landscape for journalists is changing. And certainly not every development is a step forward.

But if you're uncomfortable with the current trends, wait a few months for the next wave of technology to change things all over again. What's important is that the investigative spirit continues to thrive.

Mark Horvit is executive director of IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. He can be reached through e-mail at mhorvit@ire.org or by calling 573-882-2042.

Hot plans for Miami

Our 2008 IRE conference will offer more than 100 in-depth training sessions. Top investigative reporters will share tips and the insights you need to produce groundbreaking stories that make a difference on any beat. You'll learn about how to reach audiences using the Web and how the latest technology can increase the impact of your work.

In our showcase panels, meet journalists who are inventing new models for investigative reporting and hear from reporters who willingly risk their lives to get the story—and to ensure that others have not died in vain.

To help keep things in perspective, Miami's own Dave Barry will turn his uniquely skewed vision on the world of the investigative reporter as the keynote speaker at the IRE Awards Luncheon on Saturday, June 7.

Raul Rubiera | The Miami Herald

Dave Barry

More than 90 panels will be offered. Many will focus on Web tools such as how to background individuals, finding documents, the best sites for investigations and presenting your work. Dozens of beat topics will be covered, too. Hear the latest tips and trends in war coverage, sports investigations, foreclosure issues, housing scandals, education, criminal justice and international issues.

Visit the conference Web site, www.ire.org/training/miami08/speakers, for the latest list of conference speakers and other program information. And when you're ready to take a break, head out to the 10th annual Blues Bash – Miami style – on Thursday night at the Tobacco Road nightclub. On Friday night, there's a South Beach party at one of the city's hottest clubs.

So what are you waiting for? Sign up now at www.ire.org/training/miami08, and join us in sunny Florida on June 5-8. Early-bird registration ends on May 19.

New database library director chosen

Jeremy Milarsky, a journalist with strong print and Web credentials, is the new director of the IRE and NICAR Database Library.

He participated in the 2008 CAR Conference in Houston and officially started his duties on March 4. He will initially be based in Florida until he can permanently relocate to the IRE headquarters in Columbia, Mo.

Much of his career was spent at the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, where he worked as a reporter, news researcher and finally as a manager in the newsroom library. He has also worked for Tribune Interactive. Most recently, Milarsky took a short hiatus from journalism to concentrate on Web programming.

Gary Fountain | Houston Chronicle

Jeremy Milarsky was introduced as IRE's new databse library director at the 2008 CAR Conference in Houston.

His Web programming ability will be a strong addition for IRE. But his main focus will be on continuing to build the Database Library, while making its collection of government data more accessible to members on deadline, said IRE Executive Director Mark Horvit.

Working with data to find interesting stories, and discovering new and different ways of telling them, is his passion.

"We as a global society are awash in data," Milarsky notes. "Information, in its raw form, is increasingly escaping from the desktops of a few bureaucrats and into the Web browsers of those members of the public who are intellectually curious."

"The IRE/NICAR database library plays an important part in the organization's key role in serving the news media in an essential way—providing information and the means to analyze it intelligently. As news organizations continue to adapt to the changing economy, I believe the library will play an even more important service role for journalists."

Milarsky can be reached at jeremy@ire.org.

MEMBER NEWS

Nate Carlisle of *The Salt Lake Tribune* was among eight journalists accepted to the Arizona State University fellowship titled "Immigration:The Southwest Border." ■ **Charles A. Duhigg** of *The New York Times* was given the George Polk Award for Medical Reporting for his series regarding unethical practices surrounding investor-owned nursing homes, long-term care insurers and allied businesses. The series led to congressional investigations and changes in law. ■ **Drew Griffin**, a CNN investigative correspondent, won his third consecutive Business Emmy in 2007 for "Hidden Spending," an *Anderson Cooper 360°* segment regarding congressional spending. He was also named Journalist of the Year in national television reporting by the Atlanta Press Club and awarded the Everett McKinley Dirksen Award for distinguished coverage of Congress by the National Press Foundation. ■ **Kathleen Johnston**, a CNN senior investigative producer, received a Business Emmy for "Hidden Spending," an *Anderson Cooper 360°* segment about congressional spending. The Newswomen's Club of New York also named Johnston a Front Page Award winner for television for producing the political feature, "Is There a Better Way to Govern?" ■ **Joshua Kors** won the George Polk Award for Magazine Reporting for his two-part series in *The Nation*, exposing how the military is using a legal loophole to deny medical care to soldiers wounded in Iraq. ■ **Austino S. Lewis** is a freelance journalist with the *Cincinnati Herald* who previously worked as deputy editor in chief at *The Journal Newspaper* in Ghana, West Africa. ■ **Tom McGinty**, former IRE training director, has moved from *Newsday* to the New York investigative team of *The Wall Street Journal*. ■ **Judy Pasternak** of the *Los Angeles Times* won the John B. Oakes Award for Distinguished Environmental Journalism

CONTINUED ON PAGE 35 ➢

E-mail Member News items to Megan Means, meganm@ire.org. Please include contact information for verification.

Calendar set for board elections

BY IRE STAFF

Seven seats on the 13-member IRE Board of Directors will be up for election at the 2008 IRE Conference in Miami.

The deadline for candidates to be listed on both the election day and absentee ballots is April 18. IRE members can declare their candidacy by sending a candidacy statement, including brief biographical information, to elections@ire.org. Statements may be up to 500 words; an accompanying photo in JPEG format is encouraged.

Candidates who declare after April 18 can submit statements to be posted on the IRE Web site. Materials must be received no later than 5 p.m. on Wednesday, May 21.

June 6 is the final day to declare candidacy. Candidates who wait until the conference to announce must deliver a one-page statement and personal biography to the IRE executive director in Miami by noon on Friday, June 6.

All candidates' statements will be posted on a bulletin board in the main conference area.

Board duties

The board serves as the governing body of IRE and generally meets three times a year to discuss and vote on IRE business. One of the meetings is at the annual IRE Conference in June. The board periodically has conference calls.

Directors serve on committees and task forces made up of board members and appointed non-board IRE members.

The seats are for two-year terms, and incumbents may seek re-election to the board. A board position is unpaid; board members and their news organizations are expected to pay all, or a substantial amount, of travel expenses to board meetings. IRE will provide limited help in cases of need. Candidates must be IRE members in the professional or academic category. However, only one academic member may be on the board at a time, according to IRE's Articles of Incorporation.

Board members are expected to help raise funds and contribute financial or other resources to the organization. In addition, they lose eligibility to enter the IRE Awards contest if they have a significant role in a contest entry.

Election day

At the membership meeting on Saturday afternoon, June 7, candidates must be nominated and seconded from the floor by two other IRE members. There will be no nominating speeches, but candidates will have two minutes to address the members. The ballot at the membership meeting will include all candidates declared through the June 6 deadline. Absentee ballots will be opened and counted along with the ballots cast at the meeting.

Immediately following the board elections, there will be a separate election for two IRE Awards contest judges. Those candidates will be nominated and seconded from the floor.

Absentee ballots

Members unable to attend the conference to vote at the June 7 membership meeting will be allowed to participate via absentee balloting. You must request a ballot from the IRE office no later than May 19.

Absentee balloting is meant to supplement—not replace—IRE's traditional election process, which encourages membership meeting attendance as a sign of commitment to the group and to involve as many members as possible in important discussions.

Members attending the annual conference are still expected to cast their votes at the membership meeting.

Requests for absentee ballots will be accepted from April 18 to May 19; these include only the names of candidates who declare by the absentee ballot deadline. IRE members whose membership status will be current through June 30, 2008, may request absentee ballots by phone, e-mail to elections@ire.org or in person. A ballot and instructions will be sent to the address of record for that member. Completed absentee ballots must be received at the IRE offices by May 28.

Only international members requesting absentee ballots will be allowed to vote via e-mail.

Absentee ballots will not be available at the annual conference nor will they be accepted there.

For more information on the IRE Board Elections and updates on the 2008 IRE Conference in Miami, visit the IRE Web site at www.ire.org.

IMPORTANT DATES

April 18
• Deadline for candidates to file and appear on absentee ballots

• Opening day for absentee ballot requests

April 21
• Candidates' statements posted online at www.ire.org

May 19
• Last day to request absentee ballots

May 21
• Deadline (5 p.m.) for candidates to be listed on the Web site

May 28
• Deadline for absentee ballots to reach the IRE office

June 6
• Final deadline (noon) to declare candidacy for the election-day ballot

June 7
• Board elections at annual membership meeting

Knight Foundation extends matching grant for IRE Endowment Fund

BY IRE STAFF

IRE's endowment drive received a tremendous boost recently when the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation offered to extend its matching program through Sept. 30.

As part of a $2 million grant—the largest in IRE's history—the foundation offered to provide partial matching funds of up to $1 million for IRE's endowment. For every $2 raised by IRE, Knight provides an additional $1.

The drive was scheduled to end Dec. 31. We made a major push to raise as much as we could by that deadline. Through the dedication of a number of major donors, plus the involvement of more than 350 members who raised $87,000 of the last $1 million through our $25 Club alone, we took in a little more than $700,000.

Because of that strong show of support and a belief in IRE's mission, the Knight Foundation decided in February to extend our deadline for a short period so we could take advantage of the full matching program.

We need to raise about $300,000 in the next seven months. If we do, we'll get another $150,000 from the foundation. All of this money will go into our endowment, which provides the bedrock that will allow IRE to thrive for years to come.

The goal is within our reach, and the math is simple: We need to raise about $300,000 in the next seven months. If we do, we'll get another $150,000 from the foundation. All of this money will go into our endowment, which provides the bedrock that will allow IRE to thrive for years to come.

We greatly appreciate the support of everyone who has donated to date. This deadline extension will allow us to complete several fundraising efforts that were under way when the deadline passed. This also presents an opportunity for those who didn't have a chance to give before the Dec. 31 deadline.

So join us on this final effort to take advantage of the Knight Foundation matching program, and help ensure that IRE will be helping journalists for years to come.

IRE seeks the aid of all audiences that value quality investigative journalism and recognize its importance in keeping the public informed and governments, businesses and individuals accountable.

Also, if you have ideas for fundraising in your newsroom or region, please contact IRE development officer Jennifer Erickson at jennifer@ire.org or 573-884-2222. Jennifer is also available to answer questions about the endowment drive, the $25 Club and related inquiries.

To make a donation in support of IRE's future, please visit our Breakthroughs Web page, where you may learn more about the IRE endowment drive, download a donation form or donate online with a credit card: www.ire.org/endowment

BREAKTHROUGHS

$25 Club

2007 end-of-year funding drive best in IRE's history

We asked for your help in raising funds before the end of the year, and IRE members really came through! The end-of-year drive kicked off in October with a note from IRE board members Cheryl Phillips, Lea Thompson and Duff Wilson encouraging you to join the $25 Club by stretching a $100 pledge over four years.

The impressive results: more than 350 IRE members rose to the occasion and donated and pledged more than **$87,000** to the endowment fund. **With the match from the Knight Foundation, that's more than $130,000 in support of the IRE endowment.**

A sincere and hearty thanks to everyone who joined the club and, in the process, is working to help secure IRE's future.

Highlights of the drive:

Nearly 270 people joined the traditional $25 Club (pledged $25 per year for four years for a total donation of $100)—that's $27,000 from this group alone!

After longtime IRE and endowment advisory committee member Ruth Ann Leach Harnisch donated $5,000 to the drive, she challenged us to seek donations larger than $100 from individuals. We're happy to report that nearly 100 people joined Ruth Ann's giving circle and donated/pledged together more than $60,000 to the IRE endowment fund. Many thanks to Ruth Ann for the guidance, encouragement and support!

IRE board members helped recruit $25 Club members by means of personal calls and e-mails. Many thanks for responding to their requests, and please know that each board member, volunteers all, has made a meaningful pledge to the endowment.

Photo illustration: Annette Lein | Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat and Chronicle

Reporters gained access to Family Court transcripts to find parents of children in the foster care system, including a mother whose 4-year-old received a seizure drug used as a mood stablilizer.

FOSTER CARE Rx

Medicaid data, court records show growth of off-label psych meds

By Gary Craig
Rochester (N.Y.) *Democrat and Chronicle*

In late 2006 a Family Court judge in Monroe County, N.Y., excoriated county officials after they supported the decision to prescribe a powerful psychotropic drug to a 2-year-old girl in foster care. The judge ruled that the county had not tried enough intensive counseling to address the girl's emotional problems. Nor was the judge convinced that the drug could be administered safely. Like so many psychotropic medications, the drug was prescribed "off-label" and never had been rigorously tested for use in a young population.

Though the actions within Family Court are often off the radar of the media and the public, we were lucky enough that both our courts reporter, Michael Zeigler, and our public service editor, Sebby Wilson Jacobson, learned of the ruling. Zeigler wrote a daily story about the ruling, and we decided to find out whether this prescription was an anomaly or instead more common within the foster care population than we would have thought.

Key to the investigation were concerns about the long-term health effects of certain psychotropic drugs. Depakote, the drug central to the judge's ruling, has been linked to liver failure in young children. The anti-psychotic drug Risperdal has been tied to heart failure in older adults. Some anti-depressants promote extreme weight gain and have been tied to diabetes.

In December 2007 we published a two-day package that highlighted a significant increase in the prescription of psychotropic drugs to Monroe County's foster children. Our stories showed a 40 percent increase over five years in the number of foster children prescribed psychotropic medications, even as the foster care population was slightly declining.

Among other findings:

- At least one in eight foster children was prescribed anti-psychotic drugs. (The number was likely higher but, as with other data we accumulated, we were very conservative in our findings.)
- The Medicaid expenditures for major psychotropic drugs for foster care in our county were greatly outpacing the statewide average.
- In some cases very young children had been prescribed heavy-duty medications, including one case in which a 1-year-old was prescribed an anti-psychotic drug.

To reach this point was quite the trudge. It required: a series of multiple (and occasionally revamped) New York Freedom of Information Law requests; lessons learned about what medications are presently popular in a world where the market is often shifting; journeys into the arcane yet helpful world of medical research papers; and a push to lift the cloak draped over some Family Court proceedings. (Here is a good place to also commend work done by others on the same topic, including an excellent *Oregonian* series that ran last year, stories from *The* (White Plains, N.Y.) *Journal News* in 2002 that focused on downstate New York, and a 1997 series from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.)

Throughout much of last year we gathered data for our stories. Recognizing that Medicaid expenditures for foster care children were the one sure guide to some conclusions, we started with Freedom of Information requests to the state Comptroller's Office. We also could have sought the information from the agency that oversees local social service operations, but we decided that the Comptroller's Office, which had access to the same data, might be quicker and more responsive. As luck would have it, the Comptroller's administration changed hands early in the project—that's what happens when a Comptroller is convicted of fraud and resigns—and that sent us back to square one with the request for information.

While helpful, the new administration decided to bounce our public records requests off the lawyers. At that point, we were asking for foster care expenditures for specific psychotropic medications for every county in New York. The state lawyers determined that such a release of information for very small counties could be a HIPAA violation, possibly revealing which foster children were medicated, even though the records we'd receive would not contain names or other identifying information. We could have pursued a legal challenge to that decision, but we pared down the request because our focus was mostly our county. Ultimately, we sought the data for three New York counties, including our own, which had urban cores and hundreds of foster children. (The Comptroller's Office agreed that there was little chance of a HIPAA issue with this data.) We also sought a breakdown of statewide information.

The state was very helpful once we came to an agreement about what we could have, but a second round of records requests became necessary. While we'd done some homework about the world of psychotropic medications, we realized after our requests had been sent that we'd missed some drugs that had become more popular for depression and other uses in the past 18 months. (Lesson one: Start with interviews with psychiatrists and get their help with the current world of psychotropic medications.)

We went back with another round of public records requests and the state again complied. The data showed our county's rate of Medicaid expenditures for foster care psychotropic meds greatly outpacing

the state over a five-year period. One of the other two counties showed a rate of increase far less than ours, while the data for the other county in fact revealed an increase greater than ours.

This could have been a story by itself, but the data still left many questions unanswered. How many kids were getting the meds? Was the increase in that number—a far more telling and necessary figure—comparable to the growth of Medicaid expenditures?

We turned to the county to answer these questions and fine-tune the numbers. The county, to our pleasant surprise, was very helpful and responsive to our requests, and during much of 2007 we worked with them to get the data we needed. The county in fact supplied most of the specific information for our series. We needed to do very little heavy-lifting with the data in-house.

By using both the county and state, we also had a method to cross-check our information to ensure we were seeing similar Medicaid expenditures from both sources.

In particular, the data allowed us to see which drugs were most common (allowing us to highlight the prevalence of anti-psychotic prescriptions), to analyze how often very young children were prescribed psychotropic medications, and to determine the average number of meds prescribed per child. (On the latter question, our county fared well compared to other areas where questions have been raised about the prescription of multiple meds to foster children.)

There were bumps and dips along the way with the data gathering— too many to detail. But the most important part of the story was, of course, kids and their families. Numbers are crucial to show trends. But, ultimately, people matter most.

That led us to the next barrier—the privacy and secrecy of Family Court. We knew of the one case that started our investigation. And we learned from sources in the legal community who often practiced in Family Court about other foster care cases in which psychotropic medications had become an issue.

We pushed and prodded to determine who these families were, and then used the typical people-finding tools (AutoTrack, voter registration rolls, and, yes, a phonebook) to try to locate them. We had the names of birth parents in each case.

Our success was mixed. So we decided to see what Family Court records we might be able to access to help locate these individuals and to also learn more about the specifics of their cases. Most Family Court records are sealed in New York, but Family Court sessions are open. We approached court reporters about securing hearing transcripts in these cases, and they forwarded the request to the court clerk, who decided to leave the decision in the hands of judges. We researched New York State Family Court law; talked to New York's open records guru, Bob Freeman of the New York Department of State; and crafted a formal request in a letter for the hearing transcripts. At its core was the simple fact that the hearings had been open, and we could have sat in on any one of them. We also indicated that, should we locate these families, we would not use their names without their consent. With these assurances, a Family Court judge approved the release of hearing transcripts.

This information led us to a birth mother who had insisted that her 4-year-old son, who was in foster care, be taken off a prescription of Depakote, an anti-seizure medication now often used as a mood stabilizer. We also briefly profiled the story of a troubled teenager, now back with his mother, who had been on a regimen of five—and occasionally seven—psychotropic drugs while in foster care.

The stories also included the experts from scientific research fields and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration talking about the pros and cons of off-label medications and the possible long-term side effects of the drugs. This information was vital to suggest the dangers these children could face. We talked at length to an area psychiatrist who is hired by counties and some juvenile facilities for troubled children to try to reduce the reliance on psychotropic medications. Julie Zito at the University of Maryland has been contracted by localities and states to study whether too many meds have been prescribed to foster children, and her insight was very valuable for our stories. Also, testimony from congressional hearings about foster care directed us to several experts. The Government Accountability Office has studied federal efforts to encourage more research into the health effects of off-label meds on young children, and those studies, coupled with the FDA interviews, provided a view into the discussions about these issues at the federal level.

With investigative journalism we too often think the world is black and white, angels and evil-doers. But this issue—the prescription of psychotropic drugs for very troubled children—is not so clear-cut.

Shortly after my stories ran, I spent an hour on the telephone with a mother, as caring as any parent could be, whose teenage son had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder three years before. While that diagnosis can be challenged—given the surge in similar diagnoses in recent years—what she knew was that her son had been unmanageable, suicidal and had very nearly killed himself. His diagnosis led to a prescription of psychotropic medications, many which did not work, until one drug seemed to be at least the temporary solution. "Had it not been for off-label medications, my son would probably be dead," she said.

Some children, and especially foster children, are at risk for mental ailments that likely require medication. The tough question is whether the oversight is present in the foster care system to determine whether the drugs are properly prescribed and safe for use or instead used for behavioral control. We did not answer that question, but we did make sure that the question was asked. And that's often what our job is.

Gary Craig is a reporter for the Democrat and Chronicle in Rochester, N.Y. He is a past recipient of awards from National Headliners and Investigative Reporters and Editors.

Ben Gray | The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

In the last three decades, judicial oversight failed to prevent wide disparities in the use of capital punishment.

LIFE OR DEATH

AJC reviewed 1,315 cases to show impact of race, geography on death penalty

BY HEATHER VOGELL AND BILL RANKIN
THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

The idea for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution's* death penalty project, "A Matter of Life or Death," came to our legal affairs reporter a decade ago.

In 1997, Bill Rankin wrote a story about the 25th anniversary of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision *Furman v. Georgia*. *Furman* abolished the death penalty on the grounds that courts were carrying it out in an arbitrary manner. Getting a death sentence, Justice Potter Stewart noted, was cruel and unusual "in the same way that getting struck by lightning is cruel and unusual."

For his story Rankin interviewed an assistant attorney general who told him that the death penalty came down to community values. She compared it to sex shops; some communities allow them while others won't have anything to do with them.

Rankin knew the death penalty wasn't supposed to boil down to local political preferences. He also knew some extraordinarily vicious murders in Georgia hadn't elicited a death sentence, while other less aggravated killings—botched armed robberies, for instance—had. He wondered whether the legal reforms that *Furman* inspired had made Georgia's death penalty more evenhanded and uniform. The only way to know would be to examine the handling of every murder case that resulted in a conviction over a period of time.

In 2007, Rankin and a team of AJC reporters found the answer. More than two years of intense record-collecting and analysis showed that the state regularly failed to meet the bar it had set for fairness in capital cases. A painstaking review of the state's most brutal killings over a decade showed Georgia's death penalty remained arbitrary.

Last September, four days of stories bylined by Rankin, reporters Heather Vogell and Sonji Jacobs, data analyst Megan Clarke and researcher Alice Wertheim showed how similar crimes often did not receive similar treatment from Georgia's judicial system—even when death was at stake. We reported that murdering a white victim doubled a killer's chances of receiving the death penalty in Georgia. Also, counties applied the law so differently that, in one instance, a few miles difference in the location of the crime made a killer 13 times more likely to receive the death penalty. Factors such as race and geography proved more influential in murders involving a single victim and an armed robbery – a category that encompassed a third of all death-eligible murders in Georgia.

The series, edited by investigations editor Jim Walls, also showed how the Georgia Supreme Court had fumbled a key task: reviewing death sentences to make sure they were not disproportionate or out of line with punishment given for similar crimes. Since 1982, the court had repeatedly justified death

Pouya Dianat | The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Ben Gray | The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Marsinah Johnson (right) was tortured and shot to death in 1993. Her brothers (left) have watched the accused killer escape the death penalty twice. He was tried in two court circuits that were among the least likely in the state to use the death penalty, according to the AJC analysis

Pouya Dianat | The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Kevin Scott Brown died in a robbery at a pizza shop. His killer was one of 55 people convicted of murder in an armed robbery in 1995; only 16 defendants faced the death penalty, and only one was sentenced to die, highlighting the local differences in how capital punishment varies for a common crime.

sentences by citing similar death sentences that had already been overturned on appeal and not reinstated. The court had also failed to review similar cases that had ended in life sentences.

Reporting the series required a descent into a dark world of depravity—a world of child killers, rapists who tortured their prey, and spurned lovers whose cruelty surpassed horrific. In all, we gathered information on more than 2,300 murder convictions. For cases that were eligible for death, we catalogued details such as what weapon was used, whether co-defendants participated in the killing, whether drugs or a sex crime were involved, and whether police obtained a confession. We entered scores of facts about each case to create a database.

The data collection alone took more than a year, far longer than anticipated. Staff members came and went. The newsroom reorganized. Through it all, reporters and editors traveled to more than 100 county courthouses gathering case files.

When court records were scant, the newspaper filed Georgia Open Records Act requests with state and local law enforcement agencies, medical examiners' offices and district attorneys. When paper sources failed, reporters called people involved in the case.

Entering that information into our database presented its own challenge. Like most journalists, we were used to dealing with data that someone else has collected and categorized. We quickly found that with multiple people entering data from multiple sources there were all sorts of ways to interpret the database fields.

To prevent errors, we stayed in constant communication as we worked, checked each other's entries and met as a group to hash out disagreements over tricky classifications. We kept paper records of every fact in the database. We used Microsoft Access to find entry errors and, in some cases, manually pulled hundreds of files to re-check entries' consistency and accuracy. We sent district attorneys a list of key fields for each case in their circuit and asked them to fill in unknowns or suggest changes.

In the end, we identified 1,315 murder convictions that were eligible for the death penalty under Georgia law since 1997. We then used Microsoft Access and Excel to break down the data by circuit, year, prosecutor, crime, outcome, victim, and other characteristics.

"There's no Georgia capital punishment law," Paternoster said. "There's one [law] in one county, and in another county there's a totally different one."

We also consulted University of Maryland criminologist Ray Paternoster to help us develop a more sophisticated analysis of our data to test our findings. One of our main goals was to measure how consistently or inconsistently prosecutors handled similar death-eligible cases. But legitimate differences between cases—such as the presence of a confession or a heinous act such as a rape—could explain some of that variation.

We knew Paternoster belonged to a small, highly specialized group of criminologists nationwide who had used multiple regression analysis to control for case characteristics so they could look at how uniformly the death penalty was being applied. That approach could tell us how much geography and race were affecting Georgia offenders' chances of facing the death penalty. Paternoster crunched the numbers, took part in regular conference calls with us and wrote a report on what he found.

We also interviewed scores of investigators, defense lawyers, prosecutors, judges, jurors, academics and researchers who had studied the death penalty. We talked to the families of victims whose murders we were highlighting.

From the beginning, we planned to strike a balance between data reporting and narrative and anecdotal reporting. We kept a lookout for some of the most outrageous cases while doing mundane data collection, setting aside a specific field in our database to flag cases that really stood out. Some of those cases became the basis for an online quiz that ran the week before publication. Readers could guess whether a killing brought a death or life sentence and then clicked for the answer. Our series also included a story that detailed the legal snafus that allowed a gang leader who commanded two of the Atlanta area's most gruesome torture-killings to escape the death penalty—twice.

After we published, some state lawmakers talked about narrowing the state's death-penalty statute to allow district attorneys to seek death against fewer types of murders—in hopes of focusing on the "worst of the worst." There was also discussion about legislation that would allow district attorneys to seek a life-without-parole sentence for murder without having to seek the death penalty (now, they can't). As for the Georgia Supreme Court's sentence reviews, the state's chief justice announced the court had taken steps to improve its proportionality review in response to our questions about it.

Bill Rankin is The Atlanta Journal-Constitution's legal affairs reporter, covering the Georgia Supreme Court, the U.S. District Court and the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Heather Vogell is a reporter on the AJC's investigative team.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution's death penalty investigation won second place in the 2007 Philip Meyer Journalism Awards, recognizing outstanding use of social science research methods in journalism. Earlier *IRE Journal* articles about projects that went on to win 2007 Meyer Awards can be found in the Sept./Oct. 2007 issue ("Against the Odds" by Holly Hacker and Joshua Benton of *The Dallas Morning News)* and March/April 2007 ("Irked Consumers" by Mike Casey, Mark Morris and David Klepper of *The Kansas City Star).* The Meyer Awards are co-sponsored by IRE and NICAR, a joint program of IRE and the Missouri School of Journalism, and the Knight Chair in Journalism at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University.

FAIR PLAY

Colleges lag in policing performance-enhancing drugs

By Nate Carlisle, Michael C. Lewis and Tony Semerad
The Salt Lake Tribune

With all the focus on drug use by professional and Olympic athletes, Nate Carlisle and Scott Fontaine wondered what was happening in college sports. They planned an investigation expecting to find out how many elite college athletes were using performance-enhancing drugs. Instead, they found a system of disparities that makes it easier for drug cheats to go uncaught or unpunished.

Carlisle, a public safety reporter at *The Salt Lake Tribune*, was a fan of the reporting on the BALCO steroids scandal and thought there was more to report on drugs in sports. In October 2006, Fontaine was relocating after leaving a job as a sports reporter and copy editor at the *Albuquerque Journal*. He stopped in Salt Lake City to visit Carlisle, his old roommate from their undergraduate days at the University of Missouri, and soon they were exchanging ideas about public records requests for a story about college drug testing.

The NCAA depicts itself as having a thorough drug-testing system that is hard on offenders. Its published drug policy includes a long list of banned substances and warns that athletes can be tested at any time and that anyone testing positive is banned for one year. In testimony to Congress, the association also has said it spends $4 million a year on testing and collects urine samples from thousands of athletes.

But the reporters could not find data on what was happening at individual schools and decided to dig in that direction. Working in their personal time, Carlisle and Fontaine wrote public record requests asking for documents and data recorded since Jan. 1, 2004.

The requests were written into a form letter to save time. Then Carlisle and Fontaine compiled a database in Appleworks of public universities in the Bowl Championship Series—the football division with the country's biggest and most popular athletic departments—and their presidents to merge with the form later. Expecting a fight for records, the reporters divided the workload by state to minimize the research required on each state's public record laws.

The letters also told the schools they could redact or omit names of athletes caught using drugs. That reduced the fighting over privacy of student and health records while still providing a description of the testing. Carlisle and Fontaine asked recipients to supply data and documents in electronic format when possible.

Their requests included:

- accounting of all positive tests
- the punishments for those positive tests
- the school athletic department's drug-testing calendars and budget information
- bid information and audits for drug-testing contracts

The first requests went into the mail in January 2007. Some schools responded quickly and thoroughly. Carlisle and Fontaine were surprised to see many schools provided easily readable charts that were created by the laboratory hired to perform the urinalyses. When schools supplied only bulk data on positive tests, the reporters replied by asking for breakdowns of positives by substance and sport played.

The volume of requests required a high level of organization. Fields were added to the database to help track the requests, what records had been received and what schools required follow-up to spur compliance or gain more data.

Some schools refused to disclose any kind of information about positive tests. A lawyer for Indiana University responded that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act prohibited the school from disclosing any student educational record—even redacted—if disclosure might reveal personally identifiable information. The reporters challenged these assertions, but some universities, including Indiana, never supplied data on positives.

Story angles began to appear in the information. The NCAA arrived on campus once or twice a year to test about 30 athletes each time—out of a potential 300 athletes per campus—and anyone testing positive was subject to a one-year suspension. But further testing was left to the school, and there were big differences among the institutions' programs.

College drug-testing primer

The NCAA administers drug testing and individual universities administer drug testing. The Big Ten and Big 12 conferences also test athletes.

The NCAA tries to visit every Division I and Division II campus once a year and test about 15 athletes from two sports. If the campus has a football team, then it's always one of the teams tested. The Big Ten and Big 12 test in a similar fashion. The NCAA also tests a sample of athletes at championship events and football bowl games.

The NCAA and the two conferences test for street drugs and performance-enhancing drugs and masking agents. But there are no requirements for campus testing programs nor are universities even required to have one.

The NCAA makes annual disclosures of how many tests it has administered and how many athletes tested positive in those tests. Look on the association's Web site or contact its media relations office.

The World Anti-Doping Agency and the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency are resources for the most generally accepted list of performance-enhancing substances and testing protocols and controls.

Some experts in the field:

- Don Catlin, doping expert and former director of the UCLA testing laboratory
- Charles Yesalis, professor emeritus at Penn State University who specializes in doping studies
- Gary Wadler, medical doctor who has written extensively on drugs in sports
- Gary Gaffney, University of Iowa professor who has studied performance-enhancing drugs

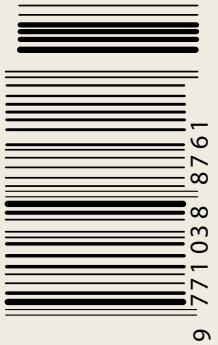
Institutional college drug testing

Many universities test entire sports teams at one time once a year, though they sometimes also test randomly. Here's a look at how the process typically works at the University of Utah:

1 The university hires an independent testing company, such as Occupational Health Care International. Players are notified 48 hours in advance of the mandatory test, to avoid giving too much opportunity to elude testing procedures. Anti-doping expert Don Catlin says even 24 hours' notice is too much. The head athletic trainer, head coach of the sports team being tested, and the assistant trainer assigned to monitor the testing session are usually the only people who know of the upcoming drug test before athletes are notified by their coach.

2 After a university athletic trainer takes attendance, athletes hang out in a training room waiting their turn. Usually, seniors get to go first, followed by juniors, and so forth. They typically do not leave, but occasionally are allowed to do so if they have class or other conflicts. They must return, though, and take the test.

3 The trainer verifies the identities of the athletes to prevent surrogates from taking tests in their place, and gives the athletes a form from the testing company that includes a bar code for help with identification. The trainer then accompanies athletes into an adjoining locker room – only three or four at a time, to avoid confusion.

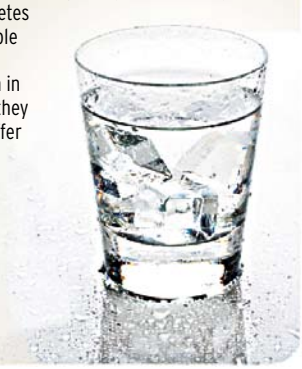


4 One at a time, athletes approach a "processor" from the testing laboratory and gives him or her their identification form. The processor then prints the player's name on the form and gives the athlete an empty sample cup. Meanwhile, other athletes wait their turn near the door.

5 A "collector" from the testing company accompanies the athlete into a urinal area or stall. There, the collector watches as the athlete urinates into the sample cup. Athletes – both male and female – must lower their pants below the buttocks area to ensure they're not hiding anything that could produce a corrupt sample. "Our job is to make sure the sample comes right from them," said Darron Kroll of Occupational Health Care International.

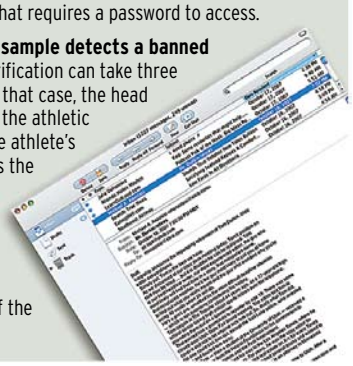
6 Accompanied by the collector, athletes return their sample to the processor. They stay to watch the processor divide the sample (only a small portion of the original sample is needed) and seal it in a cup within a plastic bag that includes identification with the athlete's name and code. Athletes must sign a form indicating they witnessed the sealing. Copies of the form are sent to the athlete, the university and the testing company.

7 With the test complete, athletes leave. The process can take as little as 20 minutes if an athlete is near the front of the line, or as long as 60 minutes if they're at the back or need longer to provide a sample. Sometimes, a few athletes cannot provide a sample right away, and they generally must remain in the testing area until they do. To help, trainers offer them water or soda to drink.

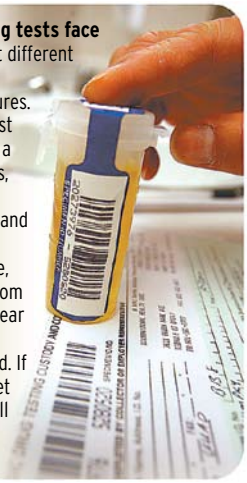


8 The samples remain with the processor until the end of the testing session, when they are returned to the laboratory and tested. Typically, clean results are known within 24 hours and communicated to the head trainer via private e-mail that requires a password to access.

If testing of a sample detects a banned substance, verification can take three or four days. In that case, the head trainer notifies the athletic director and the athlete's coach, who tells the athlete that he or she must meet with the head trainer to discuss the ramifications of the positive test.



9 Athletes who fail drug tests face different penalties at different schools, usually increasing in severity with subsequent failures. At Utah, athletes who fail a test for the first time must attend a counseling session on campus, pay its $50 fee (head coaches may discipline them further), and take another test four weeks later. If they fail a second time, they are declared ineligible from their sport for one calendar year and are subject to additional testing throughout that period. If they fail a third test, they meet with Athletic Director Chris Hill and face the loss of their scholarship.



Reporting by Michael C. Lewis, photos by Al Hartmann, graphic by Rhonda Hailes Maylett / *The Salt Lake Tribune*

Lab reports and vendor contracts demonstrated that many athletic departments were not testing for steroids and performance-enhancing drugs. For example, the University of Kansas did, but Kansas State University did not. And even the Jayhawks did not test for steroids every time. In all but a handful of cases, schools tested only for street drugs.

Some schools conducted several hundred tests a year and had six-figure testing budgets. Others collected a few dozen samples a year and spent a few thousand dollars. The University of Texas and Texas A&M University hired outside laboratories to conduct their testing. Texas Tech University had the campus hospital analyze its samples, which raised questions about conflicts of interest for the Red Raiders.

One of the most startling finds came from documents the reporters did not request. To demonstrate how athletes were disciplined, many schools sent their drug testing policies, which outlined standardized punishments for positives. Only a handful of universities suspended athletes the first time they tested positive in a campus-administered drug screening. Suspensions are a cornerstone of testing programs in other leagues, but the most common punishment for a first-time drug offense at the universities was notifying the athlete's parents and ordering the athlete to counseling or substance-abuse education.

This was a stark contrast to the picture painted by the NCAA.

In June, the reporters decided it was time to pitch a story. Carlisle went to his editors at *The Tribune*. They were enthused. The newspaper hired Fontaine, who had joined the *Tacoma* (Wash.) *News Tribune* on a freelance basis. The editors also assigned staff reporter Michael C. Lewis, a longtime college sports reporter who covered doping in the buildup to the 2002 Winter Olympics held in Salt Lake City.

There was one catch: Lewis and *Tribune* editors wanted to send the requests to the remaining schools in Division I-A college athletics—the football bowl division—and to additional universities in Utah, making a total of 122 schools. They thought a larger sample would illuminate trends and allow for more comparisons among drug-testing programs.

Newsroom clerks were assigned to help enter the new schools into the database and mail the new batch of letters. (Private universities were asked to volunteer the documents. None did.) Clerks also helped the reporters input the school data when it arrived. Computer-assisted reporting editor Tony Semerad used MySQL to move the database to Web sites that could be accessed anywhere.

In September and October, the participating staff members entered data in spare moments between daily assignments and other chores. Carlisle was entering data from his motel room while waiting for the jury to return in the trial of polygamist sect leader Warren Jeffs.

As they entered their share of data, Carlisle and Lewis made notes of examples that needed to be highlighted in the story package, such as how the University of Oklahoma and UNLV traded testing services to companies in exchange for game tickets, another conflict of interest.

Carlisle and Lewis set off interviewing people about drug testing. They toured a Salt Lake City laboratory accredited by the World Anti-Doping Agency to learn how the more reputable testing programs are conducted. (No universities use the laboratory.) The reporters interviewed athletes, athletic directors, trainers and university administrators to learn about their campus' testing and why it operates as it does.

In most cases, campus officials said it would be too expensive to conduct hundreds of steroids tests every year. A steroids analysis costs about $150 while laboratory testing for only street drugs can be had for $25. Northern Illinois University used $12 over-the-counter testing kits to screen its athletes for street drugs.

University personnel also defended the dearth of automatic suspensions by saying they wanted to know more about the circumstances of each athlete's positive test.

The outside doping experts we interviewed were versed in testing at the professional and Olympic ranks but knew much less about college testing. They were surprised when we showed them the lack of controls and lack of accountability. They lambasted the conflicts of interest in the testing, the lack of deterrence and the schools' concerns for cost.

The reporters also sought an athlete who failed a test to tell his or her story. (Schools almost never disclose who tested positive.) They used clues in the documents to identify likely suspects and placed messages in steroids chat rooms asking for volunteers.

Not being able to name an athlete who failed a test was a big disappointment to the reporters. They settled for publishing a sidebar on athletes' views on drug testing.

Semerad and the *Tribune*'s Web staff scanned the hardcopy documents into PDFs and built a searchable Web site to host all the data and augment what appeared in the morning newspaper.

The investigation was published Nov. 18. The main story appeared on the front page and discussed what the records demonstrated and the schools' and observers' explanations. There was a story on the front of the sports section about schools in Utah.

After publication, the director of the National Center For Drug Free Sport, the NCAA's drug-testing vendor, wrote an op-ed column for the newspaper in which he did not dispute the *Tribune*'s findings but lauded the NCAA's testing program. A few newspapers localized the investigation by reporting on how their local universities test for drugs, which makes Carlisle and Fontaine think someone heard their complaints about the lack of investigating.

The drug-testing package—including documents provided by schools, correspondence with the schools and a copy of the *Tribune*'s standardized record request—is online at www.sltrib.com/drugtesting. Tip sheets from the investigation are available at IRE.org.

Nate Carlisle has reported on crime and public safety at the Salt Lake Tribune since 2005. Michael Lewis has covered sports at the Salt Lake Tribune since 1993, primarily college football and basketball. Tony Semerad, computer-assisted reporting editor at the Tribune, has worked in daily journalism in the West since 1986.

FOI Files

GOOD NEWS FOR FOIA

Recent update covers private contractors, attorney fees and more

By Charles N. Davis
Executive Director, National Freedom of Information Coalition

On New Year's Eve, President Bush gave access advocates a little belated Christmas present, signing a series of amendments to the federal Freedom of Information Act that many of us in the access community—myself included—had given up hope on.

In the immediate aftermath of the signing, open government advocates hailed the passage of the first amendments to FOIA in a decade, a series of largely procedural steps intended to improve government responsiveness to information requests and to strengthen the hand of requesters.

Others were less cheery, noting that FOIA is in need of a structural overhaul.

I don't disagree, but let's not lose sight of the significance of what has been accomplished here, lest we downplay a signal moment of bipartisan support for the principle of government transparency.

The OPEN Government Act, which Congress passed Dec. 18, was co-sponsored by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and John Cornyn (R-Texas). Rep. William Lacy Clay (D-Mo.), Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.) and Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) led passage in the House.

In the political schism that is Washington, if the OPEN Government Act accomplished nothing beyond a symbolic agreement that open government is a good thing, I'd be as discouraged as some of the legislative critics.

But that's simply not the case. The OPEN Government Act is full of good news, from its language restoring meaningful deadlines for agency action under FOIA to the imposition of real consequences for federal agencies missing FOIA's 20-day statutory deadline for responding to requests.

The amendments also contain useful language making it clear that FOIA applies to government records held by outside private contractors. The establishment of a FOIA hotline service for all federal agencies should pay dividends immediately, as any frequent records requester can attest to the runaround they face.

To gauge my optimism, I turned to the experts on federal FOIA, who made me feel even better.

Steven Aftergood, director of the Federation of American Scientists Project on Government Secrecy and the force behind *Secrecy News*, an award-wining electronic newsletter on all things clandestine, said that while the OPEN Government Act does not open any documents currently closed under FOIA, it does provide meaningful procedural changes.

"The new FOIA law is entirely good," Aftergood said in an e-mail response. "It doesn't do anything bad. It makes several useful procedural changes that will help both ordinary requesters (e.g., in helping to track requests) and hard-core FOIA litigators (e.g., making it easier to get attorneys' fees). So it's a genuine positive accomplishment."

Dan Metcalfe, faculty fellow in law and government at the Washington College of Law at American University and executive director of the Collaboration on Government Secrecy, said in an e-mail that the new legislation might be a harbinger of greater things to come.

"It's quite noteworthy that in the 'findings' part of the legislation, Congress spoke of the need to 'determine whether further changes' to the Act are necessary," Metcalfe said. "When taken together with the explicit statements made by both Chairman Leahy and Chairman Waxman about the need for 'more reforms,' it suggests that Congress might soon break the mold of the FOIA's 10-year amendment cycle."

Metcalfe, the former director of the Office of Information and Privacy at the U.S. Department of Justice, sponsored a panel discussion on the OPEN Government Act on Jan. 16, in which the changes to the attorneys' fees provision raised spirited discussion.

Harry Hammitt, editor of the influential FOIA newsletter *Access Reports*, said that Section 4 of the act, which restores the previous status quo on attorneys' fees awards that existed before the Supreme Court's decision in *Buckhannon Board & Care Home v. West Virginia Dept of Health and Human Resources*, is perhaps the most important change.

Buckhannon had required a court order changing the legal relationship between the parties to qualify a plaintiff as having "substantially prevailed"—meaning that winning FOIA litigants seldom if ever met the standard.

Previously under FOIA case law, an intervening event—in the case of FOIA litigation, most often further voluntary disclosure on the part of the agency—was adequate to qualify the requester for attorneys' fees as the prevailing party.

The OPEN Government Act amendments clarify that *Buckhannon* does not apply to FOIA cases, and, instead, a plaintiff is eligible for fees if he or she obtains relief.

"I think the final provisions restore the catalyst theory—that filing the suit caused the favorable end result whether or not it was achieved by a court decision," Hammitt said.

One of Washington's best FOIA lawyers, Thomas Susman, a partner in the Washington offices of Ropes & Gray, is enthused about the provision creating the Office of Government Information Services at the National Archives.

"I think the OGIS holds the potential to be the most important advancement in access to information in the U.S. since the 1974 amendments," Susman said. "A FOIA ombudsman could help requesters and agencies alike avoid litigation and contention, and could provide a continuing process oversight that Congress has never been willing or able to provide. The key will be that Office's being given adequate resources, establishing reasonable procedures and priorities, and gaining the respect and confidence of both agencies and requesters—no small feats, those."

While the amendments don't change a word of the FOIA's exemptions, nor overrule the infamous "Ashcroft memo" overturning the presumption of openness that held sway under Janet Reno's Justice Department, it still contains much to cheer about. There's much work to be done, however, to address the next great reforms: narrowing the FOIA's exemptions and providing access to a greater range of documents.

Charles N. Davis is an associate professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and the executive director of the National Freedom of Information Coalition, headquartered at the School.

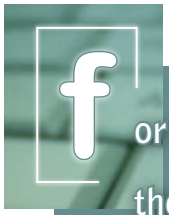
As alternative investigative formats multiply, they force journalists to reconsider how the Big Story reads, sounds and streams in multimedia, and how data morphs into information designed to be shared. Technology is opening the door for collaboration with readers and viewers and for new types of public-interest journalism springing from nonprofits with ambitious online content.

Here's a look at projects that fuse traditional investigative reporting goals and values with innovations driven by the Web.

consider the alternative

Independence and innovation drive nonprofits' work

By Brant Houston
University of Illinois



For investigative journalists leaving the mainstream media, the next best reporting option used to be taking a job at a local alternative weekly.

But the alternative now includes working for nonprofit investigative journalism centers and groups—often Web-based—where journalists are carrying out some of the most in-depth investigations in the U.S. and throughout the world.

Over the past decade, the nonprofits have probed (and often won awards) for a wide range of work that includes stories on war profiteering, government secrecy, judges' malfeasance, tobacco smuggling, pollution by multinational corporations, money and influence in politics, Latino gangs in prisons, factory workers deaths and injuries and the privatization of water.

(For more on nonprofits' work and their importance, see this article by Charles N. Lewis at www.cjr.org/feature/the_nonprofit_road.php)

Journalists working for nonprofits generally enjoy the advantage of not having to cover a beat or do daily coverage, although that may be changing. (See the Sunlight Foundation story on p. 20.) Nonprofits also receive private funding that supports or encourages digging into particular issues or outrages.

Because they are not weighed down by wide-ranging responsibilities and expectations of major newspapers or the periodic ratings "sweeps" of broadcast stations, the nonprofits have the opportunity to be more flexible in weaving new technology into their work—and they have been quick to adopt the use of blogs, wikis and multimedia presentations.

New and old outlets

The Center for Investigative Reporting, (http://centerforinvestigativereporting.org) founded in 1977, and the Center for Public Integrity (www.publicintegrity.org), founded in 1985, have long track records for outstanding investigative work in the U.S. and abroad. (Both have been multiple IRE award winners.) Because they are not typical newsrooms and have no traditional outlet, both organizations have produced stories with an eye to print, broadcast and Web presentation and have added blogs and other Web tools to their sites.

Now a slew of other ventures have joined them.

In 2006, the World Security Institute formed the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting (www.pulitzercenter.org) with a specific focus on international reporting. It makes travel grants to both freelance and mainstream journalists for enterprise and investigative work. For example, longtime investigative journalist Loretta Tofani recently completed a series on the exploitation of Chinese factory workers.

While Pro Publica and its high goals have captured attention, there are numerous local efforts underway. Many of the community efforts are funded by the James L. and John S. Knight Foundation through challenge grants or outright grants to organizations that may distribute the money for new efforts.

Also in 2006, a nonprofit called the Center for Independent Media (www.newjournalist.org) was formed and called in longtime investigative and database journalist Steve Doig to run day-long sessions in which he covered basic investigative techniques, ethics and computer-assisted reporting. Doig, who is a Knight Chair at Arizona State University and a former IRE board member, notes that the center has created "blogging collectives" in five states and, although most stories concentrate on political issues, there is an investigative edge to more than a few of those stories.

The most publicized new venture is Pro Publica, which, as of this writing, is still assembling its 24 staff members, mostly from the mainstream press. Pro Publica is funded with $10 million a year from the Sandler Foundation with support from other donors including the Atlantic Philanthropies, the JEHT Foundation, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Declaring that investigative reporting is at risk, Pro Publica aims to "focus exclusively on truly important stories, stories with 'moral force.' We will do this by producing journalism that shines a light on exploitation of the weak by the strong and on the failures of those with power to vindicate the trust placed in them." The group says it intends to collaborate with mainstream media partners as other nonprofits have done over the years.

One conduit for the Knight support is the J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism (www.j-lab.org), run by Jan Schaffer, who is well-known for her work in civic journalism. J-Lab funds efforts using new techniques for community coverage on the Web, which sometimes runs into the investigative realm. One case is "The Great Lakes Wiki" (www.greatlakeswiki.org), run by Michigan State University students and faculty with the goal of collecting and sharing information about the region. Although there is a broad range of information being shared on the environment and the Great Lakes, it doesn't take long to see entries probing pollution and controversial government actions.

Academic centers

In fact, nonprofits and universities are playing a greater role in investigative journalism with the help

of donors. In just the past few years, donations have created investigative centers at several schools.

In 2004, the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism (www.brandeis.edu/investigate) was founded at Brandeis University. Former *Wall Street Journal* reporter Florence Graves heads its work focusing on political and social justice, gender issues and an innocence project on wrongful convictions. (Innocence projects, which are truly investigative in nature, have increased in number throughout the U.S. since the inspiring work of investigative journalist and professor David Protess and his students at Northwestern University.)

In 2006, the Toni Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism opened at Columbia University with the goal of training students to be investigative journalists. It is now run by Sheila Coronel, who was director of the Philippines Center for Investigative Journalism.

More recently, journalist Asra Nomani, who was a friend and colleague of Daniel Pearl, began the Pearl Project at Georgetown University in which she and students are backgrounding and revealing the terrorist cells involved in Pearl's death. (See p. 29)

And in just the last few months, the Chauncey Bailey Project brought together many media organizations and journalism groups based in and around Oakland, Calif., including the University of California at Berkeley. The journalists are pursuing stories that extend murdered *Oakland Post* editor Chauncey Bailey's probe into organized crime and public corruption in Oakland. (The project was profiled in the Jan./Feb. 2008 issue of *The IRE Journal*.)

Outside of the U.S., the growth of nonprofit journalism endeavors has skyrocketed. Since 2001, the number of nonprofit centers has more than doubled—from 15 to 37, according to a recent report by investigative reporter David Kaplan (www.ned.org/cima/CIMA-Investigative_Journalism_Report.pdf).

International impact

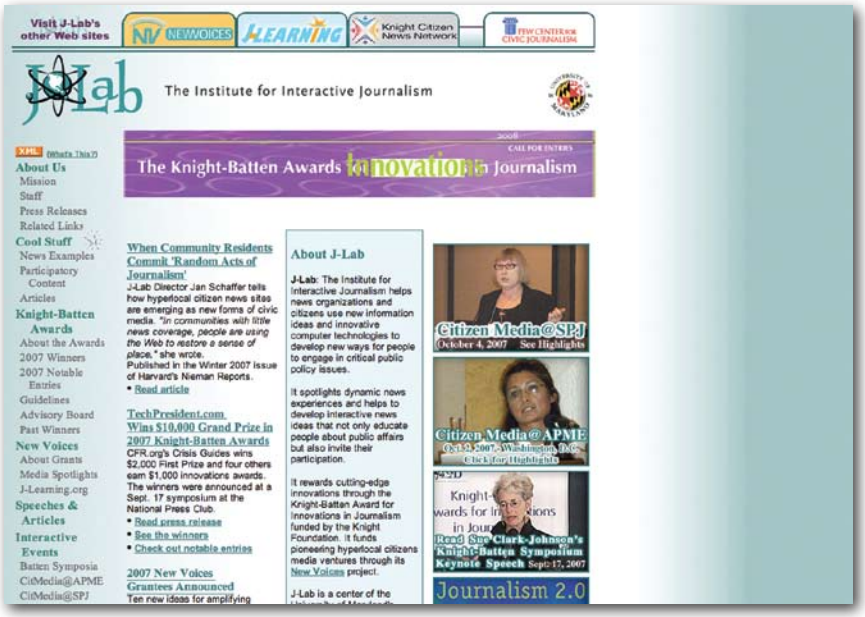
As noted above, the Web and its new tools are allowing the nonprofits not only to do traditional investigative journalism but also to advance into new realms in which its scope can easily be both local and international.

A good example of that work is the nonprofit Farmsubsidy.org, which won an IRE Freedom of Information Award last year. Coordinators of the Web site have methodically sought data from each country in the European Union to show where agricultural subsidies are going. Farmsubsidy.org posts the data online and works with other journalists to develop stories, including reports on how subsidies help multinational corporations to undercut prices in developing countries and how wealthy citizens and politicians receive subsidies for land they never farm.

Another example of nonprofits doing international investigations are the stories by the Center for Investigative Reporting in Bosnia, which won plaudits for exposing corruption that led to soaring utility rates.

Add all these nonprofit investigations up—both local and international—and it may be that Pro Publica soon will have to modify its pronouncement and say that investigative journalism was *once* at risk.

Brant Houston, former executive director of IRE, is the Knight Chair in Investigative & Enterprise Reporting at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign where he is a professor and teaches investigative reporting.



real-time watchdogs

Sunlight Foundation bloggers chip away at government secrets

By Bill Allison
The Sunlight Foundation

A member of Congress secures a $2 million earmark for a campaign contributor committing the Army to buy its product—but the Army has yet to even informally test that product.

Federal law requires companies seeking contracts with the aid of lobbyists to file a standard form showing that they are getting help from the lobbyist. But no agency in Washington can produce that form because most agencies don't collect it, and if they do, they won't give it up.

Meanwhile, federal agencies dare to tell members of Congress they need to file Freedom of Information Act requests to get information on the controversial military contractor Blackwater—although Congress itself approves the budget for those contracts.

These are just a few of the disclosures my colleague Anupama Narayanswamy and I have come across since our employer, the Sunlight Foundation, launched the Real Time Investigations blog (http://realtime.sunlightprojects.org) in December.

It's a blog on which we post everything from short entries noting anomalies in federal contracting data to updates on FOIA requests to actual investigative stories tracking the influence of private interests on public policies.

Making government more transparent by making government data more accessible to citizens and journalists alike is the goal of Sunlight, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization launched in April 2006.

Digitizing transparency

Our principal focus is Congress, and our principal means of fostering transparency is by digitizing government data—whether it's lobbyist disclosure forms, federal contracts, grants, earmarks or campaign contributions—making it fully searchable and freely available on the Internet. We have a staff of roughly 20, including a core group of savvy Web developers and data specialists who not only figure out how to make, say, an earmark database, but also how to integrate that information (or "mash it up," in Web parlance) with campaign contributions, lobbyist disclosures and federal contracting data.

Through its grants, Sunlight also supports a number of like-minded groups including:

- The venerable organizations like the Center for Responsive Politics, the premier source for campaign finance and lobbying information on the Web (and publisher of the OpenSecrets.org Web site).
- Upstarts like the Worcester, Mass.-based Participatory Politics Foundation, which runs OpenCongress.org, a site that puts information derived from the Library of Congress's Thomas Web site right alongside newsfeeds and blog posts to show what's happening in Congress now, who's reporting on it and who's commenting on it.
- OMB Watch, a longtime group that promotes government accountability, whose grant helped create FedSpending.org, which for the first time put all federal contracts and grants online in a searchable form.

Blogging data connections

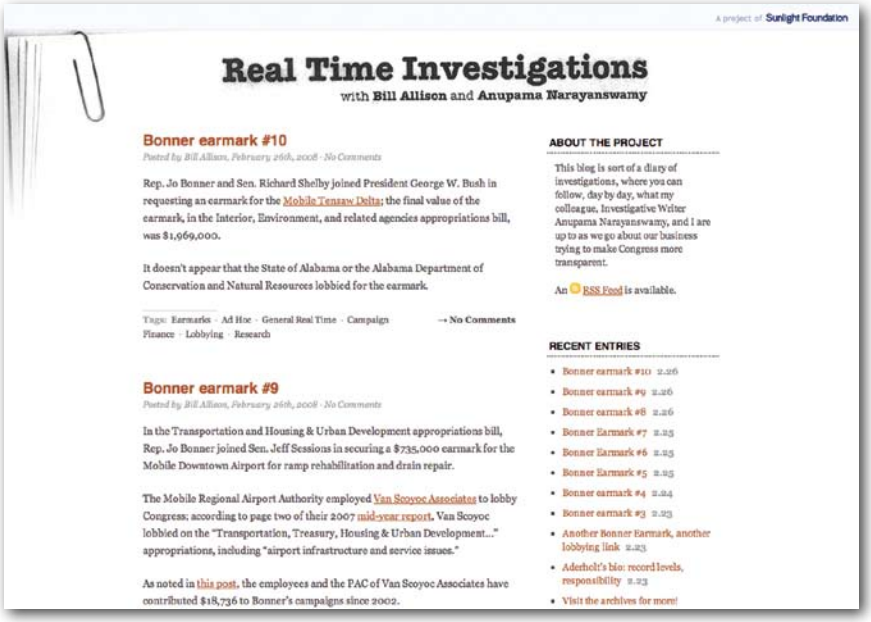
But like our more computer-capable colleagues at Sunlight, Narayanswamy and I are trying to use the Web to shed more light on what Congress does. We want to show what can be gleaned from all the federal data and information posted on the Web.

Our work includes some fairly intensive projects. Beginning in March 2007, Narayanswamy started sending Freedom of Information Act requests to roughly 120 federal agencies each month, requesting electronic logs of correspondence to and from members of Congress. Our goal is to get agencies used to releasing this information to the public and, once we've gotten enough responses in more or less compatible formats, to build a fully searchable database.

The database would allow anyone to look up interactions between lawmakers and the executive branch. For the first time, reporters and the public would be able to get a sense of how members of Congress exercise their oversight responsibilities and how much effort their offices devote to constituent services.

As we've worked on this daunting project (and a handful of others we've got going concurrently), we've found time to write fairly regular posts on Real Time Investigations about the effort. We put up raw data, including copies of the correspondence logs as we get them, and write about the interesting things we've found in them. As software engineers who use their own company's products say, "We eat our own dog food."

In addition to the issues noted earlier, we've looked into everything from the denial of black lung benefits to coal miners and their spouses to alleged defense contractor malfeasance. We have asked whether the correspondence from Congress reflected actual problems with agencies or pressure from Congress members themselves on behalf of special interests. And we've occasionally found some insights into



how government actually works (or doesn't).

For example, Narayanswamy noticed that some Defense Department logs showed congressional inquiries about Blackwater USA, the controversial security firm that guards primarily State Department officials in Iraq. According to the logs, some nine months before the company made headlines for its involvement in a street shootout that left 17 Iraqis dead, members of Congress wrote to the State and Defense departments expressing concern about the firm's performance in Iraq and seeking more information.

Narayanswamy made a few calls to the members who wrote the letters. What made them curious about Blackwater? Did they get the information they requested? She found a few staffers who were willing to answer her questions: the members, who wrote because of constituent concerns and media reports, never got the documents they wanted, in part because the Pentagon told them they would have to make separate requests for Blackwater documents to each of the contracting offices within the Defense Department.

One congressional staffer even hopefully asked Narayanswamy for tips on how to write a successful FOIA request.

Sadly, we haven't been overwhelmingly successful in that regard—something else we occasionally document on the blog. In our monthly requests, fewer than five agencies give us the information in the format we request it. Some, like the International Trade Commission, keep track of their correspondence using—literally—pen and paper, and send us hand-written logs of congressional correspondence.

As for those agencies that use modern technology, there's a wide range of interpretation about what constitutes "electronic" disclosure. The Air Force had no trouble e-mailing us spreadsheets, ready to upload, and we posted them online as we got them.

On the other hand, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, which also uses spreadsheets to log correspondence, prints out hundreds of pages from its electronic files, scans these pages to produce unsearchable image files, then burns them onto a CD-ROM that they mail to us.

In one blog post, I not only explained how we converted this mess back into tab-delimited data almost suitable for publication (sadly, some data was garbled), but I also took a look at what issues were most on the minds of members of Congress when they wrote to the Defense Secretary. The most popular topic? "Travel request."

New document trails for journalists

One of my quests at Sunlight has been tracking down the elusive standard form LLL. A 1989 law requires an organization that pays lobbyists to help secure federal contracts or grants to file these one-page disclosure forms. Given that the federal government has awarded something like $16.8 trillion to companies, state and local governments, nonprofits, universities and others since 2000, I figured it would be useful to know what percentage of that amount was awarded with the benefit of special pleading and influence.

The interesting thing I found—and wrote about extensively on Real Time—is that it appears that almost no government agencies collect this document, let alone make it available to the public (so much for disclosure). Though dozens of lobbyists helped Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin secure the Coast Guard's Deepwater project contract, the Coast Guard never asked for an SF-LLL from either company. An Army procurement official had never heard of the form. A procurement official for Transportation claimed that they did ask for SF-LLL but kept them under lock and key.

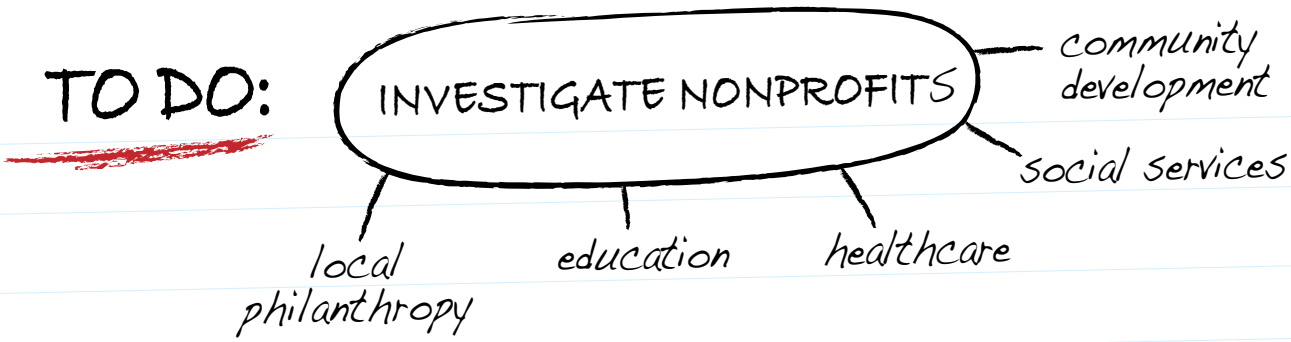
In addition to eating our own dog food, we also feast off the crème brulèe dished out by Sunlight's grantees. Taxpayers for Common Sense posts all the congressional earmarks in all of the appropriations and authorization bills on its Web site. Narayanswamy investigated two from the Defense Appropriations Act that Rep. Harold Rogers, R-Ky., bestowed upon one company, Phoenix Products, whose proprietors were longtime campaign donors. From some of the resources our grantees put online, she also discovered the proprietors donated to Rogers' leadership PAC, had hired lobbyists including one of Rogers' former congressional aides, and quadrupled their federal business—after they hired lobbyists and contributed to campaigns.

The kicker was an e-mail she got from an Army spokesman, who told her they'd yet to fully test the company's product—even though they would now have to buy $3.6 million worth of it.

Using data from Sunlight's grantees can lead to some pretty quick posts on the blog. In between other duties, I took a 20-minute spin through the lists of top donors to presidential campaigns provided by the Center for Responsive Politics. Employees of Goldman Sachs, which lobbies on everything from subprime mortgages and taxes to immigration and foreign trade, were the most generous donors to both former Gov. Mitt Romney, a Republican, and Democratic Sen. Barack Obama. They were also the second most generous donor to Sen. Hillary Clinton's campaign, and number five for both former Sen. John Edwards and Sen. John McCain. I dashed off a post and followed up with a look at Citigroup, another financial giant whose employees are among the most generous contributors to the presidential campaigns of Democrats Clinton, Obama and Edwards and to Republicans Romney, Giuliani and McCain.

While there are more tools online for following the money than ever before (and Sunlight is currently developing new ones, including a Web-based application called Lawmaker Profiler), there's a greater need for journalists to chew through that data and quickly extract useful information from it—and no better a medium for chowing down on it than the Web.

Bill Allison is a senior fellow at the Sunlight Foundation. Before joining Sunlight, he worked for the Center for Public Integrity for nine years, where he co-authored "The Cheating of America" with Charles Lewis and was co-editor of The New York Times best-seller "The Buying of the President 2004."



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critical mass

Crowdsourcing projects evolve at NewsAssignment.net

By John McQuaid

Ethan Hova, an actor by trade, developed a knack for investigative digging as a volunteer for the Huffington Post's OffTheBus a "crowdsourced" campaign journalism project. Poring over Federal Election Commission campaign expenditure reports as part of an assignment, Hova discovered that Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney was spending lots of money in Iowa on "GOTV [get-out-the-vote] consulting"—more specifically, the kind of controversial "walking around money" usually associated with the election day turnout campaigns of urban Democrats.

Hova teamed up with Thomas B. Edsall, the veteran political reporter and HuffPo writer, to report on **Romney's unconventional spending**. (See list of Web links for phrases in bold.)

"In just three months—April, May and June—the Romney campaign paid a total of $208,874.19 to 68 individuals for GOTV consulting," they reported last July. A few months later, Hova took the lead among dozens of volunteers to dissect the **impact of Bill Clinton's fundraising** on Hillary Clinton's campaign. Their report, done in collaboration with New York's WNYC radio, used FEC data to show the many ways that the former president's political reach exceeds his wife's with the party's power brokers.

OffTheBus is one of three crowdsourcing journalism projects done under the auspices of **NewAssignment.net**, a nonprofit experiment created in 2006 by New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen. Crowdsourcing is the use of

large networks of volunteers—typically connected by Internet or cell phones—to gather information. Depending on the nature of the task, the "crowd" can collectively find out more information faster than a lone journalist can by contacting individuals. The idea behind OffTheBus was to harness the potential of online social networking for journalism—and from the beginning, it was a clash of two worlds.

No longer alone

Many journalists (especially, it should be noted, investigative reporters) tend to labor alone, working sources by phone, e-mail or in person, sorting through documents in courthouses or agency offices, to put a story together. That's still mostly the case, even though we're in the middle of a digital transformation where many people are constantly plugged into Internet- or cellular-based networks of friends and people with shared interests.

The emergence of specialty blogs on law, economics, science and other topics, written by professionals for their peers and a broader audience, hint at the potential for online networking and investigative journalism, as do the cell phone photos that now routinely pop up live from disaster scenes. If journalists could tap regularly into networks of volunteers and experts, it could be a powerful, possibly transformative, tool for the profession.

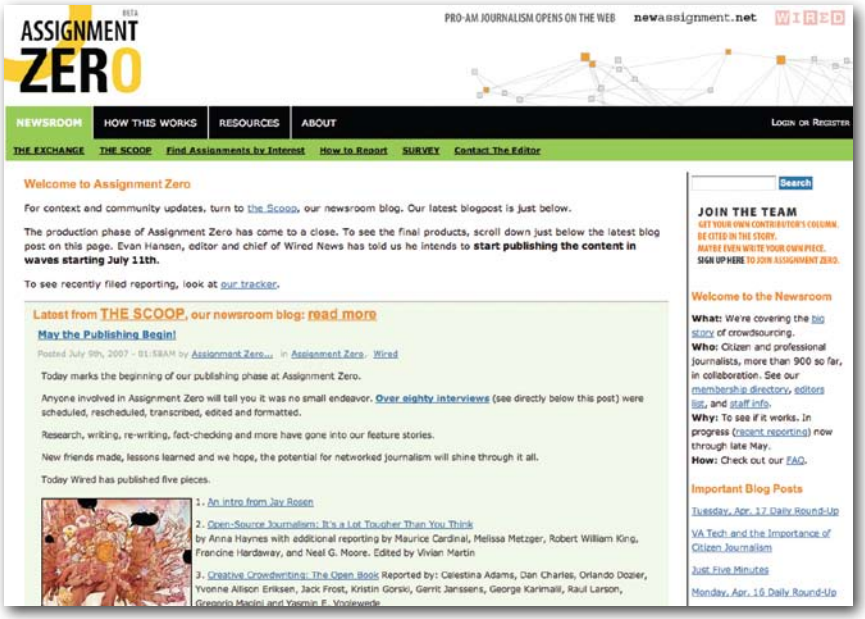
Rosen's experiment has produced some promising, if not exactly revolutionary, results. New Assignment has run three major projects so far. The basic formula is simple: New Assignment is a nonprofit funded by grants (from Reuters, among others) and it partners with established media organizations, teaming up professional journalists with volunteers, providing technical and editorial support.

New Assignment has an interesting intellectual pedigree. Rosen once was a major advocate of public journalism, the 1990s movement favoring issue-based journalism projects with lots of public input and good-government themes. New Assignment also stresses transparency over traditional journalistic political agnosticism; Rosen says everyone at New Assignment tries to be fair, but they don't have to hide their own leanings as mainstream reporters do. For example, the social networking phenomenon draws on the ranks of Democratic organizers; Amanda Michel, the director of OffTheBus, is a former Internet coordinator for Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign.

Pro-am growing pains

New Assignment has had no trouble finding news outlets interested in collaborating, and hundreds of volunteers have joined up. But the challenge is getting them working together in a way that produces interesting, new and presentable information for an audience. The single biggest hurdle is how to wrangle large groups of "citizen journalists."

"There's the 10 percent rule," Rosen says. "Of all the people who might use your product, about 10 percent are able or willing to be involved in production of some kind, from comments on the site to reporting, to sifting information. Within that, about 1 percent are able and willing to be good contributors on a professional level. Our experience has proven the 10 percent rule seems to hold across a lot of contexts."



WEB SOURCES

OffTheBus:
www.huffingtonpost.com/off-the-bus

"Romney Buys Conservatives":
www.huffingtonpost.com/2007/07/26/thomas-b-edsall-ethan-h_n_58040.html

"Bill Clinton: Hillary's Rainmaker":
www.huffingtonpost.com/off-the-bus-reporter/bill-clinton-hillarys-r_b_73419.html

New Assignment:
www.newassignment.net

Assignment Zero:
http://zero.newassignment.net

BeatBlogging.org:
www.beatblogging.org

New Assignment's first project, **Assignment Zero**, was both experimental and improvisational. The task was sprawling: to help Wired.com writer Jeff Howe uncover trends in crowdsourcing across the cultural landscape, in movies, politics, art, religion, law and business. Some criticized this theme for being both overly broad and self-referential.

And indeed, the results were erratic.

Some topic areas bloomed with new information. Others remained disorganized. By the time the project concluded last spring, the original goals weren't reached. "In the 12 weeks the project was open to the public, it suffered from haphazard planning, technological glitches and a general sense of confusion among participants," Howe wrote in a Wired.com post-mortem titled "Did Assignment Zero Fail?"

"Crucial staff members were either forced out or resigned in mid-stream, and its ambitious goal—to produce 'the most comprehensive knowledge base to date on the scope, limits and best practices of crowdsourcing'—had to be dramatically curtailed in order to yield some tangible results when Assignment Zero ended on June 5."

But Howe, Rosen and other participants concluded it was a useful learning experience, with some hits amid the misses. The project finally hit a stride, for example, when volunteers interviewed more than 80 people on the various frontiers of social networking, then transcribed and ultimately posted the content.

OffTheBus has a different and in some ways even broader focus. But the presidential campaign and social networking fit together well, and there are plenty of political junkies eager to report. OffTheBus also fits well into the liberal Huffington Post's expanding political coverage, which includes a team of professional campaign reporters led by veteran Thomas B. Edsall.

Some coverage is straight reportage from the campaign trail, with blogging, photos or video. Mixed in are longer analytical and investigative pieces requiring the kind of "pro-am" collaboration between experienced journalists and groups of volunteers that New Assignment strives for. On the Romney story, for example, Rosen said, "we found people willing to help, and organized them into teams, and found motivated people to oversee the teams. But we didn't necessarily have the background knowledge to know what's important. So they worked with Tom Edsall. By basically having him say, 'that's a story, that's not a story,' we were able to develop a piece."

Encouraged by that success, OffTheBus participants decided to pursue the more ambitious Clinton story. Forty-four people shared credit on the story, which was written by volunteer Daniel Nichanian, a student at Yale.

"This model does bode well for investigative journalism," says director Michel. "There is a real opportunity for the public and journalists to work together, and those are the kinds of pieces in the project that we feel are of highest quality and are most satisfying to the members. These are people who like to dig, like puzzles, like the process."

The latest project, **BeatBlogging.org**, brings a much tighter focus. Thirteen news organizations will try to build social networks of sources and experts around reporters on specific beats. At *The San Jose Mercury News*, it's the green energy beat; at *The Dallas Morning News*, schools; at ESPN, the NBA. Reporters, editors and technical people will create an online forum and invite some people to participate. Then, they hope, networking will ensue, complete with discussions, sharing of information and opinion, and story tips.

"Assignment Zero, for example, it had its up and downs; it worked in lots of areas but not in others," says David Cohn, the New Assignment editor overseeing the project. "This is starting smaller and growing much more organically … this is about growing those sources and taking traditional communication between reporter and source and using network effects."

John McQuaid, a freelance writer, is a contributing editor to NewAssignment.net and blogs on the Huffington Post. He is also co-author, with Mark Schleifstein, of "Path of Destruction: The Devastation of New Orleans and the Coming Age of Superstorms."

The emergence of specialty blogs on law, economics, science and other topics, written by professionals for their peers and a broader audience, hint at the potential for online networking and investigative journalism, as do the cell phone photos that now routinely pop up live from disaster scenes. If journalists could tap regularly into networks of volunteers and experts, it could be a powerful, possibly transformative, tool for the profession.

web vision

The best online projects do more than repackage print

By Aron Pilhofer and Brian Hamman
The New York Times

PolitiFact isn't your typical newspaper Web site.

Created by the *St. Petersburg Times*, PolitiFact helps voters by fact-checking what candidates say about themselves, and each other, in close to real-time. Although it's part of the *Times* Web site, it has a unique look and feel and its own identity.

It even has its own YouTube music video.

"PolitiFact was absolutely developed as a Web [site] first, print second idea," said Matt Waite, news technologist for the *Times* and the man behind PolitiFact. "Some day, we'll be building things for the Web without a care in the world what the print product is doing."

When news organizations first moved to the Web, the emphasis was on mirroring the print or broadcast experience online: in other words, one-way streams of content. Recently, news sites have begun adopting some Web 2.0 artifacts, such as article comments, blogs, video and limited forms of user-generated content. But a growing number of journalists-turned-dot-comers say the real revolution will come when the industry stops trying to force an old media model onto a new media platform.

"I think the industry in general is very aware, at long last, that the online product is increasingly a different animal than the print product," said James Wilkerson, data editor at the *Des Moines Register*.

Waite says journalists need to think about the Web as just one among a "loose confederation" of storytelling platforms available to reporters, editors and producers.

"We have to stop thinking that we can produce something once and have it work on all platforms,"

"PolitiFact is the most pure, uncut form of investigative reporting we do," Waite said. "We take something someone in power says and we hold them accountable to the truth. We don't—can't really— rely on 'published reports' or 'a spokesman said' to make a ruling."

he said. "We have to finally and completely accept the blindingly obvious—different things work in different places."

Rush to mash-ups

Many of the data-driven projects and teams emerging in newsrooms are modeled after the work of Chicago-based developer and journalist Adrian Holovaty, who launched Chicagocrime.org in 2005. It was among the first sites to consolidate data in a mapable, browsable, searchable format, also known as a mash-up.

Holovaty's site wasn't the first to combine data in this way online, but it was the one that led many journalists to see the immense potential of the Web to tell stories in a completely different way.

Gannett, which owns the *Des Moines Register*, has been among the most aggressive media companies in trying to reshape the news-gathering and publishing processes to become more Web-centric. In 2006, the company began to transform its newsrooms into "information centers" focused on delivering news on a 24-hour basis in any medium.

As part of the initiative, Gannett encouraged local papers to make many of the databases journalists have relied on for stories available to readers as well. *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, for example, recently launched CinciNavigator (http://data.cincinnati.com/navigator), a mash-up of government data—including traffic, crime reports, dog licenses, property sales— presented in an intuitive mapable, searchable and browsable format.

The Los Angeles Times has taken the idea of structured data full circle by reintegrating narrative storytelling into their own homicide map of Los Angeles (www.latimes.com/news/local/crime/homicidemap). The site allows readers to browse through the data across a number of characteristics, such as age, sex and race of the victim, method of killing and location. Then the *Times* pairs this data with a newsroom blog that offers a narrative about each homicide and opens up a conversation with readers who can comment on each post. The mixture of data-driven navigation with newsroom narrative and open comments has made for a compelling site that embraces the Web as a format suited for both exploration of the data and conversation between readers and reporters.

Blending platforms

On the broadcast side, CNN.com is one of the largest news sites on the Web and among the most innovative, particularly in its coverage of politics. This campaign season, the network sponsored debates with YouTube, giving voters the ability to submit questions to the candidates directly via video. During the 2006 midterm elections, CNN.com launched the Community Caucus (www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/special/issues/caucus/quiz.html), a combination quiz and forum that polled users about their attitudes on key issues and then provided them a forum for further discussion.

According to Mitch Gelman, senior vice president and executive producer of CNN.com, producing innovative products like this is both good journalism and good business.

"The one thing we know about media and communications today is that the market is moving fast. Today's emerging technologies are tomorrow's new competitors," he said. "We are always looking for ways to apply new technologies to storytelling. It's a key to our success."

And this is just a sampling of what's to come. At least a half dozen large news organizations—including *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*—have formed dedicated teams of developers to work with journalists on projects like these.

Waite stresses that sites like PolitiFact represent much more than clever uses of the Web.

"PolitiFact is the most pure, uncut form of investigative reporting we do," Waite said. "We take something someone in power says and we hold them accountable to the truth. We don't—can't really— rely on 'published reports' or 'a spokesman said' to make a ruling."

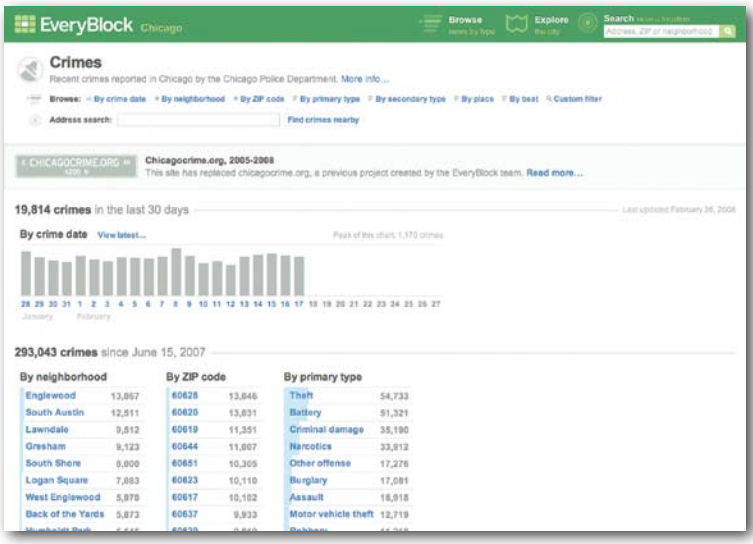
They always seek original documents, even if it means delaying the story a little longer.

"The 'document frame of mind' that has been mantra in IRE pervades the site. It forms the core of the foundation that PolitiFact rests on," Waite said.

The move toward this kind of Web-first reporting is the future of news, Waite said.

"Our job is getting information to readers," he said. "That won't change when we stop caring about how it gets to them."

Aron Pilhofer, currently a projects editor for CAR at The New York Times, spent a year on IRE's national training staff and served as director of IRE's Campaign Finance Information Center. Brian Hamman joined the news technology department at The New York Times in 2007. He previously was the online managing editor of the Columbia Missourian, and worked as a data analyst for IRE and NICAR while earning his master's degree at the Missouri School of Journalism.



the pearl project

Wikis and social network software used to track Daniel Pearl's killers

By Asra Q. Nomani with Margo Humphries
Georgetown University

On Jan. 25, 2002, two days after my friend and *Wall Street Journal* colleague Danny Pearl left my home in Karachi, Pakistan, for an interview from which he didn't return, I stood in front of a dining room wall I'd covered in blank paper, a thick black Sharpie pen in my hand. I wrote one name in the middle, "DANNY," and drew a box around it.

From there, over the next month, I connected the names of suspects that Pakistani cops and FBI agents relayed to Danny's wife, Mariane, and me. Sadly, this strange family tree couldn't help us find Danny alive. But in the darkness of tragedy, this rudimentary form of social network analysis had helped make sense of a seemingly senseless moment in journalism history.

For that reason, I knew that the newest tools in computer-assisted research would be critical when Barbara Feinman Todd, associate dean of journalism at Georgetown University, and I launched the Pearl Project, an investigative reporting seminar that first met in the fall of 2007, to seek answers to Danny's murder. Now in the project's second semester, through a grant from the Center for Ethics and Excellence in Journalism, 32 undergraduate and graduate students are learning traditional gumshoe reporting with new tricks of the trade, like wikis and computerized social network analysis.

Dividing into beats from the FBI to Pakistan intelligence, the students have built up a source list that would match that of veteran reporters. To interview sources with first-hand knowledge of Danny's kidnapping and murder, they've gone from the Embassy of Pakistan to the rooftop of a parking garage at the Pentagon City, Va., shopping mall. Our days and nights are often flipped because Pakistan is 10 hours ahead of us. One night, the morning sun about to rise, graduate student Katie Balestra curled up on the carpet of my office to decompress after we'd spent the night calling attor-

Claire Callagy | Georgetown University

Visiting students from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Qatar Haya Al-Noaimi and Fatima Bahja take notes during a Tuesday evening Pearl Project meeting.

neys in Pakistan involved in the case. Bridging the geographical divide, our Deep Throats meet us in electronic chat rooms rather than back alleys. The Pearl Project is investigative reporting 2.0.

The roots for this project came in the summer of 2002. At a sidewalk café in the Montmartre neighborhood of Paris, Jill Abramson, now managing editor of *The New York Times* and a friend of Danny's from our days together in the Washington bureau of *The Wall Street Journal*, said to me, "We need to do an Arizona Project for Danny." Within days, she had put me in touch with then-IRE executive director Brant Houston, who supported the project from its conception.

"Pearlpedia"

Our first challenge was how to map the dizzying network of suspects in Danny's murder. Houston had told me about Analyst's Notebook, visual investigative analysis software used by agencies from the FBI to the CIA and sold by i2 Inc., a McLean, Va.-based unit of ChoicePoint Corp. For years, I couldn't figure out how to get the software. Then Heather Lent-Lieber, a senior business analyst at Georgetown, told me that through i2's college philanthropy program, the company's business development associate Shahab Shokouhi-Behnam had arranged free licenses and training for all of i2's software products to Georgetown as an in-kind donation. The value of the donation was some $264,100. By late summer 2007, I sat in an i2 classroom mapping a fictional drug investigation at the company's offices with my father, a Pearl Project volunteer, and some soldiers from the Utah National Guard also learning Analyst's Notebook.

Our second challenge was how to collaborate when the seminar met only once a week for two and a half hours. Houston had told me about "wikitzing," a way that contributors could collaborate online. The term comes from wikis, a collaboratively created network of Web pages. I contacted Derek Willis, now of nytimes.com, who has run panels at IRE events on creating wikis for reporting projects. WikiMedia (the organization behind Wikipedia) offers a free public software package for wikis, but the trick was finding a server to host our Web site. The Georgetown server couldn't, but in the middle of the night, I found a host company that could create a password-protected wiki with the help of Georgetown technical support. Our "Pearlpedia" was born.

With almost compulsive addiction, students log on to the Pearlpedia to post interview transcripts, documents, reporting plans, assignments, articles and Web links. To ensure accuracy and consistency in the content of the wiki, we source everything from the date we get a phone number to details about each suspect. We don't have a gatekeeper vetting every addition, but we're all vigilant to make certain that information is sourced. We've designated an editor to keep our Pearlpedia clean, for example, with consistent spellings of names. All of the students have equal access to add or edit entries. We don't post speculation about the case.

Georgetown senior Erin Delmore checks the site about a half a dozen times a day. "With just the click of a mouse, I can keep track of my own work and that of the others," she said.

Digital draft of journalism history

Using Google Groups and instant messaging, the students stay connected at all hours of the day, chatting sometimes at 4 a.m. about a new lead.

"We've tried to instill in our students the reverence for traditional reporting skills, and at the same time, an excitement for what the new technology can enable us to do," said Associate Dean Feinman Todd. "It's the mastery of both skill sets and how they complement each other."

We plan to publish our work in traditional narrative form in national media outlets but also to make the Pearlpedia public someday as a sort of digital archive of a murder that marked a tragic milestone in modern-day journalism. Through technology, we are better able to find links, establish patterns and identify suspects and sources. And we plan to make public the electronic i2 map we are creating of the network involved in Danny's kidnapping and murder.

For most of the students, this mix of old-school reporting with new-world technologies has meant that they have been able to immerse themselves in this investigation with a clear eye on their task: truth telling.

"The case is far from solved," said Kira Zalan, a graduate student and the project's managing editor. "We are working around the clock to zero in on the perpetrators. By setting the historical record straight, our hope is that in the end justice will finally be served."

Asra Nomani is a professor in the practice of journalism at Georgetown University's School of Continuing Studies. Margo Humphries is a senior at Georgetown University, a member of the Pearl Project and the associate editor of the Pearlpedia.

We plan to publish our work in traditional narrative form in national media outlets but also to make the Pearlpedia public someday as a sort of digital archive of a murder that marked a tragic milestone in modern-day journalism.

Claire Callagy | Georgetown University

Professor of Journalism, Asra Nomani, explaining the roles and relationships of suspects implicated in the Daniel Pearl case.

alt-i resources

By Tori Moss
IRE and NICAR

Learn more about alternative investigations with help from the IRE Resource Center. Additional advice from the authors and organizations mentioned in this issue can be found in tipsheets and past issues of *The IRE Journal* and *Uplink*. Copies are available by calling the Resource Center at 573-882-3364 or e-mailing rescntr@ire.org.

Stories

The following investigative stories were written by alternative forms of traditional media, such as nonprofits and online-only media.

- **Story No. 22486**: The team behind "LobbyWatch" investigated federal lobbying using the Senate Office of Public Records online lobbyist disclosure forms and created a user-friendly database that reports on and tracks federal lobbying, the players, costs and consequences. Alex Knott, Elizabeth Brown, Julia DiLaura, Marina Walker Guevera, M. Asif Ismail, Bob Williams, Helena Bengtesson, Daniel Lathrop, The Center for Public Integrity (2005)
- **Story No. 23284**: After noticing factual errors in an online archive of a presentation by San Diego Police Chief William Lansdowne, the reporter checked all of the chief's statements and found several inaccuracies. The two stories revealed a history of inaccurate statements by the chief regarding crime statistics and found the crime rate in the city had increased, not decreased. Will Carless, Voiceofsandiego.org (2007)
- **Story No. 19520**: The team investigated how terrorists are able to use loopholes in United States gun laws to buy guns within the country and export the weapons to others. They found proof of groups — such as the Hezbollah of Lebanon — on the U.S. terrorist watch list buying guns in the United States and illegally shipping them to conflict regions throughout the world. Jake Bergman, Julia Reynolds, Oriana Zill de Granados, David Montero, George Sanchez, Center for Investigative Reporting (2002)
- **Story No. 22488**: The team tracked the pharmaceutical industry's political influence in the nation's capital and across the United States. They discovered the drug and healthcare product industries spent more money on lobbying than any other industries, which resulted in favorable laws, more friendly regulations by the Food and Drug Administration, defeat of measures aiming to cut prices and billions of dollars of profits. M. Asif Ismail, Victoria Kreha, Alex Cohen, The Center for Public Integrity (2005)
- **Story No. 22494**: The series investigated the worldwide trade in "dual-use" technology, which are products that can be used for civilian purposes or in nuclear applications. The team followed the interests and operators behind these technologies and how the materials get to nuclear powers, such as Pakistan. The series also explored the role of South Africa as a hub of the black market for nuclear weapons and equipment. Mark Schapiro, Cassandra Herrman, Monica Lam, David Ritsher, Mads Ellesoe, Meghan Laslocky, Jackie Bennion, Stephen Talbot, Sharon Tiller, Burton Glass, Center for Investigative Reporting (2005)
- **Story No. 19444**: The investigation found that live pictures from United States aerial spy missions had been broadcast in real-time to individuals throughout Europe and the Balkans. For more than six months, the broadcasts of spy flights used to monitor terrorists and smugglers attempting to cross borders were available to anyone with

a satellite TV receiver or an Internet connection once they were linked online. Duncan Campbell, Phillip van Niekerk, Samiya Edwards, Bill Allison, Maud Beelman, The Center for Public Integrity (2002)

- **Story No. 23241**: The investigation revealed what happens to the billions of dollars the European Union spends on Common Agricultural Policy. The reporters found that the most subsidies go to a small group of farmers, including ministers, commissioners, royal families and big companies, and the money is often spent on unhealthy products such as animal fat, alcohol, tobacco and sugar. Jack Thurston, Nils Mulvao, Brigitte Alfter, Farmsubsidy.org (2006)
- **Story No. 19309**: The Ford Foundation investigated the predatory loan schemes that have developed from legitimate subprime lending aimed at borrowers with a poor credit history who cannot get prime loans offered by mainstream banking institutions. Linda Ocasio, Ford Foundation Report (2001)

Tipsheets

These tipsheets provide suggestions for using the Internet and its features—such as blogs and search engines—for investigative reporting:

- **No. 2615**: "Blogs, Wikis and RSS in the Newsroom," Matthew Waite, *St. Petersburg Times*. This tipsheet provides links and set-up instructions for common blog and wiki software.
- **No. 2758**: "Fast Searching on the Internet," Stacey Garcia, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. Garcia suggests Web sites that are useful to reporters conducting online research and shares when to use specialized subject directories, specialty search engines and regular search engines. The tipsheet also contains suggestions for evaluating the information found through Web searches. Version en Espanol (2912)

These tipsheets offer suggestions for using government databases and reports:

- **No. 379**: "Finding Hidden Data," Brant Houston, IRE/NICAR. This tipsheet has suggestions for finding and getting governmental databases, including using General Accounting Office audits as sources.
- **No. 1585**: "Tracking Corporate Lobbying," Bob Young, Public Citizens' Watch Group. Young explains how to get information from lobby disclosure reports. A list of Web sites with reports and other lobbying data is included.
- **No. 2277**: "Finding Documents Under the Dome," John Hill, *The Sacramento Bee*. Hill recommends methods to find state statutes, codes, payroll and legislative bills. He also provides alternative sources of information in case an agency denies a request for information.

This tipsheet details a nonprofit's strategy for ensuring accurate data in investigations:

- **No. 2761**: "Center for Public Integrity Policy: Data Accuracy," John Perry, The Center for Public Integrity. Perry explains the Center for Public Integrity's policies and procedures relating to computer-assisted reporting. He covers data importation, coding, cleaning, update and fact-checking. A summary of methods used in an investigation about lobbyists providing legislators with free travel is also included.

The IRE Journal

- "Plenty of Election Year Left for Pursuing Campaign Stories," Aron Pilhofer, Derek Willis, The Center for Public Integrity. Pilhofer and Willis discuss the changes created by the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 and offer ideas for stories ranging from political action committees to 527 organizations. (July/Aug. 2004)
- "Business of War: Nations Conduct War, Train Soldiers, Offer Support Using Corporate Hired Guns," Maud S. Beelman, The Center for Public Integrity's International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. Beelman explores the rise of private military companies that are often sent by the government and do not have the same kind of accountability as government soldiers. The Center for Public Integrity investigated the military companies in a multiyear, worldwide project that resulted in an 11-part series titled "Making a Killing: The Business of War." (March/April 2003)
- "Hidden Agendas: When State Legislators Do Public Work for Personal Gain," Meleah Rush, The Center for Public Integrity. Rush details the challenges the Center faced while forming a database of the conflict-of-interest filings from legislators throughout the country and ranking each state's disclosure requirements. (Nov./Dec. 2001)

Uplink

- "Down on the Farm: Farmsubsidy.org Opens Access to EU Farm Payments," Brigitte Alfter, Tommy Kaas, Nils Mulvad. The Farmsubsidy.org network Web site started in May 2005 with data obtained from FOI requests regarding the more than $100 million in annual farm subsidy payments made by the European Union. The article details FOI request fights, computer-assisted reporting challenges and the site's transparency index. (March/April 2007)
- "Spotlight: Elections: Finding Data for State Elections," Derek Willis, The Center for Public Integrity. Willis provides a guide, including possible pitfalls, to the campaign finance data that is supplied electronically by several states. He also gives suggestions for handling state campaign finance data. (May/June 2004)
- "Mapping It Out: The Business of War," Ron Nixon, IRE/NICAR. Nixon explains how the Center for Public Integrity's International Consortium of Investigative Journalists used maps to show how the weapons trade is increasing on a global scale, specifically in countries abundant in natural resources such as oil. (March/April 2003)

Online Sources

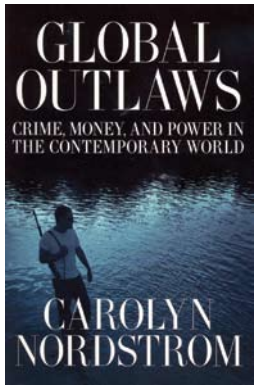
- Media Giraffe (www.mediagiraffe.org) The Media Giraffe Project is an interdisciplinary research initiative based within the journalism program at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst with a mission of fostering participatory democracy and community. The Web site provides a wide range of journalism-related articles and resources.
- Wired (www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds.html) Jeff Howe's story "The Rise of Crowdsourcing" delves into the emerging trend of companies using everyday people throughout the world to research, problem-solve and create.

Journalists should study this anthropologist's sources

REVIEWED BY STEVE WEINBERG
THE IRE JOURNAL

When journalists investigate crime across national borders, they usually focus on government institutions laboring to enforce the laws that other government institutions have adopted. Carolyn Nordstrom understands that such government-centric reporting of transnational crime provides a woefully incomplete picture.

Nordstrom is an anthropology professor at the University of Notre Dame who ventures into dangerous realms unknown to most journalists, then shares her stunning findings in her books about the illegal global trade in "products" ranging from slave labor, blood diamonds and deadly weapons of war to pharmaceuticals, cigarettes, refrigerators and other everyday household goods.



GLOBAL OUTLAWS:
Crime, Money and Power in the Contemporary World
By Carolyn Nordstrom
University of California Press, 234 pages
$21.95

Reading Nordstrom's books—which include "Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century" and "A Different Kind of War Story"—will require an adjustment for many journalists. She disguises her sources and subjects to protect them (and possibly herself) from retribution. She does not always identify the geographic locales where she observes and listens, although in her most recent book, "Global Outlaws," it is at least apparent that she conducted much of her research in remote villages throughout the war-torn, mostly impoverished African nation of Angola. In other words, any journalist reading Nordstrom must show a willingness to trust her. To the best of my knowledge, she has earned that trust. After 40 years as an investigative journalist, I was nonetheless amazed at how much I could learn from Nordstrom, both theoretically and practically.

To be sure, Nordstrom is not bound by the traditions of mainstream journalism, which means she can rely more heavily on unidentified sources than most reporters and editors. Despite that license, Nordstrom's way of investigating and, perhaps more significantly, her way of thinking, suggest vast possibilities for journalists.

When investigating international crime, journalists conditioned to focus on government tend to completely miss sources and subjects who "tend to travel with six passports, run illegal commodities and laundering scams … buy hot vehicles, deal drugs, or act as kingpins … of criminal organizations," Nordstrom says.

Take money laundering, for example. Understanding its global nature has long been a goal of mine, and I thought I had begun to understand the details by studying how established banks fall victim to it and try to guard against it in concert with government regulatory agencies. Nordstrom demonstrates convincingly that a huge amount of money laundering begins in places like Angolan villages built around the transportation of questionably obtained goods that can yield a profit in international trade.

She introduces readers to a man she names "Tiago," who operates what Nordstrom calls a "cool drink shop" on a dusty street in Kalunga, Angola, away from the main road in a place where many would probably assume electricity is non-existent. In fact, given the money Tiago has made from coordinating off-the-books transport of questionably obtained products, he can afford electricity to power sophisticated computer and telephone systems allowing him to communicate with anyone anytime around the world.

As Nordstrom chats with Tiago, he receives a telephone call informing him that one of the truck drivers hauling refrigerators from a remote Angolan pick-up point to Kalunga appeared to be missing. Had the driver appropriated the cargo for himself? Had his truck crashed? Had it been hijacked by commercial rivals or rebel forces fighting the government?

Tiago does not know, but he has sophisticated means of finding out and will do so because the refrigerators are worth perhaps $65,000 wholesale and more than that retail. Tiago purchased the refrigerators with American dollars; Angolan currency is worthless on the international market.

"To get the dollars," Nordstrom explains, "[Tiago] had to work the extra-legal markets—arms for diamonds for food for gas for international commodities for refrigerators. To complete this set of business circuits, he couldn't simply send his trucks along the bumpy washed-out road from Truck Stop [a border town with a name made up by Nordstrom] to Kalunga. So his drivers crossed the border into Angola, traded merchandise for diamonds for dollars, journeyed along roads wrecked by years of war, then drove back across the border at an unmarked spot, taking the poorly guarded back roads to Kalunga. Common practice, and completely illegal."

The money earned by Tiago will not be declared to any government tax agency or deposited in any recognized bank. Instead, Nordstrom says, "Men such as Tiago and their 'offices' provide a window on how unregulated economies have grown into a multi-trillion-dollar global phenomenon, and they are a key to understanding money laundering in the twenty-first century….While authorities are trying to bust laundering by looking for large sums of cash entering banking and financial systems from 'shady' sources, the Tiagos of the world…are using far more sophisticated systems that no one is monitoring. Quietly and efficiently they are amassing invisible fortunes."

Nordstrom's lengthier explanation of precisely how Tiago and his ilk launder the cash they receive is clear, credible and mind-bending.

Journalists miss a huge part of the story when they limit money-laundering sagas to, as Nordstrom phrases it, "classical organized crime in cosmopolitan settings." She explains, "Interest in the topic focuses mostly on the movement of direct gains—currency from drugs, gambling, the sex industry and the like—into legitimate banks and financial institutions.…This type of research gives the impression that laundering is relatively straightforward, that people try to move large chunks of illicit money directly into legally recognized bank accounts and businesses. While this is certainly part of the story, it is dangerously incomplete." Visiting rural border towns straddling desperate nations, as Nordstrom does, quite likely will "offer a snapshot of the deep layers of complexity that can surround laundering," she comments.

Another astonishing section of Nordstrom's book focuses on the transportation of illegal goods by water. Nordstrom talked her way onto a container ship hauling illegal goods and saw first-hand how, in port after port in the United States and around the world, government inspectors are either overwhelmed or non-existent. Nobody ever asked to see Nordstrom's passport or other documents as she walked freely around the ports after the ship docked.

Ships' crews "burst into laughter" at the mention of claims by the Bush administration and other governments about tight security. "We can't figure out the USA at all," crew members told Nordstrom, according to her notes. "There is all this table pounding about terrorism and security, and absolutely none exists. We talk about it all the time; we could blow up just about anything anywhere here and no one is even around to see it. It's even worse than that. Did you notice when we left port …."

With revelations like this in every chapter, Nordstrom's book is highly recommended. Maybe a few journalists will follow in her footsteps, then publish their findings for a wider audience than an academic anthropologist can reach.

Steve Weinberg is senior contributing editor to The IRE Journal and a former executive director of IRE.

Member news

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

for "Blighted Homeland," a four-part series about the health impact uranium mining during the Cold War is having on the Navajo reservation on the Utah and Arizona borders. ■ **Dana Priest** and Anne Hull of *The Washington Post* were given the 2008 Selden Ring Award for Investigative Reporting for their series that exposed the unsanitary conditions and poor treatment veterans were provided at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. ■ **Rick Rodriguez**, former executive editor of the *Sacramento Bee* and the first Latino president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, has joined the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University as the Southwest Borderlands Initiative professor. ■ **Mark Schleifstein**, Matt Brown, Bob Marshall and Dan Swenson of the *New Orleans Times Picayune* were awarded the John B. Oakes Award for Distinguished Environmental Journalism for "Last Chance: The Fight to Save a Disappearing Coast," a series about the coastal erosion threatening southeast Louisiana. ■ IRE Board Member **Marilyn Thompson** returned to *The Washington Post*; she most recently worked for the Washington, D.C. bureau of *The New York Times*.

IRE SERVICES

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTERS AND EDITORS, INC. is a grassroots nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of investigative reporting within the field of journalism. IRE was formed in 1975 with the intent of creating a networking tool and a forum in which journalists from across the country could raise questions and exchange ideas. IRE provides educational services to reporters, editors and others interested in investigative reporting and works to maintain high professional standards.

Programs and Services:

IRE RESOURCE CENTER—A rich reserve of print and broadcast stories, tipsheets and guides to help you start and complete the best work of your career. This unique library is the starting point of any piece you're working on. You can search through abstracts of more than 20,000 investigative reporting stories through our Web site.
Contact: Beth Kopine, beth@ire.org, 573-882-3364

IRE AND NICAR DATABASE LIBRARY—Administered by IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. The library has copies of many government databases, and makes them available to news organizations at or below actual cost. Analysis services are available on these databases, as is help in deciphering records you obtain yourself.
Contact: Jeremy Milarsky, jeremy@ire.org or 954-305-3134. To order data, call 573-884-7711.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE INFORMATION CENTER—Administered by IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. It's dedicated to helping journalists uncover the campaign money trail. State campaign finance data is collected from across the nation, cleaned and made available to journalists. A search engine allows reporters to track political cash flow across several states in federal and state races.
Contact: Mark Horvit, mhorvit@ire.org, 573-882-1984

ON-THE-ROAD TRAINING—As a top promoter of journalism education, IRE offers loads of training opportunities throughout the year. Possibilities range from national conferences and regional workshops to weeklong boot camps and on-site newsroom training. Costs are on a sliding scale and fellowships are available to many of the events.
Contact: David Donald, ddonald@ire.org, 573-882-2042

Publications

THE IRE JOURNAL—Published six times a year. Contains journalist profiles, how-to stories, reviews, investigative ideas and backgrounding tips. *The Journal* also provides members with the latest news on upcoming events and training opportunities from IRE and NICAR.
Contact: Megan Means, meganm@ire.org, 573-884-2360

UPLINK—Electronic newsletter by IRE and NICAR on computer-assisted reporting. *Uplink* stories are written after reporters have had particular success using data to investigate stories. The columns include valuable information on advanced database techniques as well as success stories written by newly trained CAR reporters.
Contact: David Herzog, dherzog@ire.org, 573-882-2127

REPORTER.ORG—A collection of Web-based resources for journalists, journalism educators and others. Discounted Web hosting and services such as mailing list management and site development are provided to other nonprofit journalism organizations.
Contact: Mark Horvit, mhorvit@ire.org, 573-882-1984.

For information on:

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To attend this conference, you must be an IRE member through July 1, 2008. Memberships are nonrefundable. From April 1 to May 19, the early registration fee is $175. After May 19, the on-site registration fee of $200 applies.

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Advance tickets are $20. Ticket prices on site, if available, will be higher. Limit of 2 tickets per registrant.
❑ One Ticket $20 ❑ Two Tickets $40

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