

THE IRE JOURNAL

Summer 2010

Volume 33

Number 3

UNCOVERING NEW STORIES ON CAMPUS

UNPAID ROYALTIES

Small paper probes natural gas payments and lands a Pulitzer

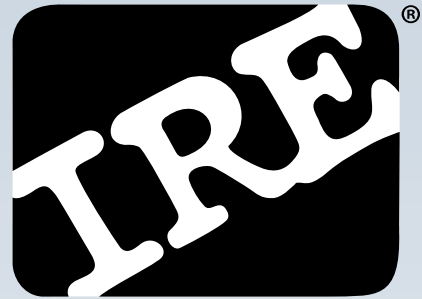
REGIONAL AIRLINES

Joint investigation finds trouble with training and safety

ARAB JOURNALISTS

Regional center supports watchdogs despite the risks

MARK YOUR CALENDARS



Watchdog Workshops

IRE is offering its Better Watchdog training designed for reporters, editors and producers from small, midsize and large publications, TV stations, Web-only news sites and news blogs. Get the tools and the tricks of the trade that you need to be a better, faster watchdog journalist.

- **Sept. 24-25, 2010 — Miami, Fla.**
- **Sept. 25-26, 2010 — San Francisco, Calif.**
- **Oct. 9-10, 2010 — Eugene, Ore.**
- **Nov. 6-7, 2010 — Charleston, W.Va.**

Webinars

- **Broadcast investigations**
Oct. 6, 2010 2 p.m. (EDT)
Join Tisha Thompson of WTTG-Washington, D.C., to find out how documents and computer-assisted reporting can beef up your November book.
- **Doing great work with fewer resources**
Oct. 13, 2010 2 p.m. (EDT)
Tips and practical advice on feeding the daily copy beast while working on bigger enterprise stories. Ways to manage time, navigate office politics and stay focused on stories that make a difference while handling routine matters. Strategies to make progress on the big story during the reporting and writing phases.

Better Business Watchdog (CAR for Business Journalists)

Polish your skills in computer-assisted reporting and learn how to hold local businesses accountable with this free, daylong workshop co-presented by the Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism and Investigative Reporters and Editors.

- **Oct. 11, 2010 — Atlanta, Ga.**
- **Nov. 9, 2010 — Milwaukee, Wis.**

Conferences

- **2011 Computer-Assisted Reporting Conference**
Feb. 24-27, 2011 — Raleigh, N.C.
Join IRE and NICAR for our annual conference devoted to computer-assisted reporting. Learn about tools you need to dig deeper into stories and give readers and viewers the information they want.
- **2011 IRE Conference**
June 9-12, 2011 — Orlando, Fla.
The best in the business will gather for more than 100 panels, hands-on classes and special presentations about covering business, public safety, government, health care, education, the military, the environment and other key beats. Speakers will share strategies for locating documents and gaining access to public records, finding the best stories and managing investigations. Join the discussion about how to practice investigative journalism in print, broadcast, Web and alternative newsrooms.

Other events will be posted online as they're confirmed. For full information and to track other upcoming events, visit IRE's online training calendar: <http://ow.ly/2dDrM>

THE IRE JOURNAL

SUMMER 2010

- 4 Filling the vacuum on campuses**
By Mark Horvit
IRE Executive Director
- 6 SCANT PUNISHMENT**
Massachusetts regulators rarely took action against brokers, lenders
By Maggie Mulvihill and Joe Bergantino
New England Center for Investigative Reporting at Boston University
- 8 DRILLING DEEP**
Time management, data skills help small paper snag a Pulitzer
By Daniel Gilbert
The Bristol (Va.) Herald Courier
- 10 FLIGHT RISK**
Regional airlines have troubling record on training, safety issues
By Catherine Rentz
Investigative Reporting Workshop/PBS Frontline
- 12 PARTIAL CONFESSIONS**
Sex abuse in Catholic Church remains tough to track despite new promises of transparency
By Shaun Hittle
Lawrence Journal-World/6News
- 14 Investigations in the Arab world take root amid danger, obstacles**
By Rana Sabbagh
Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ)
- 16 A COSTLY TEMPTATION**
Without watchdogs, officials may enrich themselves with tax money
By Charles N. Davis
National Freedom of Information Coalition
- 17 COLLECTED WISDOM**
Cover government
By Norberto Santana
Voice of OC (Orange County)

- 18 DOUBLE MAJOR**
Use data and documents to dig deeper on campus
By Mary Beth Marklein
USA TODAY
- 21 UNJUST COMPENSATION**
Student team finds unequal justice in payouts to the wrongly convicted
By Clark Merrefield
CUNY Graduate School of Journalism
- 23 SEX CRIMES ON CAMPUS**
Yearlong investigation finds failures of the justice system
By Kristen Lombardi
The Center for Public Integrity
- 26 ADMISSIONS SECRETS**
Public records uncover ties to powerful patrons
By Jodi S. Cohen
Chicago Tribune
- 30 WRESTLERS AND REAL ESTATE**
Student investigation uncovers sales among coaches, athletes
By Chris Ison
University of Minnesota
- 33 RESOURCES**
By Alecia Swasy
The IRE Journal



- 34 Snapshots from our blogs**



COVER STORIES:
Pages 18-33

ABOUT THE COVER

Amid the red bricks and ivory towers on campuses across America, watchdog stories are waiting to be written. Reporters who follow the money, use public-records laws and think creatively will be rewarded with stories that make a difference.

Photo by E. Jason Wambsgans, *Chicago Tribune*

MANAGING EDITOR
Doug Haddix

ART DIRECTOR
Wendy Gray

CONTRIBUTING LEGAL EDITOR
David Smallman

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATE AND STORY EDITOR
Alecia Swasy

IRE

IRE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Mark Horvit

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT
Alison Young, *USA Today*

VICE PRESIDENT
Manny Garcia, *El Nuevo Herald/The Miami Herald*

TREASURER
David Cay Johnston, author

SECRETARY
Phil Williams, WTVF-TV

Sarah Cohen, Duke University
Robert Cribb, *Toronto Star*

Andrew Donohue, voiceofsandiego.org
Leonard Downie Jr., *The Washington Post*

Lise Olsen, *The Houston Chronicle*
Cheryl Phillips, *The Seattle Times*

Aron Pilhofer, *The New York Times*
Lea Thompson, broadcast journalist/producer
Mc Nelly Torres, freelance

The IRE Journal (ISSN0164-7016) is published four times a year by Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. 141 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

© 2010 Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.

FROM THE IRE OFFICE

Filling the vacuum on campuses

BY MARK HORVIT
IRE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Plenty has been written about how newsroom cutbacks have led to fewer reporters in Washington, D.C., and in state capitals from coast to coast.

Loss of coverage at city halls and school districts has citizens fearing what their elected leaders will do when freed from scrutiny.

But relatively little attention has been paid to another area where cutbacks in coverage have largely resulted in a free pass being given to multimillion-dollar operations that often employ hundreds, educate thousands, and spend tax dollars and grant funding at a voracious rate.

Higher education.

Colleges and universities can be the largest employers in a community. Thanks to state and federal funding, they often get bigger shares of tax dollars than agencies that get far more journalistic attention.

And – most importantly – they are responsible for creating future generations of civic leaders, physicians, educators, businessmen and women, movers and shakers.

This edition of the Journal highlights several investigations that show just how much is at stake, and what can be found when journalists serve a watchdog role on campus.

Check out the great work by professional journalists who examined issues including sexual assault on campus (see Page 23) and admissions favors granted to influential families (Page 26).

There also is excellent work from student journalists at the City University of New York (CUNY) who won an IRE Award this year (see Page 21) and the University of Minnesota (see Page 30).

Consider, especially, the work done by the students in Minnesota, who examined the ties between numerous property transactions involving wrestling coaches and student wrestlers.

Such projects, in which student journalists serve as watchdogs of their campuses, have become increasingly important as fewer professional journalists are on the beat.

It's this kind of work that is the focus of one of IRE's newest programs, the Campus Coverage Project.

This project brings investigative reporting skills to college students and shows them how to use those skills to cover their own institutions. The project is funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education and is done in partnership with the Education Writers Association and the Student Press Law Center.

In January, 74 students from campuses throughout the country gathered at Arizona State University for four days of training from professional journalists and experts in education issues. They learned how to analyze a university budget, read an IRS 990 form to find information on private schools, find statistics and details to measure key measures including graduation rates and financial aid, use computer-assisted reporting skills and much more. The major focus of this training is giving student journalists tools to hold their administrations accountable on key issues including graduation rates and quality of education.

To check out some of the work they've done in the months since, and to download some of the training materials, go to www.campuscoverage.org.

We'll be holding the second Campus Coverage Project workshop in early January, and ASU again will be our host. Registration is a simple process, and almost all expenses are covered for those who are selected to attend.

Registration is open through most of September; for more information on how to apply, go to www.ire.org/campus.

IRE has a long tradition of providing training to student journalists. Never has that work been more important.

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

Strong attendance, enthusiasm highlight Vegas IRE conference

About 800 journalists, educators and students gathered in Las Vegas in June for the annual IRE conference. For a full rundown of conference coverage on blogs and elsewhere, check out this list of links: <http://bit.ly/bQcJCp>.

"We're very pleased with the turnout, but just as important was the energy and enthusiasm of the hundreds of journalists who attended the conference," IRE Executive Director Mark Horvit said. "In session after session, journalists who have done vitally important work in the past year shared advice, tips and other details behind their stories. The conference stands as a testament to the breadth and quality of watchdog journalism that continues to be done in the U.S. and throughout the world."

More than 60 tipsheets from the Vegas conference have been posted in the IRE Resource Center. For full results, search "2010 IRE Conference (Las Vegas)" on the tipsheets page: www.ire.org/resourcecenter/tipsheets.php. A CD of conference tipsheets can be purchased from the Resource Center for \$20 (including shipping).

Audio from many of the panels is available online for IRE members (www.ire.org/membersonly/audio/vegas10.php). A DVD of the complete set of audio from the 2010 IRE Conference is available to members for \$25 (price includes shipping). Contact the Resource Center at 573-882-3364 or rescntr@ire.org.

Seven win seats on the IRE Board of Directors

Three new candidates and four incumbents won election in June to IRE's Board of Directors during the annual conference in Las Vegas.

Newly elected to the 13-member board are Sarah Cohen, of Duke University; Andrew Donohue, of voiceofsandiego.org; and Aron Pilhofer, of *The New York Times*. Four incumbents also won two-year terms on the board: Robert Cribb, of the *Toronto Star*; Manny Garcia, of *El Nuevo Herald*/*The Miami Herald*; Mc Nelly Torres, an independent investigative journalist; and Phil Williams, of WTVF-TV in Nashville.

Full bios and their reasons for running are posted online at www.ire.org/about/elections/bal-lot10.html.

The seven were elected through a voice vote because the number of candidates equaled the number of open seats.

Immediately after that election, the board held a brief organizational meeting and elected members to serve on the Executive Committee:

President: Alison Young, *USA Today*

Vice president: Manny Garcia, *El Nuevo Herald*/*The Miami Herald*

Treasurer: David Cay Johnston, author

Secretary: Phil Williams, WTVF-TV in Nashville

Lea Thompson, broadcast journalist/producer

Chairman: Cheryl Phillips, *The Seattle Times*

Learn new tricks, tools through IRE webinars

Tap into practical training from your home or office with IRE's online training. Four new webinars will be led by experienced journalists and IRE trainers:

Sept. 16, Corral and analyze text with DocumentCloud – Amanda Hickman, DocumentCloud

Sept. 22, Twitter tools for journalists – Doug Haddix, IRE

Oct. 6, CAR for broadcast – Tisha Thompson, Fox5 News, Washington, D.C.

Oct. 13, Doing great work with fewer resources – Daniel Gilbert, *Bristol* (Va.) *Herald Courier*, and Doug Pardue, *The* (Charleston, S.C.) *Post and Courier*

For more information and to register, please visit www.ire.org/training/online.

MEMBER NEWS

John Bartosek has been hired as the new editor of *PolitiFact Florida*, a joint project of the *St. Petersburg Times* and the *Miami Herald*. Most recently, Bartosek worked at the *Palm Beach Post*. *PolitiFact* checks politicians' statements and claims for accuracy and context.

The Utah-Idaho-Spokane Associated Press Association recently awarded **Ben Botkin** of the *Times-News* in Twin Falls, Idaho, a first-place award for investigative reporting. His story, "Questions raised about CSI/Builder relationship," explored the bidding practices of a community college. He also was awarded first place in beat reporting for state budget coverage.

Elaine Grossman of the National Journal Group received first-prize awards for Online News and Features in the Society of Professional Journalists Washington Dateline Awards and Best Spot News or Exclusive Single News Story in the Specialized Information Publishers Foundation's Editorial Awards. The article revealed disagreements between Obama Cabinet members over how to maintain the nation's aging nuclear arsenal.

The Alaska Press Club's Public Service award was presented to the *Skagway News* and the University of Alaska at Fairbanks Journalism department. **Brian Patrick O'Donoghue**, UAF chair, and his students were recognized for "Reporting from Iraq," a monthlong news feed featuring blogs, print and broadcast coverage of Alaska-based soldiers.

The Livingston Awards for Young Journalists – a \$10,000 prize given for local, national and international reporting by journalists under the age of 35 – were awarded to:

Abbie Boudreau, CNN, for international reporting, "Killings at the Canal: The Army Tapes."

Mark Greenblatt, KHOU-TV, for local reporting, "Under Fire: Discrimination and Corruption in the Texas National Guard."

David Nathaniel Philipps, the Colorado Springs *Gazette*, for national reporting, "Casualties of War."

Please send Member News items to Doug Haddix (doug@ire.org). Read updates online at <http://data.nicar.org/irejournal/membernews>.

SCANT PUNISHMENT

Massachusetts regulators rarely took action against brokers, lenders

BY MAGGIE MULVIHILL AND JOE BERGANTINO
NEW ENGLAND CENTER FOR INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Massachusetts regulators, despite carefully polished public presentations on aggressive monitoring of errant brokers and lenders, had the worst record in New England when it came to disciplining mortgage professionals.

Enterprising reporters across the country routinely mine the housing beat for new ways to explain the subprime mortgage crisis. But in Boston last year, reporters at the newly formed New England Center for Investigative Reporting found little coverage on how state regulators were disciplining errant mortgage brokers and lenders.

New England media had done plenty of stories about how federal regulators and Congress had ignored the developing mortgage loan crisis in the years leading up to explosions in home foreclosures.

But that crisis was, in part, created by aggressive brokers and lenders looking for eager, but financially unprepared, homebuyers and convincing them to purchase homes they could not afford. Who was supposed to be watching them? It was time to look at what regulators did in our own backyard.

Because of our small staff size and the fact our media partners are based in Boston, we focused on a piece of the larger picture. We decided to examine how Massachusetts regulators compared to other states when it came to aggressively weeding out bad brokers and lenders. We chose what had been described to us by housing experts as the height of recent foreclosure activity in New England – 2007, 2008 and part of 2009.

During that time period, were mortgage professionals losing their licenses or getting suspended from practicing for violating the law or state regulations? Did these regulatory agencies, such as the Massachusetts Division of Banks, have adequate budgets and staff to fulfill their oversight function?

These were the questions we set out to answer with our students during the 2009 summer semester. It was a complex task, but after several months of hard work, we came up with several major findings:

- Massachusetts regulators, despite carefully polished public presentations on aggressive monitoring of errant brokers and lenders, had the worst record in New England when it came to disciplining mortgage professionals.
- The Massachusetts Division of Banks took stringent action – revoking, suspending or forcing license surrender – against just 3 percent of its licensee pool between Jan. 1, 2007, and June 1, 2009 – even as it publicly stated that subprime loans were at the center of the Massachusetts housing crisis.
- During the same period, for instance, Connecticut took punitive action against 24 percent of its licensees; New Hampshire, 11 percent of its mortgage brokers and lenders.
- At the time of our story, Massachusetts ranked last in the number

of revocations, suspensions and forced license surrenders against mortgage brokers and lenders, compared to other New England states. But it ranked second in its foreclosure rate.

- Unlike neighboring states, the bulk of disciplinary actions issued in Massachusetts are secret because they are considered informal actions. Regulators told NECIR-BU they have greater power to convince misbehaving brokers and lenders to change their practices if they won't be made public.
- The division's examinations, or periodic audits, of mortgage brokers and lenders actually dropped between 2006 and 2008 despite the growing number of foreclosures. Not until 2008 did state regulators set up a special unit to investigate mortgage fraud.

Inconsistent disciplinary data

At NECIR-BU, we started by assigning our students to research both print and digital news clips for any publicity on brokers and lenders in our region who had run afoul of regulators and had been stripped of their license.

We also began talking to lawyers for homeowners, consumer advocates, appraisers, housing counselors, legislators and any other individuals who could provide information on how state regulators were performing in their oversight role.

We attended meetings held by foreclosure prevention groups to find homeowners who were at risk of losing their investments and to gauge the consumer's viewpoint of state regulators.

We submitted a public records request to the state of Massachusetts to determine which brokers and lenders had been the subject of complaints and what, if any, action had been taken against them.

Housing advocates and foreclosure prevention counselors told us early in our reporting that very little aggressive discipline of the industry was taking place in Massachusetts.

"A lot of the licensees (brokers and lenders) have thus far gotten away with murder when it comes to these foreclosures," said John Taylor of the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, which assists victims of deceptive mortgage practices. We also began talking to regulators in each of the other five New England states to determine how they monitored brokers and lenders and how aggressive they had been in issuing sanctions.

This part of the project became the most difficult because there was no uniformity in the way states kept disciplinary data. Some states, like Maine and Vermont, did not post all of their disciplinary information online. Other state data wasn't timely. Some states were months behind in posting sanctions on their respective websites.

Student reporters spent two months creating spreadsheets of each state's disciplinary actions, checking and rechecking with state officials in all the New England states to confirm they were counting the proper sanctions. For example, we did not count brokers and lenders who dealt exclusively with commercial real estate. We also did not count mortgage loan originators because, unlike some neighboring states, Massachusetts did not pass a law requiring them to be licensed until 2007.

Once our spreadsheets were created, we sorted and analyzed them in Excel spreadsheet and Access database software to determine final numbers of sanctions in our three discipline categories: license revocations, suspensions and forced license surrenders.

An immigrant connection

Besides the raw numbers, our story also began to take a human shape fairly early in the reporting. Through interviews and court records, it became clear that immigrant groups were being deliberately targeted by brokers and lenders from their home countries who convinced them they could have the “American dream” – a home of their own.

We began to focus on homeowners who obtained mortgages through a Boston-based company called Su Casa Y Mas, or “Your Home Mortgage.” The firm was run by two brothers from Colombia: Diego and Mauricio Osorno.

The company had been the subject of two complaints to the Massachusetts Division of Banks in 2007 that resulted in no formal, or public, action.

In one case, the Osornos obtained two mortgages for first-time buyer Jaime Alvarez for about \$580,000 to purchase a two-family home in Boston. The monthly mortgage payments, which Alvarez claimed he did not understand at the time, totaled about \$5,460 – far more than his \$4,300 gross monthly income.

When Alvarez began to fall behind on his payments, foreclosure prevention counselor Virginia Pratt filed a complaint with the state, claiming the loans were based on no-income verification. She also stated that the Osornos failed to fully disclose the terms of the loans to Alvarez, a tour bus operator who also emigrated from Colombia. Failing to disclose mortgage terms was a violation of the Division of Banks’ regulations at the time.

The state’s response: While Alvarez’s experience with Su Casa Y Mas was not “ideal,” the Osornos’ conduct did not warrant agency action.

Regulators acknowledged to NECIR-BU a second complaint had been filed against Su Casa Y Mas in 2007 but declined to explain what, if anything, happened to that complaint. The homeowner, Aresenia Rodrigues, claimed the Osornos rushed her into signing a blank mortgage application for a \$485,000 home in Somerville, Mass. At the time, Rodrigues was on disability, earning \$27,000 annually, and living in public housing.

Rodrigues later sued Su Casa Y Mas, along with other homeowners who claimed they were duped by the brothers. The Osornos defaulted on that lawsuit and voluntarily gave up their mortgage broker license in June 2009, saying they were insolvent.

Reached by phone, Diego declined to comment on the allegations in the complaints or the lawsuit. In an interview at his Chelsea office, Mauricio Osorno denied the allegations. “I can get you more than 100 or 200 letters from people who can vouch for our name and our reputation,” Mauricio Osorno said.

Massachusetts state regulators said they were so aggressive in weeding out unethical brokers and lenders there was very little need for public discipline. They also said they were able to convince brokers and lenders to modify their bad practices quietly through an informal sanction.

“I think we have an excellent record of taking action when we’ve found a problem and keeping people out of the business so they won’t perpetrate this fraud,” said David Cotney, the division’s second-in-command. Because those are not made public in Massachusetts, it was impossible to verify the Massachusetts Division of Banks’ claim.

Our multimedia package of stories prompted numerous tips from homeowners about other unscrupulous brokers and lenders – tips we continue to pursue. Coverage is online at <http://ow.ly/2hLjp>. Many of those tips came following the publication of our story in *El Planeta*, which reaches a huge Hispanic audience.

In December 2009, court records show, a state court judge assessed \$300,000 in damages against Your Home Mortgage in the civil case.

Joe Bergantino and Maggie Mulvihill are co-founders and co-directors of NECIR-BU, an investigative reporting collaborative based at Boston University. Media partners include The Boston Globe, WBUR (NPR,) New England Cable News, El Planeta, The Lawrence Eagle Tribune, New England Cable News and New England Ethnic News.

Our multimedia package of stories prompted numerous tips from homeowners about other unscrupulous brokers and lenders – tips we continue to pursue.

Connect with IRE on Facebook, Twitter

To make sure you get the latest news and information as soon as it’s available, follow IRE on Facebook (Investigative Reporters and Editors) and on Twitter (IRE_NICAR).



More than 2,700 people have connected with IRE through Facebook, where they receive up-to-date information about upcoming IRE training and events, links to investigative stories, and tips and resources for watchdog journalists.



More than 1,000 people follow IRE_NICAR on Twitter for real-time updates, links and tips.



A natural gas well operates near Birchleaf, Va.

DRILLING DEEP

Time management, data skills
help small paper snag a Pulitzer

BY DANIEL GILBERT
THE BRISTOL (VA.) HERALD COURIER

... the state regulatory board in charge of oversight has failed to pay tens of millions of dollars in royalties to thousands of mineral owners. Instead, the board has diverted royalties into escrow accounts.

The lush, mountain landscape of Southwest Virginia is perforated with more than 6,500 gas wells, sucking more than \$1 billion a year of natural gas from beneath the surface of the poorest region in the state.

Virginia's legal infrastructure has successfully expanded natural gas production, allowing corporations to drain gas without the owners' consent or knowledge. But the statutory scheme has failed to compensate thousands of mineral owners owed tens of millions in gas royalties. Instead, the regulatory board that oversees production has diverted royalties into escrow accounts.

This has been going on for 20 years. It was never exactly a secret. People knew there were gas wells on or near their property, and they received paperwork from energy corporations written in undecipherable legalese. Most were unaware of their rights to royalties, or what happened to the money once it went into escrow.

The gas fields are just beyond my newspaper's circulation footprint – roughly a 75-mile drive from the newsroom. I had been at the *Bristol Herald Courier* for about a year covering courts when, in November 2008, a reader first alerted me to the Virginia Gas and Oil Board.

I didn't know anything about mineral rights at the time. I'd never reported on the energy industry. But there was enough in what the reader said to engage my interest: a powerful industry; an obscure board that rubber-stamped whatever the industry requested; and people who had never been paid for their gas.

With a little reporting, I learned that there was about \$23 million of royalties in escrow accounts. The only way for land-

owners to recover the money was to sue to prove they owned the gas, or else split it with someone else – almost always a coal company – who also claimed ownership.

Neither my editor nor I knew what the story would require: 13 months of reporting between daily assignments and other enterprise; driving more than 2,000 miles to research court cases in far-flung rural courthouses and to meet with aggrieved landowners; and learning how to analyze data.

The eight-part series – “Underfoot, Out of Reach” – is online at <http://bit.ly/90t4vd>.

It began with two simple questions: Why aren't people getting paid for their gas? What happens to royalties in escrow?

Failure of government

With only a vague sense of the story's dimensions, and as one of seven news reporters on staff, I had to negotiate for time to report outside of my beat. I began to cover the monthly hearings of the Gas and Oil Board. Producing next-day stories on the board's actions helped me justify the time to my editors and develop sources.

To move the story forward while coping with daily work, I made to-do lists before getting to work. Whenever I ran into something I didn't understand about mineral rights, which was often, I jotted down names of people I thought could explain. I would call and e-mail them during open windows of time.

J. Todd Foster, managing editor of the *Herald Courier*, explained his support of my project this way: “Newspapers our size have to make difficult choices. Freeing up Daniel to do this series meant sacrificing a few daily stories, but certainly not quality. And Daniel still managed to produce an average of four dailies a week during this 13-month investigation.”

It didn't take long to learn that the Gas and Oil Board was funneling royalties into escrow because of a dispute over the ownership of coalbed methane gas – once considered nothing but dangerous to miners, but now 80 percent of all natural gas produced in Virginia. The dispute reached the Virginia Supreme Court in 2004, when the justices ruled that landowners, not coal companies, owned coal bed methane. But the board disregarded the ruling and continued to escrow royalties, tripling the fund's balance over the next five years.

I knew that the government was failing to compensate people for their property. Now I wanted to know whose job it was to make sure energy corporations complied with escrow requirements.

The Gas and Oil Board and its staff, I found, simply trusted the industry to make the correct payments. My records requests revealed that the last audit of the escrow accounts was 10 years ago, and it did not address compliance. So I began looking for ways to independently gauge compliance.

I obtained monthly spreadsheets of escrow account activity from the state, and learned that each of the more than 750 accounts corresponded to a gas well. I had access to monthly production records by well through an online database maintained by the state.

In general, an escrow account should receive royalties during months when the corresponding well produces gas. I wanted to compare the two sets of data, but lacked a way to comprehensively cross-reference them.

I explained the impasse to my editor, and the newspaper sent me to a computer-assisted reporting boot camp at IRE headquar-



Reporter Daniel Gilbert, left, looks over one of the wells with Denny Sutherland on his property near Birchleaf, Va.

State lawmakers responded swiftly with legislation designed to release royalties from escrow, which now contains \$26 million.

ters at the University of Missouri in August 2009. I learned how to import records into a database manager, and interview them with Structured Query Language.

When I returned, I built a database of 18 months of escrow and production records. I developed a query that turned up every account that did not receive a deposit for a month when the corresponding well produced gas. After weeks of pruning the data, I found that 30 percent of accounts corresponding to producing wells were not receiving payments.

Even with strong evidence of nonexistent oversight and corporate negligence, there still was a crucial question to explore: Who was being harmed?

I found landowners like Kenneth and Kathy Street, who had never been paid for their coalbed methane. The escrow accounts holding their royalties contained \$187, instead of the \$125,000 they should have held. Without funds to hire a lawyer, the Streets never attempted to collect their money. "You have to know you have enough [in escrow] to hire a lawyer to get it," Kathy Street told me. And the Streets, like so many other landowners, didn't know. They couldn't have known.

A coordinated strategy

Nearing publication, I reached out to our sister paper, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. I was concerned that a complex series, if published only by a small newspaper, would not grow legs. I wanted it to play in the policy nerve center of the state.

On the Sunday that my series concluded, the *Times-Dispatch* printed a condensed version on its front page, referring readers to our full coverage of the past week. Soon, my newspaper, the *Times-Dispatch* and newspapers around the state weighed in with editorials, calling for the legislature to remedy the injustice.

The Virginia Gas and Oil Board met two days after the series concluded, and approved the first audit of the escrow accounts in a decade. The audit is ongoing. The two energy conglomerates that drill for more than 90 percent of the gas in Virginia, after receiving

my analysis, have so far combined to pay about \$1.25 million into escrow accounts that had not received royalties. State officials initially brushed off my findings, but have admitted to regulatory gaps and pledged to hire more staff to monitor escrow payments, and to implement more compliance checks.

State lawmakers responded swiftly with legislation designed to release royalties from escrow, which now contains \$26 million. One new law resolves the 20-year-old conflict about coal bed methane, essentially codifying the Virginia Supreme Court's ruling in favor of landowners. Another law establishes an arbitration system to resolve ownership conflicts within six months, and without the expense of having to go to court.

No one, it seems, can snap their fingers and release the money in escrow to landowners. Some believe the only way landowners will get relief is through the civil justice system.

In June, a team of high-powered law firms filed a series of lawsuits seeking class-action status against the two dominant natural gas producers in Virginia, accusing them of stealing landowners' gas and demanding full compensation and damages.

"What we are talking about here is breathtaking thievery," said Don Barrett, a Mississippi plaintiffs' lawyer who first read about the coalbed methane controversy in the *Herald Courier*. "The system's broken in Virginia, unlike any other place in the country. And that's what they make courthouses for."

Daniel Gilbert is a staff writer at the Bristol Herald Courier, which won the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for his series on Virginia's mismanagement of natural-gas royalties. The same work won the IRE certificate for newspapers under 100,000 circulation, and a National Journalism Award from the Scripps Howard Foundation.



A natural gas well in Buchanan County, Va.



Workers remove debris at the scene of a plane crash of Continental Connection Flight 3407 in Clarence Center, N.Y., in February 2009.

FLIGHT RISK

Regional airlines have troubling record on training, safety issues

By CATHERINE RENTZ
INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING WORKSHOP/PBS FRONTLINE

Newark, N.J., airport, Feb. 12, 2009 – Two pilots and 47 crew and passengers sat aboard Continental Flight 3407, waiting to take off for Buffalo, N.Y. Wintry weather had delayed the plane for more than an hour. The pilots passed the time in the cockpit chatting – one about a hesitancy to fly that evening.

Co-pilot Rebecca Shaw: *“Oh, I’m ready to be in the hotel room.”*

Captain Marvin Renslow: *“I feel feel feel bad for you as far as feeling **.”*

Shaw: *“Well, this is one of those times that if I felt like this when I was at home, there’s no way I would have come all the way out here. But now that I’m out here.”*

The co-pilot’s condition was one of a number of troubling factors that would later come out in the full cockpit voice recorder transcript. The plane crashed into a suburban Buffalo house just a few minutes before landing, killing everybody onboard and one on the ground. The evidence eventually unearthed about that fateful flight would expose the significant safety shortcomings in an airline industry that has been radically transformed during the past three decades.

Our team – a new partnership at American University initiated by Rick Young, producer for FRONTLINE, and Charles Lewis, executive editor at the Investigative Reporting Workshop at AU’s School of Communication – traced what went wrong with Continental Flight 3407, stepping all the way back to 1965 to the founding of the company that was actually operating the flight that night: Colgan Air.

Who’s flying your plane?

One of the biggest revelations: just over half of domestic flights today are operated not by major airlines such as Continental but by much smaller, lesser-known regional airlines such as Colgan Air, a medium-sized outfit based in Manassas, Va. In fact, the last six fatal commercial plane crashes in the United States have all been regional airlines and, like Colgan, most were flying under the guise of another airline.

What was driving this regional airline accident trend? Did Colgan represent something bigger? These questions drove our investigation. According to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) data, four of the six accidents, including 3407, had a common thread: pilot error. In the case of 3407, both pilots erred inexplicably by failing to monitor air speed and respond appropriately to an aerodynamic stall, both basic piloting skills. What led to the pilots’ mistakes?

NTSB public docket

We began the investigation with the NTSB’s public case docket, which provided the bulk of clues as to what happened that night. The cockpit voice recorder transcript, pilot training records, employment applications, Colgan’s safety memos and other documents highlighted profiles of pilots dramatically different than the public image of experienced pilots, like Capt. Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger, who had just safely steered his US Airways plane into the Hudson River one month before Flight 3407.

For example, employment records showed the captain of 3407, Marvin Renslow, was hired by Colgan in 2005 with only 618 hours of flying time – less than half the time required by most major airlines. His training records revealed that he had failed five flight performance tests over his career, some of which his employer had failed to discover. Furthermore, he had received inadequate training for a critical stall recovery procedure in the plane he was operating.

The cockpit voice recorder revealed that the first officer Rebecca

Shaw, 24, earned less than \$16,000 during her first year. Though her flying base for Colgan was Newark, she was living with her parents in Seattle and had spent the night before the tragic flight on a red-eye overnight flight with little rest.

Inside Colgan and the FAA

To better understand the life and pressures of regional flying, we wanted to hear firsthand from the pilots at Colgan and other regional airlines. They were the hardest to track down and convince to go on camera. But once they agreed to talk, they had plenty to say, proving to be the most insightful and strongest sources of the program.

The pilots sent us time sheets showing they were paid only for the time they were actually operating a flight – not for the dozens of hours in between of filing paperwork, waiting between flights, and weather and maintenance delays. They led us into their little-known world of “crash pads” where pilots sleep sometimes six to a room in bunk beds to afford their commuting lifestyle.

The pilots spoke of different training regimens than the majors; regional pilots less experienced and less well-trained, yet flying in some of the most difficult conditions with multiple flight legs each day in lower, more turbulent air. Some told us of being pressured to fly, despite dangerous weather conditions or questionable mechanical circumstances.

In a separate NTSB file, we discovered an alarming incident that reflected the safety culture of Colgan Air. The FAA had been alerted to a flight in 2008, in which a Colgan captain had falsified a weight manifest in order to keep the flight on schedule. An investigation by the FAA resulted in the revocation of the captain's license. But in the transcripts of the appeal hearing, we discovered surprising testimony from Colgan's director of operations, who testified in support of the captain. The incident confirmed what we were hearing from numerous Colgan pilots; the culture at Colgan was to “move the rig.”

Besides pilots, we spoke with several current and former FAA employees who provided important insights into the FAA's oversight of Colgan Air. One FAA inspector had raised numerous safety concerns about Colgan as early as 2005, but said his concerns were ignored by FAA management.

Other government sources

Based on what we were hearing from our sources, we wanted to know more about the oversight of Colgan's operations by both the FAA and Continental Airlines. We filed several FOIA requests and found records revealing many concerns about Colgan's safety operations. There were reports of pilots exercising poor judgment during flights and the company's failure to finish a critical flight manual during its preparation to fly the new type of turboprop plane that would eventually crash in Buffalo.

But what about Continental, the company selling the passengers the tickets? What did it know? We wanted to see Continental's safety audits of Colgan. But there weren't any available because, surprisingly, major airlines like Continental aren't required to conduct safety audits of their regional flying partners. If they choose to do so, these reports are not necessarily provided to FAA and, therefore, difficult to obtain.

However, we discovered that the Defense Department audits the carriers it contracts to fly government workers. In a 2009 U.S. Senate hearing, Continental said that it looked over Defense audits of its regional partners. Documents turned over under FOIA showed that safety audits of Colgan revealed incomplete safety procedures,

unfinished manuals and absent internal safety programs. While the audits noted corrective actions taken by the carrier, reports indicated that in 2007 the Defense Department considered revoking Colgan's authorization to transport military personnel.

Industry sources

Industry insiders, including former Continental CEO Gordon Bethune, told us that intense competition in the airline industry – exacerbated by 9/11, bankruptcies and volatile fuel costs – had led major airlines to rely more and more on outsourcing flying operations to less-expensive regional airlines. But we wanted to better understand the relationship between the majors and their regional partners. For that, we needed to see the flying contracts, also known as “code-share” contracts.

We got a big break when we discovered one Colgan contract in a public lawsuit docket from a previous US Airways crash. Among other things, the contract made it clear that Colgan indemnified its partner, in this case US Airways, for any legal liability in the case of an accident. Sources told us that these legal shields were common to code-share contracts.

We also learned from industry sources that contract payments for many regional operators, like Colgan, are based in part on completion factors such as on-time performance. In some instances, the regionals aren't paid at all if they don't complete the flight. As one former airline executive told us, these contractual relationships may provide incentives to “move the rig” that are contrary to a safety-first culture.

CAR online

The partnership at PBS Frontline and the workshop created a unique ability to bolster Frontline's narrative storytelling with computer-assisted reporting. For our maiden CAR project, we offered the public for the first time the ability to find out which airline was really flying their planes and details about each airline's safety record.

Jacob Fenton, who had just been hired to lead the workshop's computer-assisted reporting about a month before air date, hit the ground running during his first week on the job. He mashed up NTSB's aviation accidents database, FAA's air operators databases, and the Bureau of Transportation Statistics' airline databases with contracting information from the Regional Airline Association to analyze the safety of regional and major airlines.

Fenton and Wendell Cochran, senior editor of the workshop, developed a two-portal system for the public where users could click on a map at FRONTLINE that featured the nation's major hubs. The map linked to the workshop's website, where users could see which regionals fly for which majors and get safety records for each operator. The complete narrative of each incident analyzed was posted on the workshop's site so visitors could see past problems at any given airline or airport.

In the end, Flying Cheap and the accompanying website for the workshop (www.investigativereportingworkshop.org) garnered a strong reaction, clearly touching a nerve in the aviation community. We are now working on a special 30-minute follow-up that will look into outsourcing airline maintenance.

Catherine Rentz was the co-producer for Flying Cheap and currently works at the PBS FRONTLINE / Investigative Reporting Workshop as a field producer. She worked at NICAR while getting her master's degree from the Missouri School of Journalism in 2006.

PBS FRONTLINE and the Investigative Reporting Workshop at American University conducted a joint six-month investigation culminating in the documentary “Flying Cheap.” It aired one year after the crash of Continental Flight 3407.

To see the full website and video, visit www.pbs.org/frontline/flyingcheap.

PARTIAL CONFESSIONS

Sex abuse in Catholic Church
remains tough to track despite
new promises of transparency

BY SHAUN HITTLE
LAWRENCE JOURNAL-WORLD / 6NEWS

The site, which lists more than 3,000 clergy accused of sexual abuse, gave us an initial starting point, but as we would find, many of the cases had never made it into the media.

In the summer of 2008, we started off with what at first seemed a fairly simple question: How many Catholic clergy have sexually abused children in Kansas?

With new reforms in the Catholic Church that promised “open and transparent” communication with the public about sexually abusive clergy, we thought a few months of research – and simply asking the church – would give us answers.

But more than two years later, we had only more questions.

As the spotlight again falls on the Catholic Church nationally and internationally about its handling of sexually abusive clergy, our two-year investigation found the church, in most cases, unwilling to come clean about its abusive past in our state. And after years of interviews with victims, advocates

and lawyers, we found time and time again that our frustration was shared by others looking for answers about sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

In the end, we were able to identify and detail the cases of about two dozen alleged sexually abusive clergy in Kansas. However, the cases we reported were a portion of the total number of alleged abusers we found during the investigation. Many of the cases reported to us by victims could not be verified by the church and lacked a paper trail, such as lawsuits or criminal charges.

The series is online at <http://ow.ly/2ikZV>.

Database of abusers

Our investigation began by scouring the Internet for previous cases of abusive clergy in Kansas. A helpful starting point was the nonprofit organization, Bishop Accountability, whose website (www.bishop-accountability.org) collects media reports of abuse cases and provides browsers with alphabetical and state-specific databases identifying abusive clergy. The site, which lists more than 3,000 clergy accused of sexual abuse, gave us an initial starting point, but as we would find, many of the cases had never made it into the media.

With a launching point of several cases, we searched for victims by reaching out to advocacy groups such as the Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests, or SNAP. That’s how we found Janet Patterson, a woman who spends her free time investigating sexually abusive clergy in Kansas. In her Wichita home, Patterson keeps thousands of documents: lawsuits, court records and timelines of abusive clergy service.

“Nothing comes out of the diocese unless it’s pulled out,” Patterson said.

Patterson’s dedication assisting victims was her way of coping with the 1999 suicide of her son, Eric. He was one of



Nick Krug | Lawrence Journal-World

Brothers Dean Albert, left, Gene Albert and Ray Albert talk about the years they spent at the St. Joseph Children’s Home, a former orphanage run by the Catholic Church in El Dorado, Kan. Several members of the Albert family have come forward with allegations of sexual abuse by clergy and in 1996 filed a lawsuit against the Catholic Diocese of Wichita. The case, however, was dismissed due to the statute of limitations in civil cases.



The St. Joseph Children's Home in El Dorado, Kan., circa 1950. The home, which is now an apartment complex, was once an orphanage run by the Catholic Church.

least five suicide victims who had alleged abuse by Robert Larson, a former Wichita Diocese priest and now convicted sex offender. But Patterson's story, as remarkable as it was, had been well-documented in local and national media, and we strived to tell the stories of those cases that had never reached the media's attention.

Each victim had a telling narrative, all with the common theme of a church cover-up. Each of the victims deserved an article, and in some cases a book, about their experience fighting the church.

Take 68-year-old Texas archaeologist Bob d'Aigle, who says he was kidnapped and raped by a current Kansas priest in Louisiana in the 1950s. Or the story of federal inmate Brian Brown, incarcerated for life in a New Mexico prison for sexually abusing a 10-year-old Kansas girl, who said the abuse he suffered at a Topeka church in the 1980s led him to a life of crime, drugs and instability. Or the incredible story of the seven Albert children, removed from their Wichita home in 1950 and placed in a Catholic orphanage. Six of the seven children allege abuse at the home.

For about a year, we talked to as many victims and advocates as possible, compiling a list of alleged abusive clergy. We presented that list to the church, along with requests for additional information, all based on the church's stated new policy openness about sexual abuse. The language in the church's 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People – created in the wake of the national sex abuse scandal that dominated media coverage in 2001 and 2002 – was strong but vague.

"Dioceses/eparchies are to be open and transparent in communicating with the public about sexual abuse of minors by clergy within the confines of respect for the privacy and the reputation of the individuals involved."

Open and *transparent* meant different things to different church officials.

In some cases, the dioceses would confirm some of the cases we found, and some would provide detailed accounts of a clergy's abusive record. But other times, church officials declined to provide any information, and no one from any of the four Kansas Catholic dioceses would agree to an interview about abusive clergy. Months of unanswered phone calls to

church officials led to certified letters detailing the information we sought. Half of those letters were never answered, and the ones that were provided little additional information.

Veil of secrecy

Every year, dioceses across the country submit information about allegations of sexual abuse committed by clergy to an independent auditing firm hired by the Catholic Church. The information is used for statistical purposes, and the church reports results annually to the public.

But the report lacks the names of accused clergy.

Whether or not to release the names is left to the discretion of officials at each of the dioceses, said Teresa Kettelkamp, director of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, the entity that enacted the reforms. Kettelkamp acknowledged that church officials are left to interpret the reforms, with no option for appeal.

It's difficult to measure the impact of the church's programs in recent years to spot and prevent abuse. In 2004, the first year the church tracked abuse allegations, there were 898 reports of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy in the United States. That number dropped below 400 last year.

Reforms in the church also have established formal mechanism to investigate abuse within each diocese. Across the country, dioceses are required to operate independent review boards that investigate every allegation of abuse. The review boards, which are made up of a majority of non-church employees, interview victims and alleged abusers. Then, they make determinations on whether abuse occurred. The boards then make recommendations to the church on potential payments to victims. If the board finds a clergy member committed even one act of sexual abuse of a minor, that clergy is to be removed from public ministry.

For many of the victims we interviewed, the poor treatment they've received by church officials when they reported abuse has removed the possibility of any true justice.

Some would settle for the naming of all clergy who abused children. "Our name is as good as theirs," said Dean Albert, one of the seven Albert children who spent years in a Catholic orphanage. Specific names in a story make the abuse scandal "more real, instead of hiding."

Shaun Hittle is a general assignment reporter for the World Company in Lawrence, Kan. His stories appear in the Lawrence Journal-World, as well as on a local TV news station, 6News.

Months of unanswered phone calls to church officials led to certified letters detailing the information we sought. Half of those letters were never answered, and the ones that were provided little additional information.

Tips for investigating Catholic clergy in your area:

- Start by locating all previous abuse cases reported in the media. A good starting point: www.bishop-accountability.org.
- Check lawsuits against the Catholic Church in the counties where each diocese is located.
- Reach out to survivor groups, such as the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests.
- Understand the reforms in the church, and be prepared for resistance when requesting information.

Journalists around the globe are producing high-quality investigative stories that make a difference. Their experiences offer lessons as well as inspiration.



Investigations in the Arab world take root amid danger, obstacles



BY RANA SABBAGH
ARAB REPORTERS FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM (ARIJ)

In Syria, government bulldozers cleared the site hosting the largest garbage dump near the capital to curb the spread of infectious diseases and ease air pollution.

In the largely autocratic Arab world, where jailing reporters for exposing petty corruption or criticizing official policy is common under draconian media laws, investigative journalism remains a rare commodity.

But a new breed of dedicated and courageous reporters, working under the umbrella of Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism – the only media support center in the Arab world that is seeking to spread a culture of investigative journalism – are drawing a highly significant line in the sand.

ARIJ has provided professional training, small grants and pre-publication legal screening for scores of journalists who are passionate about telling a story but are frustrated by financial and other limitations. The so-called ARIJEANS now are standing up to higher powers, exposing serious issues of concern to their societies, and becoming an important force in promoting the rule of law and democratization.

During the past four years, the nonprofit group – set up with funding from the Danish parliament – has been making a difference.

With the help of UNESCO, it has published a comprehensive manual in Arabic, English and French, the most common languages in the region. The manual integrates best international practices and standards of investigative reporting with practices in the Arab world through a network of editors and journalists.

More than 80 in-depth investigations tackling human rights violations, miscarriage of justice, sexual abuse within families, pollution and other previously taboo topics have been published. Another 30 are in the pipeline.

The ARIJEANS publish investigations in their respective media and on the ARIJ website (www.arij.net). In addition, relevant data, documentation and detailed methodology are posted to help inspire their Arab peers.

ARIJ has trained 26 coaches and 12 regional Arabic-speaking trainers to boost the network's capacity in the eight areas of operation: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen. A dozen ARIJ fellows have earned

six pan-Arab and European prizes for top investigations that have caused a stir.

In addition, ARIJ has organized two annual pan-Arab conferences modeled along the Global Investigative Journalism Conference, providing a rare platform for frank interaction between regional and international media practitioners and academics. The third will be organized in November 2010.

The Washington-based International Center for Journalists has agreed to provide a Knight fellow to help the network set up five investigative reporting units in existing media outlets in Egypt, Jordan and Palestine. If the experiment succeeds, it will be emulated elsewhere in the region. A joint ICFJ-ARIJ prize in honor of award-winning American journalist Seymour Hersh also will be given to the best ARIJ investigation in 2010.

Journalists and editors from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have approached the network for help in setting up a similar system.

Paris-based Mark Hunter, a veteran award-winning investigative journalist since 1980 and professor of media and communications at INSEAD and the University of Paris, is the principal author and editor of the ARIJ manual, available on the network's website. Several Arab and European media practitioners involved in the ARIJ network helped Hunter produce "A Story-Based Inquiry: A Manual for Investigative Reporters."

"It fills a major gap in the literature of investigative journalism not only in the Arab world but worldwide," Hunter said. "And it equips journalists of the 21st century with a simple and clear working methodology to produce bulletproof investigations."

So far, ARIJ investigations have not toppled presidents or forced the resignations of senior technocrats and corrupt politicians, but they have led to quick improvements in several areas.

In Egypt, where martial law remains in effect since the 1981 assassination of President Anwar Sadat by Muslim militants, a lawyer asked the prosecutor general to sue the government for negligence after ARIJ fellow Mona Iraqi exposed

mismanagement of hazardous hospital waste in a 40-minute TV documentary.

Her colleagues Hisham Allam and Dareen Farghali, reporters for al Masry Al Yawm, caused a public outcry after documenting how untreated wastewater leaving a state-run sugar factory is polluting parts of the Nile River and threatening the lives of more than 220,000 residents. Because of the news report, parliament summoned the minister of health for questioning, and the president's office promised follow-up.

In Syria, government bulldozers cleared the site hosting the largest garbage dump near the capital to curb the spread of infectious diseases and ease air pollution. Khaled Mousa and Baraa Boushi worked for three months to collect data showing how the contractor was abusing the deal. In the process, they were threatened by local garbage collectors who were operating with tacit support from junior municipal officials.

In another case, the government formed a committee to look into six hospitals where incinerators burning medical waste were operating below the minimum temperature needed to ensure safe disposal and were transmitting the toxic chemical Dioxin.

In Jordan, the government closed hundreds of shops selling Shawarmah (a type of sandwich) because the ARIJ investigator proved that workers were not adhering to hygiene rules and overseers were ignoring the violations.

Several radios hosted Suhair Jaradat after she exposed families forcing their newlywed daughters to undergo medical virginity exams because they did not bleed the first time they had sex with their husbands.

Not all investigations had happy endings. In three cases, journalists were threatened by officials or business interest groups and forced to stop looking into the smuggling of endangered eagles, the selling of alcohol mixed with methanol, and the manufacturing of local cosmetic products causing skin allergies and facial scarring.

The Arab world, which mostly lacks parliamentary democratic systems, has a long way to go before in-depth reporting designed to reach the truth – or even simply the facts, as best as they can be determined – becomes an integral facet of daily journalism.

The region lacks other important factors, such as a reformed legal environment, a tradition of lively and competitive press with a diversity of owners, and adequate public support for bold journalists willing to question authority. Arab states, with the exception of Jordan, have not enacted laws guaranteeing the right to access public information. Even in Jordan, journalists complain that the 2006 law has many loopholes that bureaucrats use to block information.

Uncooperative and suspicious officials and a lack of public information and reliable statistics will continue to hamper the emergence of social and political truths in the Arab media. But, at least, a new generation of Arab journalists is dedicated to assuming the role of the Fourth Estate. And ARIJ is providing a reliable conduit.

Rana Sabbagh, ARIJ executive director, is a career journalist and media trainer with 26 years of professional experience with international and local media. She became the first Arab female chief editor of a daily political newspaper, The Jordan Times (1999-2001).

Philip Meyer Journalism Award

Sponsored by



National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting

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,
Arizona State University

**The contest recognizes
the best journalism done
using social science
research methods.**

All entries are placed
in IRE's Resource Center story
library so IRE members can
learn from others' triumphs
and troubles.

**POSTMARK DEADLINE:
October 31, 2010**

For more information or to enter:
www.ire.org/resourcecenter/contest/meyeraward.html

To keep their watchdog teeth sharp, journalists need to stay connected with the latest news and trends about public records and open meetings at the federal, state and local levels.



A costly temptation

Without watchdogs, officials may enrich themselves with tax money

BY CHARLES N. DAVIS
NATIONAL FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COALITION

The city manager was the highest paid, at \$787,637 a year, for overseeing a city in which 17 percent of the 40,000 residents live in poverty.

The headlines from Bell, Calif., interrupted a week of reverie for me in Lake Tahoe, with the realization that a longtime fear had come home to roost.

From my deck overlooking the idyllic alpine lake, it struck me that some of Bell's well-heeled public officials could doubtless afford some Tahoe real estate, courtesy of the taxpayers now threatening to run them out of office.

By now you know the basic story: The Bell city manager, assistant city manager and police chief resigned after *The Los Angeles Times* reported each was being paid excessive salaries.

The city manager was the highest paid, at \$787,637 a year, for overseeing a city in which 17 percent of the 40,000 residents live in poverty. Four of the five members of the Bell City Council were paid about \$100,000 annually before they cut their salaries in the wake of the scandal.

It also struck me that such a train wreck was inevitable, given the lack of journalistic eyes on the ground these days, but what was equally disturbing was the lack of any meaningful solution to what will become a much more frequent occurrence. What is Bell's problem today will become some other town's problem tomorrow, for corrupt public officials working in a vacuum of publicity will be sorely tempted, again and again, to do the wrong thing.

Sunshine, Louis Brandeis famously said, is the best disinfectant, but what to do if the sunshine is abundant but untapped? The Bell scenario existed right out in the open, and yet no one was watching. It's precisely what many of us feared would manifest itself in the wake of the degradation of the once-mighty watchdog press.

But before we get too comfortable with the idea that Bell is some canary in the journalism coal mine – and perhaps it is – consider for a moment the conditions that had to exist

for public officials to grow so brazen as to effectively hijack municipal government for their own gain.

The arrogance, the hubris, the abuse of authority that it took to create such a perfect storm had to be built through years of neglect. No public official subject to even the hint of journalistic scrutiny would have felt emboldened enough to take such salaries.

It took a complete absence of scrutiny to grow such a rotten civic ecosystem, and it will take more than a serendipitous intervention by the big-city press to save similar communities from similar fates.

A column by Terry Francke, a longtime ally in the open government wars, provides some helpful local context. It seems that the local paper in Bell, the *Bell Industrial Post*, founded in 1924, had become the Bell-Maywood-Cudahy Industrial Post by the 1960s, then went through several chain companies' hands until disappearing altogether.

"In short, the Bell spectacle is what happens to communities without their own old-fashioned diligent news coverage by veteran newspaper reporters, or at least smart reporters led by veteran newspaper editors," Francke wrote. "The result need not be on paper, but it must be done with the community memory and professional savvy almost unique to newspaper-trained journalists with experience watching small-town politics."

True, every word, but we must also find new ways to work with citizens to augment what's been lost in the community press.

In the aftermath of the Bell debacle, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger challenged California's cities to post public officials' salaries on websites if they have nothing to hide.

"Put the information on the website so people don't even have to call," Schwarzenegger said in a budget speech to the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce.

The press should take the governor's plea a step further, aggregating salary data statewide in an easy-to-use portal that can be accessed from every media outlet in the state, complete with maps and other tools that the online folks have gotten so good at creating. Deploy all the tools of online social networking around data sleuthing, and get the citizens involved, and the calamity in Bell will be much harder to pull off next time.

Charles N. Davis is an associate professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and the executive director of the National Freedom of Information Coalition, which is headquartered at the school. Visit the coalition's website at www.nfoic.org.

It's precisely what many of us feared would manifest itself in the wake of the degradation of the once-mighty watchdog press.

IRE members have learned invaluable lessons during years of refining their investigative skills. They generously share their wisdom so others may benefit.



Cover Government

By Norberto Santana Jr.
Voice of OC



The amazing story of Robert Rizzo, the \$800,000 city manager from the California city of Bell, and his \$100,000 part-time city council members shows what happens when reporters really show up to the local city hall beat.

This summer's blockbuster *Los Angeles Times* coverage of the small city just southeast of Los Angeles prompted a host of official resignations and launched a national debate about transparency in government and what can happen when the public turns its eyes off city hall.

And at its heart, it was a basic documents story.

When it comes to covering government, there's a lot to be said for sticking to the basics.

Getting to public records

Start with the basics, like the city budget. Look at it like you would your own home budget. Ask yourself what the spending patterns tell you about the public agency's challenges and priorities.

Keep asking basic questions and look for the documents that hold the answers. At most city halls across America, there's likely a city or county clerk for official records that can help out.

How much does the city manager make each year?

When it comes to local government, it's often the basic questions that turn around the most fascinating stories.

How much water is each elected official using? Where do they travel? Who gives them gifts? What kinds of investments do they dabble in? Where do they raise their campaign money?

The answers to these basic questions don't require late-night meetings in parking structures or fancy reporting. They are all in public documents.

Learn to read bureaucratese

When you do find your public documents, the next important concept is learning how they're written.

Learn how to comb through and read government agendas with an eye toward the "why" behind the intentionally dull descriptions of things like salaries, pensions and contract changes. Read agendas and staff reports and look for why they are changing, or buying or canceling any particular item. There's usually a pretty good story waiting there.

Get ahead of agendas

Community members really value coverage of government that allows them to get involved. Like anything, advance notice is great. So give people glimpses of what's coming up and help them start the debate early. They'll appreciate it and reach out.

Norberto Santana Jr. is editor-in-chief of the Voice of OC, a nonprofit news agency that covers politics and government in Orange County, Calif. Previously, he worked as an investigative reporter for the Orange County Register. He was a founder of CubaNet.org, a website launched in 1995 for dissident writers inside Cuba.

Think in terms of themes

It's always helpful to understand the theme of a municipality. It helps take daily coverage and have it feed into broader stories.

Are you covering an older town trying to adapt its old downtown district to compete with the local mall? Is the city trying to build a new stadium on limited revenues?

Keeping asking basic questions about the kinds of local impacts that are likely from the economic development, transportation, infrastructure and public safety decisions being made by your local government. Are they making your community healthier or tougher in terms of quality of life?

Show up

Bureaucrats respect reporters who are seen in the trenches. Showing up to government meetings, along with the occasional neighborhood meeting, is critical for getting faster access to documents as well as sourcing.

Being there for the small things is how you run into the big things.

Sourcing

Along with a good document strategy, there's nothing more important than sourcing the people who shape policy. Hand out business cards at every corner of city hall. Get to know the people who work in the building.

Often, the best function of document hunts is getting introduced to the workers and officials who are in the midst of shaping policy.

Most of government is shaped off the record so a critical component to sourcing is developing a knack for finding the right people who have an interest in talking to you.

For example, always look for what I like to call, "the artist formerly known as ..." Make it a point to visit retired, fired, convicted council members or city officials. And when meeting the new finance manager at your local city hall, ask what happened to the last one. Chances are they didn't go too far away, and such former officials always have a fascinating take on the agencies.

Triangulate agencies and officials as often as possible. Everyone, from the county government to the state to the federal government, is likely to have jurisdiction or some official following the local issue you're tracking. Don't hesitate to reach out to them and get their perspectives into stories. It also helps to broaden stories into a regional perspective.

Putting it all together

By combining a solid public records and sourcing approach, along with constancy in coverage and timeliness in breaking stories, one lone reporter can significantly alter the balance of power at a city in favor of the public.

UNCOVERING NEW STORIES ON CAMPUS

"Between questions about why the cost of college keeps climbing and why graduation rates are so low at some institutions, there is plenty to investigate."

DOUBLE MAJOR

Use data and documents to dig deeper on campus

By Mary Beth Marklein
USA TODAY

The Virginia Tech killings in 2007 cast a national spotlight on important issues in higher education, particularly related to crisis management and mental health. The tragedy clearly deserved the attention it got; even so, press coverage barely scratched the surface of what happens on campuses.

In fact, higher education is largely neglected by the national media, according to a December 2009 report by the Brookings Institution. Its survey of the first nine months of 2009 found that education coverage took up a mere 1.4 percent of prime real estate in mainstream media, including news websites. Of that, less than a third was devoted to higher education. And, as the Virginia Tech case suggests, coverage was more often driven by events.

The report paints a slightly rosier picture for local coverage. But in light of newsroom cutbacks (especially, it seems, on the higher-ed beat), it's safe to assume that a lot of really good stories about the inner workings of higher education are going untold.

That's unfortunate, because just about everybody has a stake in the local college or university, whether they're students or parents, employers, employees or taxpayers. And there's a lot of skepticism.

A survey released in February by Public Agenda and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education found that Americans increasingly view a college education as essential for success, but believe colleges care more about the bottom line than on educating students.

Between questions about why the cost of college keeps climbing and why graduation rates are so low at some institutions, there is plenty to investigate.

Where to start? The basics: Go to meetings. Follow agendas. Read student newspapers. Talk to students. And don't assume you understand the complexities of higher education just because you have a college degree.



Bob Riba | USA TODAY

A few more tips:

Ask to sit in on admissions decisions. The process is shrouded in secrecy, as the *Chicago Tribune's* excellent coverage of influence-peddling at the University of Illinois shows. But I have observed a slice of the proceedings at two schools with selective admissions – a small private and a large public. A first-hand look can help you demystify a process that perplexes many families, and help you understand what pressures the admissions staff faces when building a freshman class. And, while not all schools have competitive admissions, today's economy has added some new wrinkles, as some open-access schools limit enrollments and some private institutions struggle to meet their goals. All the more reason to look into who gets in and who doesn't.

Examine all charges. An increase in tuition sticker prices makes for an easy headline but often a misleading one. Make sure to count increases in mandatory fees, and room and board charges; colleges typically focus on whichever figures cast their institution in the best light. And remember, when financial aid is figured in, the amount any one student pays can range from zero to the full amount. Some of the biggest debates today center on financial aid, including concerns about merit vs. need-based aid, average student loan debt for graduates, and a school's loan default rates. Something to watch this fall: Congress just passed a controversial change in the federal student loan process that one prominent critic (Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.) says will make getting a loan "about as enjoyable as going to the Department of Motor Vehicles."

Expand your horizons. Three-fourths of today's students no longer fit the traditional just-out-of-high-school mold. Some stories might best be told through the eyes of a veteran, single parent or displaced worker. Likewise, don't overlook community colleges, which enroll nearly half of all undergraduates, or the fast-growing for-profit institutions. Those schools have their own challenges, and view non-traditional students as an important market.

Meet the institutional researchers. Accountability and assessment are hot topics in higher education, and this department (or person) collects data on all kinds of things. Some statistics, such as enrollment and graduation rates, get reported to the Education Department, accrediting agencies and, yes, *U.S. News & World Report*. Increasingly, the researchers are being asked to prepare internal reports on topics such as student learning, how schools are spending money or how faculty pay compares with peer institutions.

Understand the budget. That, plus institutional data, provides context "to everything that everybody else at the university says," says Josh Keller, a reporter for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. When University of California-Berkeley officials said the school was admitting more international students as a way to increase diversity, for example, Keller pointed out that the higher fees they paid also boosted tuition revenue.

Request copies of audits. They examine how the institution handles its cash and whether the money is well tracked. Read every word, "including the dry ones about internal controls," says Ryan Gabrielson, an investigative reporting fellow at the University of California-Berkeley. His review of Scottsdale Community College audits found multiple examples of fraud, including faked enrollments, at the Arizona school.

Use the IRS Form 990. Private universities file a 990, which contains salaries of the highest-paid employees, as well as trustee information. If you cover a public university, get the 990s for the institution's foundations, which in many states are "relatively rich, increasingly powerful and important, and, some worry, seldom scrutinized," as the *The State* notes in a recent piece on foundations affiliated with South Carolina's four-year public universities.

Be ready for the "student privacy" excuse. Colleges are notorious for citing the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, better known as FERPA, as a reason against releasing documents. The 1974 law was created to protect student academic records but colleges have cited it to avoid handing over information about everything from parking violations to transcripts of public meetings. Frank LoMonte, executive director of the nonprofit Student Press Law Center, says court decisions typically favor the news media, as a judge did in May when a Wyoming college didn't want a local paper to publish information about the president that it had received from an anonymous source. But "because we don't have anything binding from the Supreme Court or a federal Court of Appeals, schools keep pursuing the path of least disclosure," LoMonte says.

Mary Beth Marklein has been covering higher education for USA TODAY since 1997.

Bob Rithg | USA TODAY



"Private universities file a 990, which contains salaries of the highest-paid employees, as well as trustee information."

STORY IDEAS AND TRENDS

Scott Jaschik, editor of Inside Higher Ed, offered reporters attending an Education Writers Association conference in San Francisco story ideas and trends to monitor. Among them:

- Doctoral programs, which are expensive and can enhance prestige, are poised to get attention with the release (expected this summer) of newly formulated rankings by the National Research Council. With cost-cutting on everyone's mind, it will be interesting to see what happens to poorly ranked programs.
- Many colleges are expanding their master's programs, but who are they helping, really? Master's programs typically are cash cows for colleges, and compared with doctoral programs, offer fewer avenues for financial aid. In a tight job market, many graduates may be passing the time in unnecessary programs because they don't know what else to do.
- There has been too little scrutiny of the impact of state budget cuts to higher education. Cuts are often made across the board, which sounds fair, but is it? Community colleges, for example, rely more heavily on state appropriations than do the flagships, so a 10 percent cut hurts them more than it does a state research university.
- Take a look at the low graduation rates at most community colleges. They may be local institutions but they're gaining national scrutiny, including from the Obama administration. Be sure to look at how community colleges are experimenting with potential solutions, too.
- Enrollments, especially among poor and minority students, are surging at for-profit institutions. Those schools typically offer courses at convenient times and locations, but are controversial within higher education. Some do good things but merit scrutiny on recruitment practices, student loan defaults and other issues.
- Kindle didn't capture the hearts of most students but the iPad could revolutionize how students learn.
- Culture wars may be on the rise at religious schools. A Catholic university is under fire for rescinding a job offer to a professor who is a lesbian, and whose scholarship includes lesbian sexuality. And an evangelical scholar of the Old Testament was dismissed this spring by a seminary after a video showed him endorsing evolution.
- Some interesting twists are surfacing regarding grade inflation. A professor who failed 90 percent of her students was recently yanked from the classroom. A Duke professor uses a modified version of crowdsourcing in which students determine how well their peers did on assignments. Most, if not all, got an A for the class.
- A three-year bachelor's degree has quickly emerged as a way to help families keep costs down. But is it good policy, and are students enrolling? Some evidence suggests otherwise.

Reported by Tim Barker, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY. Jaschik offers more tips at <http://bit.ly/8XEZCx>.

"A Duke professor uses a modified version of crowdsourcing in which students determine how well their peers did on assignments. Most, if not all, got an A for the class."

UNJUST COMPENSATION

Student team finds unequal
justice in payouts to the
wrongly convicted

By Clark Merrefield
CUNY Graduate School of Journalism

Investigative reporting is a luxury in some shrinking newsrooms, leaving plenty of opportunities for student journalists to dig for untold stories.

That's what we did at the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism. Andrew Lehren, my investigative reporting professor, assigned a team of students to unravel the conviction compensation system in New York State.

Others have written about wrongful convictions, but we wanted to tell the story of what happens when the wrongfully convicted seek redress. This system of compensating the wrongfully convicted was the driving force behind "Wrongful Conviction, Unequal Compensation," which served as my thesis during my final semester in September 2008.

I worked with a great team of students: Stephen Bronner, Joshua Cinelli, Dan Macht, Rosaleen Ortiz and Matt Townsend.

For students and professional journalists working in a team, a wiki page can be invaluable. Wiki software provides a secure, central place to store notes, photos, data and other reporting information. Every member of the team can access information through the wiki – a sort of shared electronic filing cabinet. We used pbwiki.com. Amid a whirlwind of other personal projects, when not every member of the team can make every meeting, it's a great way to quickly bounce ideas off one another and keep data organized.

Beyond campus,
students can
investigate issues
in their local
community and
far beyond,
making a real
difference in
coverage.

"Our most important sources were lawyers who had worked on specific cases, and experts on wrongful conviction compensation."

Claims database

We started with a database from the New York State Court of Claims. It contained about 250 wrongful conviction compensation claims filed from 1984 to 2008, resulting in \$24 million in payouts. Obtaining this database was fairly easy. I called the Court of Claims and put in my request. After a bit of clarification of what I wanted, they sent PDF files, which we imported into Excel.

Cinelli found it more difficult to get data on wrongful conviction cases from the Innocence Project at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University. Perhaps that's to be expected because law students rotate in and out every three years, and we wanted numbers going back two decades. The Innocence Project's initial reluctance was based on privacy concerns, but Cinelli persisted and convinced them to give us data on selected clients. To round out our data, we used data from Northwestern Law's Center on Wrongful Convictions.

After four weeks, we cleaned up our data, ran queries using Access database software and did basic analysis using an Excel spreadsheet. We looked for trends and outliers: Who had been in jail the longest and gotten the smallest payout? The biggest?

Payouts varied, with the amount set seemingly at the whim of the judge. That proved the core of the story. With our data, we knew exactly which people would have the most compelling stories.

"Breaking down the data once you obtain it – it's a very powerful thing," Bronner said.

Human sources

Our most important sources were lawyers who had worked on specific cases, and experts on wrongful conviction compensation. They were not hard to find. But those wrongfully convicted were tougher to track down. Wrongfully convicted people sometimes live on the margins of society, so finding them years after exoneration was not easy. But we needed those voices to add life to the statistics.

"It takes a lot of time to go through all the documents and find the individual stories to paint a picture that showed examples of the different kinds of cases," Townsend said.

I called the Court of Claims again, this time looking for specific case files. I wanted to see every detail of every case. Every judge's explanation, every handwritten note in the margins. No such luck.

Turns out the New York State Court of Claims isn't exactly a robustly staffed office. But I needed those court papers. So, on a student's budget, I rented a car and drove to Albany to the Court of Claims. Without money to rent a hotel room, I had only a few hours to go through cases, make copies and bring it all home. I worked mostly on instinct, looking through reams of paper for cases we'd plucked from the data, and others we might have overlooked.

This process was particularly helpful in getting information on John Scott (supplemented by Lexis-Nexis research), whose case was the lede of the story, and on Terrence Ferrer, the man who spent 12 years behind bars for a murder he didn't commit.

Research continued in New York City. Macht was looking into the infamous Central Park jogger case. The five teen boys convicted of raping and assaulting a woman in Central Park were exonerated in 2002 when Matias Reyes confessed to the crime. One of the boys, now an adult, was filing a compensation claim with the state, and a civil suit. Macht called his lawyer to find out the particulars.

"He basically just said if they win in federal court, there's no reason to go back to the court of claims," Macht said. "That told us that there was something a little screwy at the court of claims."

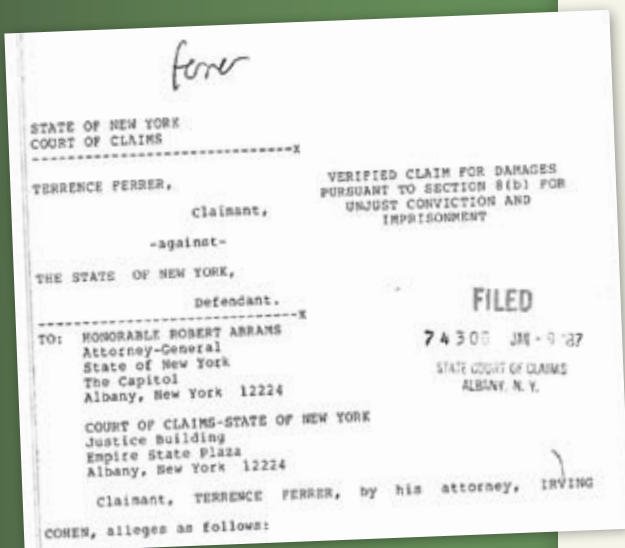
Key interview

We all tried to get lawyers to allow us to talk to their clients on the record, but Ortiz struck pay dirt. She organized an interview with Michael Clancy, who spent four years in prison for a Bronx murder before being released in 2003. Ortiz did a pre-interview with Clancy to gauge his willingness to talk. She determined he'd be a good subject, so we proceeded with the official interview.

"I think the story is like any other story; just being up front to the people will get you the information," Ortiz said. "First you need to know who to contact. In this case I contacted the lawyers and I just said we were students, we were doing this, and if anyone could talk to us."

Cinelli brought up another point. Our team examined compensation claims for just one state. How many other states have a broken compensation system? How many thousands of people are waiting for someone to start asking questions? The ground here is still fertile.

Clark Merrefield graduated from the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism in December 2008. He has worked as an editor and researcher for book authors and is currently a reporter for The Daily Beast.



Terrence Ferrer of New York filed a claim for compensation after serving 12 years in prison for a murder he didn't commit. Ultimately, he won a \$1.56 million judgment. He died of a heart attack at age 43.

SEX CRIMES ON CAMPUS

Yearlong investigation finds
failures of the justice system

By Kristen Lombardi
The Center for Public Integrity

Kathryn Russell said it happened in her campus apartment. For Megan Wright, the venue was a residence hall. The U.S. Justice Department estimates that one in five women college students will become the victim of a rape or attempted rape before she graduates.

But official reported data doesn't reflect the scope of the problem. And student victims face a litany of barriers that either assure their silence or leave them feeling victimized a second time, according to "Sexual Assault on Campus: A Frustrating Search for Justice." The six-part series was published Dec. 1-3 and Feb. 24-26 by the Center for Public Integrity.

Reporter Kristin Jones and I spent a year surveying crisis-services programs, building databases from records requests, deciphering disciplinary procedures and sexual assault policies, and interviewing students, victim advocates, college administrators and Education Department officials. What we found suggests systemic problems with the way colleges and universities handle reports of sexual assaults.

Our investigation reveals that students deemed "responsible" for alleged sexual assaults often face little or no punishment, while their victims' lives are frequently turned upside down. Many times, victims drop out of school; students found culpable go on to graduate. According to our investigation, "responsible" findings rarely lead to tough punishment like expulsion – even in cases involving alleged repeat offenders.

It isn't just this disparity in outcomes that seems remarkable, but also the commonalities among campus rape cases. Research shows that repeat offenders actually account for a significant number of sexual assaults on campus, contrary to what those who handle these cases believe. We found many schools are slow to realize they have what experts call "undetected rapists" in their midst.

"What we found suggests systemic problems with the way colleges and universities handle reports of sexual assaults."

UNCOVERING NEW STORIES ON CAMPUS

"From the start, I knew the best way to get at this story would be to find students who filed complaints and went through their schools' processes."

Culture of silence

Critics question whether faculty, staff and students should even adjudicate what amounts to a felony crime. But these internal campus proceedings grow from two federal laws, known as Title IX and the Clery Act, which require schools to respond to claims of sexual assault on campus and to offer key rights to victims.

The Education Department enforces both laws, yet its Office for Civil Rights rarely investigates student allegations of botched school proceedings, largely because students don't realize they have a right to complain. When cases do go forward, the civil rights office rarely rules against schools, we found, and virtually never issues sanctions against institutions.

Equally chilling is the culture of silence surrounding rape among students. Many student victims don't report incidents at all, because they blame themselves, or don't identify what happened as sexual assault. We found that institutional barriers only compound the problem of silence, and few actually make it to a campus hearing.

Those who do come forward, though, can encounter secret disciplinary proceedings, closed-mouth school administrations and off-the-record negotiations. At times, school policies and practices can lead students to drop complaints or submit to gag orders – a practice deemed illegal. Though administrators defend existing processes as a fair and effective way to deal with sensitive allegations, our inquiry shows that the processes have little transparency or accountability.

The pervasiveness of campus sexual assault – largely hidden from public view and shrouded by official secrecy – drew us to the story. The project began in April 2008 after I had attended a conference on covering sexual violence. There, I met victim advocates who work on campuses and who spoke about the college judiciary process. They described what they saw as systemic failures, and led me to others who come in contact with student victims, sexual assault services coordinators, response team leaders and student activists.

From the start, I knew the best way to get at this story would be to find students who filed complaints and went through their schools' processes. Then we contacted organizations like Security on Campus and the Victim Rights Law Center – both staffed with advocates and lawyers who help students with the college process and with Title IX and Clery Act complaints. We did court searches on Title IX lawsuits filed against schools, then contacted the plaintiffs' attorneys. We posted e-mail queries on the blogs and Facebook pages of advocacy groups like SAFER (Students Active For Ending Rape) and V-Day, seeking to talk with students who had reported being raped to their schools and had gone through proceedings. We attended Take Back the Night and similar events on some campuses.

Innovative survey

By the summer of 2008, we began conducting a survey of on-campus and off-campus crisis programs that serve students, faculty and staff at public universities. The idea was to contact front-line responders to student victims to get a general sense of what was happening on campuses across the country. We took a stratified random sample of these programs on or near college campuses in every region of the United States. We sent out survey questionnaires, and then conducted follow-up phone interviews. Of the 260 programs in our sample, 152 completed the survey, a 58 percent response rate. Respondents were asked, among many questions, how many student sexual assault cases they handled in the past year. We also asked if they would introduce us to students.

In the end, we interviewed 33 students who reported being raped by fellow students, and another dozen students who said they were raped yet never reported, or who said they were raped by professors.

They were the heart of our investigation. But we also interviewed 50 experts familiar with the college disciplinary process – student affairs administrators, hearing board members, district attorneys, campus police officers, university counsels, lawyers, researchers. We pushed to interview accused students whose cases we featured; about a half dozen of them agreed to speak with us.

Document sources were critical, too. We used judicial records from the students' college proceedings to corroborate their stories. Students who had their full disciplinary case file gave it to us. For others, we asked them to sign privacy waivers so we could file records requests under state disclosure laws to obtain their documents. We also helped students who attended private universities file requests for their proceeding records under the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA. During our investigation, we filed records requests at the federal and state level, including in Colorado, Indiana, Florida, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin.

We repeatedly bumped up against FERPA, which makes it difficult to cover these cases without a student's cooperation. Despite the signed waivers from the victims, schools often heavily redacted the disciplinary case files, presumably to protect the identities of accused students. At times, we received only the disposition letter and, if applicable, the sanction. We had to file records requests to obtain information that FERPA, in theory, doesn't prohibit. Some schools refused to provide even basic numbers of sexual assault hearings,

dispositions, and, especially, sanctions. Not one school gave us the names of accused students found responsible for sexual assault, even though such names *can* be released under FERPA.

Our project aimed to break new ground by trying to quantify a previously unquantified problem: Campus sexual assault remains a hidden crime, in part, because there is no central clearinghouse for colleges to report cases and to record their dispositions. We tried to collect documentation from a wide variety of sources to put isolated cases on individual campuses into a broader, systemic context.

We filed numerous Freedom of Information Act requests with the Education Department – first seeking the department’s resolutions of Title IX and Clery Act complaints filed against colleges over the past 10 years; then, seeking the supporting documentation in select investigations. We built two electronic databases from these records – the only public records available that are windows into the institutional response. We also identified 10 years worth of civil suits filed under Title IX against colleges, and examined those court filings.

We sought grant applications and progress reports from schools that have received federal funding to combat campus sexual assault under a grant program administered by the Justice Department’s Office on Violence Against Women. That program turned out to offer the only national statistics on sexual assault proceedings we could find. Ultimately, we got our hands on the electronic database that the agency has compiled to keep track of its grant recipients’ progress – making us the first journalists to do so.

Finally, we built a fifth database from our survey results, which included the on-campus and off-campus programs’ observations of the sexual assault cases that they recorded. We then obtained crime data required for all schools to file under the Clery Act. By having two separate databases – one of campuses’ Clery numbers and one with our survey results of those same campuses – we were able to compare the “official record” from the universities to what practitioners in the field serving those same universities’ students were seeing. We found overwhelmingly that the programs saw many more instances of sexual assaults than what universities were submitting in their annual Clery reports.

Widespread coverage

It’s probably not surprising to say that this story takes a lot of patience, persistence and time. Not only is information on campus sexual assault proceedings not readily available, but seemingly sympathetic sources – let alone hostile ones – often don’t want to speak on the record. Privacy laws, such as FERPA, complicate things. We had students sign privacy waivers just so we could request interviews from their school administrators. Many administrators agreed to talk about the specifics of a student’s case only because of these waivers; others still declined our interview requests.

The year’s worth of reporting has yielded a wide-ranging series of long-form narrative articles. As part of our online report, we published powerful videos and audio slideshows of students telling their stories. We posted key case documents and compiled a Reporter’s Toolkit for student journalists. For the February installment, we partnered with National Public Radio and members of the Investigative News Network – mostly nonprofit journalism organizations dedicated to watchdog reporting – to broaden the scope and reach of our investigation.

The project has generated widespread media coverage online and in print, radio and TV, reaching an estimated audience of more than 40 million people. More than 50 student newspapers have done stories based on our findings. Recently, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, funded by the Centers for Disease Control, has cataloged the project’s site as a permanent addition to its searchable library – a widely used resource by advocates, students, authors and researchers.

Maybe the best measure of impact is the current campaign for reform. Spurred by our report, national advocacy groups unveiled on Capitol Hill the so-called “Campus Sexual Assault Free Environment (SAFE) Blueprint,” a legislative proposal to amend the Clery Act and Title IX to improve the institutional response to these cases. Some college administrators have begun rethinking existing policies. And the Education Department has promised to ramp up its own enforcement of Title IX.

Kristen Lombardi is a staff writer and investigative reporter for The Center for Public Integrity. Her series on campus rape cases was a finalist for the Freedom of Information award in this year’s Investigative Reporters and Editors contest.



"We found overwhelmingly that the programs saw many more instances of sexual assaults than what universities were submitting in their annual Clery reports."

UNCOVERING NEW STORIES ON CAMPUS

ADMISSIONS SECRETS

Public records uncover
ties to powerful patrons

By Jodi S. Cohen
Chicago Tribune

In spring 2009, the University of Illinois was operating under a well-entrenched, secret admissions system that allowed subpar applicants into the state's most selective public university based not on merit but on political connections.

The unfair system could have existed indefinitely had the *Tribune* not dedicated substantial resources to uncovering a practice that allowed students backed by university trustees, high-ranking administrators and elected officials to get on clout lists, thereby greasing their way into the university.

Chris Walker | Chicago Tribune



B. Joseph White, president of the University of Illinois, appears before the Illinois Admissions Review Commission at the university in Urbana, Ill. Later, he resigned amid the admissions scandal.

Uncovering it was no easy task since the system was designed to remain in the shadows. It operated outside the normal admissions process.

Through the Freedom of Information Act, I was able to get logs kept by university officials that included the names of applicants (redacted) and the names of the public officials who sponsored them, as well as the college applied to and the admissions decision. I also received hundreds of e-mails among university officials, lobbyists and others regarding the applicants.

The first set of documents totaled 1,800 pages. Subsequent FOIA requests eventually led to about 9,000 total pages. To tackle what quickly appeared to be an important story, two other reporters joined the "Clout" team: general assignment reporter Stacy St. Clair and education reporter Tara Malone.

University administrators did not hold back in their e-mails describing the students: An undergraduate applicant had "terrible credentials," while a Law School applicant was so unqualified that an admissions officer predicted that there "is absolutely no reason to expect anything other than failure."

Both were admitted.

As a group, they were referred to as "students who can't get in on their own credentials."

But the documents told only part of the story. We interviewed admissions officers (past and present), the university chancellor, president, and other campus officials and high school guidance counselors. Multiple sources helped fill in blanks left by the heavily redacted documents.

Phil Velasquez | Chicago Tribune



University of Illinois Chancellor Richard Herman answers questions from a state commission looking into admissions issues at the university. Later, he resigned his position.

Chris Walker | Chicago Tribune



University of Illinois at Chicago student James Matz, foreground, joins protesters in a lobby outside a meeting of the University of Illinois board of trustees in Chicago.

"We interviewed admissions officers (past and present), the university chancellor, president, and other campus officials and high school guidance counselors. Multiple sources helped fill in blanks left by the heavily redacted documents."

UNCOVERING NEW STORIES ON CAMPUS

"Our investigation led to the appointment of a state commission to review the admissions system and the resignations of most of the university trustees, the president and the chancellor."

During the next six months, we wrote more than 90 stories. We also produced detailed graphics that showed e-mail exchanges, and two computer databases that readers could use to get more information.

Our investigation led to the appointment of a state commission to review the admissions system and the resignations of most of the university trustees, the president and the chancellor.

While an independent commission appointed by Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn called the university's system of preferential admissions perhaps unprecedented, it would be worth looking into whether similar practices exist at public universities in your state.

If you do, here are some lessons we learned while reporting and writing "Clout Goes to College:"

Student privacy concerns

The University of Illinois, a public university, redacted many documents for the stated purpose of protecting student privacy. It is helpful to have an understanding of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, known as FERPA, before the university uses it to shield information. FERPA is increasingly being challenged as universities withhold documents such as student parking tickets by calling them "education records." Because the university used this law to justify redacting certain information, we needed to be well-sourced to tell the full story. The *Tribune* also has a lawsuit pending in federal court to challenge the university's claims of student privacy. In the lawsuit, the *Tribune* argues that "FERPA is not a secrecy statute that protects information that might be embarrassing to the state."

If you are able to discover the applicants' identities, be prepared for difficult questions about how to identify them in your stories. There were days when it felt like we spent more time debating whether to name applicants than we spent writing the story. The debate came down to this: It was unclear whether students knew they had powerful sponsors. Regardless, the story was about the misdeeds of public officials. So we decided not to name the applicants, but refer to them as a "relative" of the adult who had a connection to the sponsor.

Team dynamics

If you're going to get involved in a months-long project, make sure you are working with people whom you can tolerate for 12 hours a day. When we realized the enormity of this project, my boss allowed me to decide who should join the team instead of dictating it himself. I think it was a brilliant decision. Everyone on our team brought a different strength. We identified those pretty quickly, which made things run smoothly. After writing 90 stories together, we're still talking to each other! And we had an editor, Tracy Van Moorlehem, who was organized and consistently calm during stressful times.

Non-"investigative" reporters

You don't have to be on your newspaper's official "investigative team" to investigate. None of us are. Don't let that deter you. Despite not having the title, we embraced all of the principles of investigative reporting: documents, strong sourcing, extensive street reporting and databases.

Personal level

Political deal-making in Illinois is nothing new. The *Tribune* has written about it for decades. We're so used to corruption stories in Illinois that many people may not care or understand how they're affected. But we took a key event in many peoples' lives – applying to college – and showed how Illinois' patronage politics tainted even that. It was clout on a level that everyone could understand.



Boxes upon boxes hold applications of students denied admission to the University of Illinois. The university keeps them for several years before destroying them.

Document organization

When dealing with so many documents, it was critical to have an organizing system early on, and to make a complete set of originals before divvying them up for analysis. We had to rearrange the documents, which were given to us in disorder. It helped to have a complete set for reference. We were able to put together e-mail strings that had been separated and to identify common threads: e-mails related to trustee-sponsored applicants and ones about particularly unqualified students, for example. It also was helpful to have multiple people reviewing the documents. It allowed us to discover more than any of us would have on our own. Fresh eyes led to fresh findings.

Quick pace

"Clout Goes to College" was an investigative series with a breaking news tempo. While we were uncovering new information, we also were covering daily news of a state investigation that our initial reporting triggered. We could have been overburdened by the day-to-day coverage, but instead we balanced the daily coverage with the need to stay ahead of the story and continue to break news. One or two of us covered the daily news, while the remaining team member continued to work on the stories that revealed new abuses.

Expressing thanks

We worked incredibly long hours for several months, but many other people worked hard as well: editors, photographers, graphic artists, database experts, page designers, and even the lawyers. We tried to make sure they knew how appreciative we were, and that the series wouldn't have been possible without them.

Jodi Cohen is the higher education reporter at the Chicago Tribune. To read the "Clout Goes to College" series, go to www.chicagotribune.com/collegeclout.

"When dealing with so many documents, it was critical to have an organizing system early on, and to make a complete set of originals before divvying them up for analysis."

E. Jason Wambsgans | Chicago Tribune



A rolling investigation by the *Chicago Tribune* led to the creation of a statewide commission to investigate irregularities in admissions. Most of the university trustees resigned, as did the president and chancellor.

WRESTLERS AND REAL ESTATE

Student investigation uncovers
sales among coaches, athletes

By Chris Ison
University of Minnesota

Even to seasoned reporters, long-term investigative projects look like mountains. The long climb will bring breaking news stories and beat duties that distract them, impatient editors who divert them, and months of digging that might turn up little to justify the time and expense. Combined, an exciting idea can turn into a tough and discouraging slog.

For a college newspaper, multiply those problems by 10. Constant turnover. Inexperienced reporters who graduate or change beats after only months on the job. Short institutional memories.

But a recent long-term investigation by the *Minnesota Daily*, the campus newspaper at the University of Minnesota, illustrates that none of those obstacles are insurmountable. The *Daily's* success was rooted in the basic investigative principles that are emphasized repeatedly in the pages of "The IRE Journal" and "The Investigative Reporters Handbook," and taught at the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting.

The article, "U wrestling makes real estate big business" (<http://bit.ly/5eS4fj>), involved seven reporters, three editors and more than three years of handoffs and start-and-stop research. By the time the story was published on Dec. 10, one of the reporters had been graduated for nearly three years, another for a year. But the integrity of their original research was preserved in an Excel spreadsheet and detailed files and flow charts documenting scores of property transactions and associations between wrestlers, coaches and real estate companies. Their organization and collaboration paved the way for a smooth process of writing, editing and line-by-line fact checking.

An inadvertent discovery

Brady Gervais was a senior journalism student and *Daily* editor in 2005 when she began working on a project about housing code enforcement in the university area. Three students had died in a house fire, and Gervais (then Brady Averill) wanted to find out if a promise to ramp up inspections had led to tougher enforcement.

She obtained the city of Minneapolis inspections data digitally, and then attended NICAR's Boot Camp in Columbia, Mo., where she learned how to analyze it using Microsoft Access and Excel. Gervais was trying to track landlords with the largest numbers of violations. But along the way, she spotted a familiar name: J Robinson, the coach of the three-time national champion Gophers wrestling team.

Robinson had bought and sold millions of dollars worth of real estate in neighborhoods surrounding the university. On a hunch, Gervais obtained the wrestling team roster and began searching for property in their names, finding a number of them owned houses as well.

Gervais finished her original story – a three-part series that showed that many landlords continued to own property with numerous code violations despite the increased code enforcement. The story (<http://bit.ly/8FWKjx>) was a finalist for an IRE student award. But she didn't have time to focus on the wrestling angle before graduating in May 2006.

Enter Mark Remme, who like Gervais was looking for an idea for an honors project that he also could publish in the *Daily*. Gervais handed off a spreadsheet listing dozens of properties that appeared to have connections to wrestlers, coaches and affiliated companies.

"Getting that stuff from her showed me how an experienced reporter utilizes CAR," said Remme, a *Daily* sports reporter at the time. "I was able to take that and expand on it and see what was going on. I don't think I could have had what I ended up with if she hadn't given me that spreadsheet in the beginning."

Remme expanded the list of wrestlers and their addresses and ran them through the city and county property databases. The result was startling.

"It was a very large web that seemed awfully unique to anything I'd ever heard of in an athletic program," Remme said. "We were talking about coaches selling to ... former wrestlers, and former wrestlers that had connections to coaches."

Remme mapped out the properties, showing that they were bunched closely together in university neighborhoods. He created a flow chart showing property transactions between recently graduated wrestlers and coaches, wrestlers living in homes owned by other wrestlers, and one assistant coach who rented to a wrestler. In two cases, wrestlers had purchased property from the head coach within months after graduating.

None of the information proved wrongdoing. But Remme knew it raised questions. National Collegiate Athletic Association rules prohibit athletes from receiving any special benefits from coaches or boosters. If any wrestlers had received sweetheart deals on property or rental agreements, or promises of sweetheart deals as recruiting incentives, it could be considered a violation.

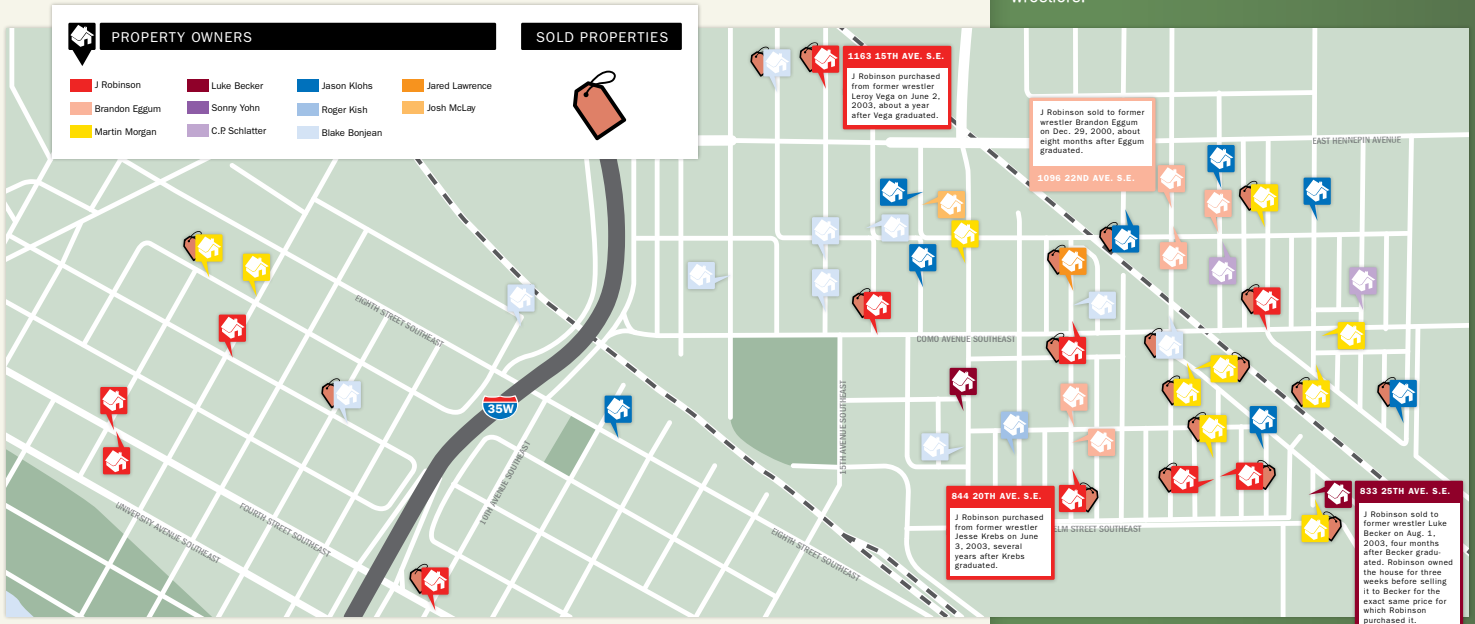
But proving a benefit was difficult. Wrestlers wouldn't talk, and though Remme got an interview with Robinson, the coach would say little about the transactions. He did acknowledge, however, that he often talked to wrestlers about the financial benefits of owning property.

By the spring of 2008, Remme felt he was closing in on a publishable story. But he was set to graduate in May and begin a baseball writing internship in Boston. If the story were to be published, it would have to survive another handoff. Two other *Daily* reporters grabbed the story that summer, but with a small staff publishing a weekly print edition and updating the online edition, they made little progress.

"If any wrestlers had received sweetheart deals on property or rental agreements, or promises of sweetheart deals as recruiting incentives, it could be considered a violation."

The student newspaper, the Minnesota Daily, documented dozens of property transactions involving wrestling head coach J Robinson, two assistant coaches, a team staff member, a former assistant coach and seven former wrestlers.

Gus Holtz | The Minnesota Daily



"... he began using the Accurint database to look for more property transactions and associations between wrestlers, coaches and real estate companies. He found two or three dozen more homes owned by wrestlers, coaches and their associates that previous reporters hadn't found or that had been purchased more recently."

Handoff No. 3

The *Daily* may be one of the few college newspapers with a team devoted to long-term projects. But usually those projects are two or three-week efforts. In fall semester 2009, Projects Editor Andy Mannix made a key decision. He promoted one of his reporters to a reporter/assistant projects editor position to give himself more time to take over the wrestling investigation.

The project had begun to languish, and Mannix spent weeks combing through the old files. He rebuilt the spreadsheet with property transactions.

Two key steps helped inspire him. First, he began using the Accurint database to look for more property transactions and associations between wrestlers, coaches and real estate companies. He found two or three dozen more homes owned by wrestlers, coaches and their associates that previous reporters hadn't found or that had been purchased more recently.

The second discovery was one of those small facts that Mannix knew might never fit in the puzzle but that was interesting enough to energize him to keep pushing. It was a civil court filing from 2000 in which head Coach Robinson had appealed the denial of a gun permit. Robinson said in the filing that he needed the gun because he dealt with large amounts of cash, and he had looked into renting an armored car to make two pickups a week at a university dormitory.

Then Mannix got a break. He found a wrestler who was willing to talk about the house he had bought, and who acknowledged that Robinson had brought up buying real estate when he recruited him. An assistant coach who helped recruit him served as his real estate agent shortly after stepping down as coach.

While the mounting evidence continued to suggest a potential for NCAA violations, the *Daily* still couldn't prove there were special benefits. Wrestlers, coaches and Robinson have consistently denied that real estate was being used to recruit or reward wrestlers. That raised a question typical in many such projects: go with the story now and keep chasing it, or continue digging?

Mannix, along with colleagues Briana Bierschbach and Mike Mullen, hit the phones, tracking down NCAA compliance experts around the country and explaining what they'd found.

One compliance expert, who also was an assistant athletics director at another university, said the activity raised a red flag and that she would never allow her coaches to do it. A Minnesota wrestler who owned property said he wouldn't rent to wrestlers because of the potential for problems. And Minnesota's own athletics director acknowledged concern and vowed to investigate.

Rigorous fact-checking

The interviews made the *Daily's* decision to publish an easy one. The newspaper didn't have to characterize the findings or say that they raised questions about possible violations. The experts had done that for them.

They wrote several story drafts, and then began a fact-checking process that lasted several days – the same line-by-line process taught in "The Investigative Reporters Handbook." They projected the story on a large screen while a team of reporters and editors, including Editor-in-Chief Holly Miller and Managing Editor Alex Robinson, forced Mannix to account for every fact, date and spelling using original records. Reporter Robert Downs was enlisted to handle last-minute document searches, looking for incorporation papers and Uniform Commercial Code filings at the Minnesota Secretary of State's Office.

The spreadsheet, organized files with property records and carefully transcribed interviews were crucial to a smooth process, Alex Robinson said.

"I wouldn't have run the story, I don't think, without a fact-checking process like the one we had," he said.

The day the story was published, the university announced it was launching its own investigation into the property transactions. Other major media outlets in the Twin Cities – and some national media – picked up on the story. It took the university more than four months to send its own investigation to the NCAA. Though it confirmed most of what the *Daily* had reported, it uncovered little else. Officials concluded that the real estate transactions did not constitute violations of NCAA rules because they did not provide special benefits to wrestlers and were not meant as recruiting incentives. J Robinson said the report was a vindication.

But the report, totaling less than six pages, left other questions unanswered. Much of it was redacted before being released. And a key finding by the newspaper – that J Robinson had discussed real estate while recruiting a wrestler – was never mentioned.

In an interview after the report was released (<http://ow.ly/2o6wo>), university General Counsel Mark Rotenberg told the *Daily* that, generally, real estate discussions in the recruiting process would raise questions. "Yes, absolutely, we would have a different case."

So why wasn't the recruiting conversation that the newspaper reported addressed in the university's report? Rotenberg said he didn't know. And the university wouldn't allow reporters to interview the compliance director who conducted the investigation. So as the bustle of campus life gave way to the slower pace of summer, the *Daily* was still on the story – with yet another group of young reporters and editors.

Chris Ison is an associate professor at the University of Minnesota School of Journalism and Mass Communication, an IRE member and former projects editor at the Star Tribune in Minneapolis.

RESOURCES

UNCOVERING
NEW STORIES ON
CAMPUS

By Alecia Swasy
The IRE Journal

Plenty of great stories are lurking around the quad at your local colleges and state universities. Check out IRE's Campus Coverage Project (www.campuscoverage.org) for tips on investigating the ivory towers. Here are a few of the Web resources available:

- **American Council on Education:** Offers research and policy links. www.acenet.edu/resources/policy-research.
- **Chronicle of Higher Education:** Covers all aspects of higher education. The publication offers courtesy subscriptions for journalists. www.chronicle.com.
- **College Puzzle:** Stanford professor Michael Kirst blogs on big issues. <http://collegepuzzle.stanford.edu>.
- **Education Writers Association:** This higher ed list serv helps you keep up with what's happening around campuses. Contact public editor Linda Perlstein for tips at lperlstein@ewa.org or 202-265-0280. She blogs at www.educatedreporter.com.
- **ERIC database:** ERIC is short for the Federal Education Resources Information Center, a database of scholarly research and articles on education topics. www.eric.ed.gov.

The Student Press Law Center offers terrific tips on how to exhume lawsuits and other public records. The complete list is on www.campuscoverage.org. Here are a few:

- **Lawsuits:** Lawsuits involving colleges are a treasure chest of interesting stories. Start at the Clerk's Office, civil division of your local circuit court. Most have computers allowing you to search the name of those being sued. Search by "East Wherever University," but also by the names of regents or trustees. Don't forget to search by last name of the college president and chair of the board.
Once you know your case number, request the pleadings file, which gives you the complaint, the answer and any motions. It's a snapshot of the case.
- **Common types of lawsuits to look for include:** employment discrimination, personal injury and contract disputes.
- **Audit reports:** Somebody has to audit the university's financial records. It's either an internal auditor or an outside consultant. The report is a public record. Check it out and follow the money.

Tipsheets

- **No. 3111:** "Covering Higher Education: Holding Administrators Accountable," Todd Wallack, *The Boston Globe*. Wallack offers an overview of sources, useful documents and story ideas on the higher education beat.
- **No. 3295:** "Scouring syllabi: Basic ways to check if colleges and universities are teaching," Ryan Gabrielson, *East Valley Tribune* in Mesa, AZ. Gabrielson's tips include looking at graduation rates, evaluating testing results and investigating the curriculum.

The IRE Journal

A Johns Hopkins University student was stabbed to death while he slept in his dorm, prompting WMAR's investigation into the amount of crime on Maryland college campuses. Tisha Thompson and John Anglim wanted to take a more in-depth look into campus crime, so they analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Education's Clery Act to determine a rate of crime at state college campuses. (November 2004)

"Behind the UConn Logo: A Broken Promise. As Colleges Profit, Sweatshops Worsen."
Matthew Kauffman and Lisa Chedekel, of the *Hartford Courant*, showed the lack of progress to battle sweatshop conditions behind lucrative licensed merchandise production. The University of Connecticut pledged to improve the situation, but the reporters found that most schools merely watch from the sidelines as factory conditions deteriorate. (December 2004)

New and expanded blogs on IRE's website provide tips, success stories and reporting resources. Here are excerpts from a few recent blog posts, in case you missed them or haven't explored the new online offerings.



Snapshots from our blogs

From "Manage your time for investigative stories," IRE On the Road blog, www.ire.org/training

By Doug Haddix
IRE training director

Time management can be a reporter's biggest challenge when it comes to watchdog stories.

During a recent Better Watchdog Workshop in Denver, two seasoned investigative journalists shared tips and tricks they've learned to make time for the big story.

Advice and tips came from Raquel Rutledge of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and Laura Frank of the I-News Network based in Denver. Rutledge drew examples from her "Cashing in on Kids" series about fraud in tax-subsidized day care – winner of the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Local Reporting. Frank recalled lessons learned from her award-winning investigations at the *Rocky Mountain News* and other newspapers where she worked before founding the nonprofit news center.

Here's a sampling of their time-management tips:

- Keep an active list of ideas for bigger stories. Feed it regularly as you get ideas while covering daily beat stories.
- Use one notebook for daily stories and another for bigger enterprise pieces. During any down time, pick up the enterprise notebook and chip away at the story.
- Stay organized by using a source list, a to-do list (updated daily), a quotes file or index, a timeline of key events, and a "players' tree" to look for connections. Such lists save time later during reporting and writing.
- Ask yourself: "Who would disagree with this?" Talk to those sources early.
- Request data early because it might take weeks or months to get it.
- Use short progress memos or notes to keep your boss up to date – and to keep yourself focused.
- Do a quick daily story to prime the pump and shake out sources for the bigger story.

From "Gannett bolsters watchdog work," On the Road Training blog, <http://ow.ly/2bX19>

By Doug Haddix
IRE training director

Attorney Herschel Fink brandished a copy of a \$400,000 check from the city of Detroit – payable to the *Detroit Free Press* for legal fees in a public records battle involving former Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick.

While large, the payment didn't cover the newspaper's full costs in its aggressive investigation, which led to the mayor's resignation and 99 days in a county jail for obstructing justice and assaulting a deputy.

Still, the room of more than 60 Gannett reporters and editors burst into sustained applause. They had gathered for a two-day watchdog workshop presented by IRE.

Gannett partnered with IRE to present three watchdog boot camps in recent months in Detroit, Nashville, and at company headquarters in McLean, Va. More than 250 Gannett journalists from across the country attended the two-day workshops.

Kate Marymont, Gannett's vice president of news, told participants at all three boot camps that powerful watchdog stories are key to the company's continued success. "It's what we do. It's what sets us apart," she said during the Detroit workshop.

From "Follow the Money: Gulf Oil Spill," On the Road Training blog, <http://ow.ly/2cu0y>

By Jaimi Dowdell
IRE training director

While oil is gushing into the Gulf of Mexico, the government is pouring resources into the cleanup effort. Track how much is being spent, which agencies are awarding it, and where it's going with data from the Federal Procurement Data System. The FPDS's Gulf Oil Spill Report, updated regularly, is downloadable in spreadsheet format at <http://ow.ly/2cu63>.

Use this data to see which companies are making money off of the disaster. Are any of those companies in your state? Are small, women- or veteran-owned businesses getting a slice of the money?

If you're looking for data on oil spills, check out the U.S. Coast Guard's National Response Center at www.nrc.uscg.mil/foia.html. The Center for Public Integrity has compiled information about using this data, along with some caveats at <http://ow.ly/2cu63>.

Don't forget to check out the IRE Resource Center's tipsheet database to uncover tips, sources and secrets that can help you tackle just about any topic. Eric Nalder's classic tipsheet, "Oil on the rock, fire on the water," has 14 pages of information useful for covering oil spills. Search tipsheets at www.ire.org/resourcecenter/tipsheets.php.



Laura Frank, left, of the I-News Network in Denver, and Raquel Rutledge of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

Doug Haddix | IRE

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.

From "Teaching the Trainer," On the Road Training blog,
<http://ow.ly/2cuCd>

By Doug Haddix
IRE training director

Every trainer will tell you that one of the joys of the job is learning from people you're training.

During custom training for The Associated Press in San Francisco, the group was talking about ways to avoid high copying fees for paper documents. After I suggested using a portable scanner, camera or cell-phone camera, AP staffer Marcus Wohlsen shared a tip. Turns out a relatively new app for the iPhone can help. It's called JotNot (\$4.99 from the iTunes store). A similar product, DocScanner (\$5.99 from the iTunes store), works on the iPhone and Android platforms. Both applications strive to improve the quality of the photo image of a document so it's more legible once it's converted to a PDF and stored electronically.

In addition to a presentation on public records and FOIA, the IRE custom training in San Francisco featured an overview of data and documents, hands-on training in spreadsheet and database software, and one-on-one story consultations. AP gathered a dozen staffers from Atlanta, Fresno, Los Angeles, Phoenix and San Francisco for the two days of training.

Tracie Cone of the AP bureau in Fresno found the spreadsheet training particularly useful. "For years I've seen community college night class offerings on Excel training, and I'd think, 'Who needs to take a class to punch numbers into a spreadsheet?' So, obviously I had no idea what Excel even was about. So to go from that to actually WANTING to think of stories that could include numbers crunching is a huge leap."



AP staffers (from left): Ron Harris, Marcus Wohlsen, Justin Pritchard, Shaya Mohajer, Tracie Cone, Judy Lin, Lisa Leff, Jim Trotter, Juliana Barbassa, Juliet Williams, Garance Burke, Jacques Billeaud and Jason Dearen (kneeling).

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 website.

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: Jaimi Dowdell, jaimi@ire.org, 314-402-3281. To order data, call 573-884-7711.

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: Jaimi Dowdell, jaimi@ire.org, 314-402-3281; or Doug Haddix, doug@ire.org, 614-205-5420

Publications:

THE IRE JOURNAL – Published four 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: Doug Haddix, doug@ire.org, 614-205-5420

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:

ADVERTISING – IRE staff, 573-882-2042

MEMBERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTIONS – John Green, jgreen@ire.org, 573-882-2772

CONFERENCES AND BOOT CAMPS – Stephanie Sinn, stephanie@ire.org, 573-882-8969

LISTSERVS – Amy Johnston, amy@ire.org, 573-884-1444

Mailing Address:

IRE, 141 Neff Annex, Missouri School of Journalism, Columbia, MO 65211



Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.
 Missouri School of Journalism
 141 Neff Annex
 Columbia, MO 65211
www.ire.org

APPLY NOW!

DEADLINE SEPT. 27

75 students from across the country will be selected to attend.

Scholarships cover travel, lodging and registration.

Learn investigative reporting skills from the pros and give your campus the coverage it needs.

Apply now for a full scholarship to attend a three-day campus investigative reporting workshop and participate in a yearlong program that offers ongoing training and opportunities to learn from top reporters from throughout the country.

Head to Phoenix in January for three days of panels, workshops, story brainstorming sessions and hands-on computer-assisted reporting classes. You'll leave armed with the skills to provide better, more in-depth coverage of your campus and will gain skills that will last a lifetime.

Space is limited, and all attendees will receive scholarships that cover travel and lodging, plus a stipend for meals. You must have experience reporting for a campus-related news outlet, but being a journalism major is not a prerequisite. Only students with at least one year of coursework remaining are eligible.

For more details and an application, go to www.ire.org/campus.



Investigative Reporters and Editors



Education Writers Association



Student Press Law Center

CAMPUS
 Jan. 6-9
 Phoenix
COVERAGE
PROJECT

Sponsored by Lumina Foundation for Education

You'll learn how to:

- ▶ **Use the Internet as an investigative reporting tool**
- ▶ **Read budget documents and find the stories that matter**
- ▶ **Prepare for tough interviews**
- ▶ **Analyze your school's performance to see how it measures up**
- ▶ **Examine athletic programs – and their funding**
- ▶ **Use legal tools to pry open foundations, auxiliaries and other secretive campus institutions**
- ▶ **Examine issues on your campus in the context of national debates on higher education**



Sponsored by Lumina Foundation for Education