WHERE ARE THE MOTHERS?

To attract and retain millennial journalists, news outlets must better meet the needs of parents with young children.
Contributors

Katherine Goldstein (page 24), a 2017 Nieman Fellow, is a digital journalist and consultant focusing on issues of women and work. She leads workshops, coaches, and teaches a course at the Harvard Extension School on how to develop a journalism career. Previously, she worked as the editor of vanityfair.com, the director of traffic and social media strategy at Slate, and as the green editor at The Huffington Post. In addition to her editorial, strategy, and managerial roles, she has covered topics ranging from the Copenhagen climate talks to the first gay wedding on a military base. She lives in Brooklyn, New York with her husband and son.

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Tristan Ahtone (page 36), a 2018 Nieman Fellow, is a freelance reporter and member of the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma. He has reported for “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer,” National Native News, Frontline, Vice, Fronteras Desk, and NPR.
The New York Times’s improved family leave policy is the result of lobbying by an employee group to which these women belong.

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Journalists in Turkey increasingly face trial and imprisonment

ON A SUNNY FRIDAY IN MAY, A sweetly solemn ceremony unfolded on the grounds of Harvard’s Lippmann House as Nieman Fellows gathered for a class reunion. Missing was Anja Niedringhaus, a treasured classmate and Associated Press photographer who was slain while covering elections in Afghanistan. In Anja’s honor, fellows from the class of 2007 dedicated a tree and stood beneath the young Eastern redbud, telling stories about their fallen friend.

I don’t know that I’ve heard a journalist described with more affection, both for her Pulitzer Prize-winning work and her distinct charm. A veteran of the Nieman staff who has known hundreds of fellows confided that afternoon that Anja had been her favorite. In 2014, an Afghan police officer opened fire on the photographer and AP colleague Kathy Gannon as they waited peacefully inside a car at a checkpoint near Khost. Gannon was badly injured. Niedringhaus died instantly. She was 48.

The risks that journalists have taken in places like Afghanistan are extraordinary, and perhaps one reason why Niedringhaus also loved the leavening work of shooting the Olympics. But the once-clear boundaries we drew around assignments to mark them for danger are growing blurred.

On the eve of the Nieman Fellows’ memorial for Anya, Greg Gianforte, a Montana Republican, was voted into Congress in spite of—some say because of—his physical assault on Guardian journalist Ben Jacobs the night before. During the congressman-elect’s court hearing Jacobs said: “I asked Mr. Gianforte a question in the same manner I have asked questions of hundreds of politicians… [His] response was to slam me to the floor and start punching me.”

Gianforte pleaded guilty to misdemeanor assault but with a diluted description of his actions. “I grabbed his wrist,” he testified. “A scuffle ensued, and he was injured, as I understand it.” In describing the scene at his election-night party in Bozeman, Politico wrote that attendees “widely laughed off” the events. “When Gianforte apologized to the reporter he had assaulted, an attendee yelled that he was forgiven, as others shook their head, expressing the opinion that he shouldn’t have to apologize.”

Niedringhaus and Jacobs occupy distant poles on the continuum of violence against journalists. But the proximity of the memorial for her and the assault on him forced uncomfortable questions for me about how easily, dangerously, almost imperceptibly conditions can change for journalism in any part of the world.

President Trump’s insistent use of his candidacy and now office to demean and diminish journalism in the U.S. is redefining the historic relationship between the presidency and the press in perilous new ways. By some counts, the pugilistic video that portrayed him punching a figure representing CNN was his most widely shared tweet. More disquieting to me was the recent exchange between Trump and Russia’s Vladimir Putin. Gesturing to journalists covering their meeting, a giggling Putin asked, “These are the ones that insulted you?” And the new American president shared a mirthful moment with the veteran in whose country journalists have been murdered with impunity.

Last November, in a speech at the Committee to Protect Journalists’ 2016 International Press Freedom Awards, broadcaster Christiane Amanpour said, “Never in a million years did I expect to find myself appealing for the freedom and safety of American journalists at home.”

Trump’s tweets, she said, had “chilled” her. “We are not there yet, but here’s a postcard from the world: This is how it goes with authoritarians around the world like Sisi, like Erdoğan, like Putin, like the Ayatollahs, like Duterte in the Philippines, and all of those people,” she said.

“International journalists know only too well: First the media is accused of inciting, then sympathizing, then associating—and then they suddenly find themselves accused of being full-fledged terrorists and subversives. They end up in handcuffs, in cages, in kangaroo courts, in prison—and then, who knows what?”

If any tree can claim patriotic roots, it is perhaps the Eastern redbud. It was a favorite of George Washington, who wrote about them in his diary and treasured the specimens at Mount Vernon. Thomas Jefferson wrote about them too and planted redbuds on the grounds of Monticello. Anya’s tree grows directly outside my office and through a tall mullioned window I’ve been keeping an eye on its sure summer progress. To gardeners, its flowering is a harbinger of spring, showy magenta blossoms signaling a new year. But I’ve been reading about redbuds and have learned not to count them out in the harsh months. One arborist wrote: “Even in winter, covered with snow, the Eastern redbud is stunning.”

FROM THE CURATOR

Violence at Home and Abroad
The animus against journalists in the U.S. demonstrates how quickly conditions can change in any part of the world
BY ANN MARIE LIPINSKI

FREE PRESS FREE SOCIETY

Journalists in Turkey increasingly face trial and imprisonment
The Struggle Against Silence in Mexico is a Relay Race

Reflecting on my return to Mexico and the violent threats against journalists in the country

BY MARCELA TURATI

Today [June 8] marks one week since I returned to Mexico after 10 months in the United States on a Nieman Fellowship.

On my first day back, I talked to 15 Michoacán colleagues who had taken a personal day or asked for unpaid leave in order to attend a protest outside the PGR [Attorney General’s Office] to call attention to the silence around the disappearance of Salvador Adame, their colleague from the newspaper La Voz de Tierra Caliente. At the protest I ran into two Mexico City colleagues who, when they saw me, began talking about how overwhelmed they felt by the impact of so many deaths, about the need for psychological support, about feeling they could be the next to die. Their question: what do we do? That night I saw a dear friend trapped in the infinite web of trying to make sense of the senseless murder of Javier Valdez Cárdenas, the tangle ensnaring us all. The chat groups churn with messages proposing new initiatives, new information, posting new emergencies, one day alerting us of a reporter in Quintana Roo whose ear was cut off as a warning to the owner of his newspaper and another of an indigenous radio announcer who was attacked or of a photographer’s teenage daughter who was disappeared (and, thankfully, later found). When we message each other, we ask if help arrived for the 7 reporters and photographers ambushed by 100 armed men in Guerrero and stripped of their equipment; if there were funds to pay for Javier’s wake and to compensate his family; if anyone knows how the guys from RíoDoce newspaper are dealing with their pain of losing Javier; if anyone knows of therapists who could travel to Sinaloa or Guerrero to attend to colleagues there.

Every day I get messages from colleagues asking for help in stopping the new state laws being passed by legislators supposedly to “protect journalists” but that are loaded with poison, others who need advice about putting together their own self-defense journalist collectives, others asking that we run their inserts addressing to the authorities or photos of their demonstrations, others that we share the articles they are publishing every day so that the issue doesn’t fade.

There have been days full of meetings over coffee to listen to friends who don’t know what to do with the anxiety eating at them or who haven’t been able to cry over the loss of the friend-colleague-big brother that Javier was, or, who with Javier’s murder have to relive the killings that once forced them to flee their homes for the DF [Mexico City]. Of the Twitter campaign defending a Sonoran colleague kicked off his radio program for not toeing the official line. Of calls from frustrated local media directors after leaving the Interior Ministry, having listened to officials say that they are overwhelmed and can’t figure out what to do. Of evening gatherings to brainstorm about what we can do to put an end to the State’s policy of impunity;

asking each other for details about the most recent crimes to try and understand their hidden messages; considering where we can and can’t practice journalism; sharing anecdotes of nocturnal paranoias; talking to human rights defenders and sharing our assessments, our uneasiness, our ideas for action.

I, like many of us, have been converted into a kind of air traffic controller, trying to manage initiatives that our more clearheaded colleagues are launching—to publish something on the anniversary of Javier’s death, to read Javier’s work, to blanket the city with posters, to make a collection for media in crisis. Yesterday at the end of the press conference in which we invited our profession to next week’s encounter between journalists to discuss our problems and design solutions, one of the reporters interviewing me began to cry when we were talking about Miroslava Breach’s assassination because she’s a mother too.

Days full of plans, many, and attempts at trying to shape a future where there is a place for journalists, in which information doesn’t become dangerous, in which we learn to respect each other. Days filled with explaining that if a journalist is killed, what he or she was reporting is also silenced. Days of mescal and of plans to meet, of advising colleagues that maybe they should prepare to leave the country because they could be next, of sending messages of support to those who have already gone, of reviewing our own practices and our own work inspired by the example of Javier, of swallowing our rage and grief because for lack of funds they didn’t get him out when he asked for help, of feeling that in 10 years of living in this emergency we haven’t learned much as a profession to make it a little harder for the killers, of thinking that maybe Javier, Miroslava, Choco, Regina, and Rubén weren’t murdered so much for what they published as to terrorize the rest of us. Telling ourselves that it’s going to get worse and that we have to steel ourselves in preparation.

Despite the sorrow and the fear that I now have to live with, I feel clear and serene, a little wiser after my experience, knowing that the struggle against silence in Mexico is a relay race, that one day some are tagged to stop and catch their breath (or save their lives) and others return rested with a fresh perspective in order to begin again. Days of shared embraces, of solidarity, of silence, of encouragement, of being orphaned, of love, of welcome, of loss. But also of looking to the future. A future where we have each other because we are alive and because we have everything left still to build.

Translated from Spanish by Patrick Timmons

Remembering murdered journalist Javier Valdez Cárdenas

The chat groups churn with messages proposing new initiatives, posting new emergencies, one day alerting us of a reporter in Quintana Roo whose ear was cut off as a warning

The chat groups churn with messages proposing new initiatives, posting new emergencies, one day alerting us of a reporter in Quintana Roo whose ear was cut off as a warning to the owner of his newspaper and another of an indigenous radio announcer who was attacked or of a photographer’s teenage daughter who was disappeared (and, thankfully, later found). When we message each other, we ask if help arrived for the 7 reporters and photographers ambushed by 100 armed men in Guerrero and stripped of their equipment; if there were funds to pay for Javier’s wake and to compensate his family; if anyone knows how the guys from RíoDoce newspaper are dealing with their pain of losing Javier; if anyone knows of therapists who could travel to Sinaloa or Guerrero to attend to colleagues there.
Charlie Sykes: “Everything that’s happening that is bad is about to get worse”

Political commentator and former radio host on the rise of conservative media, alternative reality silos, and media safe spaces

A long time political commentator, Charlie Sykes has become a leading conservative voice. Best known as the host of the “Midday with Charlie Sykes” talk show, broadcast on WTMJ in Milwaukee, Wisconsin from 1993 to 2016, Sykes began his journalism career at The Milwaukee Journal and, in the mid-1980s, served at the helm of Milwaukee Magazine before he began working in radio. During the first 100 days of Trump’s presidency, Sykes co-hosted the “Indivisible” public radio show produced by WNYC, Minnesota Public Radio, and The Economist. He is currently a regular contributor to MSNBC. His latest book, “How the Right Lost Its Mind,” will be released in October. Sykes spoke with fellows this past spring at the Nieman Foundation. Edited excerpts:

On Trump and the conservative movement today. This last year was this really soul-crushing, disillusioning slog for me, because I really did think I understood what the conservative movement was about. In Wisconsin, we had a very robust conservative movement, and I really thought that this was a movement based on concepts of freedom and individual liberty, small government, constitutionalism. When Trump came along, I kept expecting that the conservative movement would stand up and say, “This is exactly what we aren’t.”

For 20 years, I’d been on the air—and maybe it was, part of it, being a recovering liberal, I don’t know—basically saying, “OK, you folks say that we are all of these things. You say we’re racist, we’re sexist, we’re xenophobes. You say that we have these attitudes. It’s not true.” Then, suddenly, this guy comes up who is the living embodiment, this cartoon version, of every stereotype that the left has ever had of conservatism, and he’s surging in the polls.

I kept expecting that the conservative movement and conservative voters would draw the line and say, “No,” whether it’s an evaluation of his character, his erratic personality, or whether it’s the fact that he wasn’t a small-government conservative. He wasn’t in any way reflective of the values of the mainstream conservative movement.

As I watched the dominoes falling … watching one conservative leader or politician or writer after another go, “Well, maybe he’s OK”—watching that really made me realize that the conservative movement is broken, and maybe it was not what I thought it was.

You say we’re racist, we’re sexist, we’re xenophobes. You say that we have these attitudes. It’s not true. Then, suddenly, this guy comes up who is the living embodiment, this cartoon version, of every stereotype that the left has ever had of conservatism, and he’s surging in the polls.

On his listeners and fake news. As 2015–2016 was unfolding, because we had such engaged listeners, they would send me emails, they would forward stories, where they would say, “Why aren’t you talking about this?” Over the years, I tried to push back on that. “This is not true. Barack Obama was not born in Kenya.” I started noticing that it was becoming harder and harder to convince people the stories were not true. It got to the point where I would even spend time going, “Well, here’s the fact check on The Washington Post.” Or, “Here is the story from The New York Times.” Or,

“Here’s what NBC is reporting showing that this thing that you just sent me is completely not true.”

The response that I was getting increasingly was not to deal with the facts there. It was, “Oh, I don’t pay any attention to those liberal rags.” Just the fact it was in the Times or the Post, or any of these other sites, that was discrediting. That’s when I begin to realize, “OK, what we’ve done here is we have these alternative reality silos; these echo chambers that don’t just disseminate information, but which become this chrysalis that would protect you from counter information if it does not come from the bubble.”

There were a couple of emailers that I almost made experiments of—“Can I convince you to stop forwarding this stuff?”—and failed miserably. Even to the point where I would engage and then said, “Look, I know you. I know that you are a good person. Why do you keep forwarding this bigoted bilge? Why are you obsessed?” Basically, the answer was, “Well, I just think that we have to save America and it’s important to win this election. I'm willing to say and believe and do anything.” Even when you pointed out to them that it was not true, they didn't care.

One of the interviews that I’ve done on my public radio show that was, for me, the most interesting was Garry Kasparov, who is the former world chess champion and a Russian dissident who understands, I think, the role of propaganda and lies in a way that a lot of Americans don’t. His main point is that the point of lies is not to convince you of a certain policy. It wouldn’t necessarily make you believe a lie. What it is it is an assault on your critical sensibilities. It is an assault on your ability or your interest in sharing what is true.

On great investigative reporting on Trump—and why it didn’t reach Trump supporters. There was great reporting all through the campaign about Donald Trump. I was one of the early advocates for David Fahrenthold to win the Pulitzer Prize. I was obsessed with that story because I thought it was interesting, the way he went out—as a model of investigative reporting—and determined that Trump had not actually made any of those charitable contributions.

I go home. I read this stuff. Then I go on the air, and I will mention something about Trump. I get this horrendous blowback from the Trumpkins that it’s all BS. I realized, “You know what? They’re not hearing this.” My audience, which is pretty smart, never read any of Fahrenthold’s stuff.
You’ve got 40 percent of Americans who never heard any of those stories. I had Fahrenthold on my radio show. I don’t know how many conservative shows ever had him on. He went through everything. He was on for half an hour. My audience was blown away by it, and was like, “Oh, wow. Why have we never heard this before?” Really? How deep in the bubble are you that you didn’t hear that?

When people heard it, they were affected by it. Then they would move on. This is the thing—how hermetically sealed these echo chambers are and really self-perpetuating they are—that happened in 2016. There’s really been some good reporting on this, the amount of money that went into some of the sites like Breitbart. This is not irrelevant.

The way in which conservative talk shows provided them cover, created this world where I honestly think that if we had this media ecosystem during the Watergate scandal that Nixon would have survived. I’m actually very convinced of that because you can have the best investigative reporting in the world, and if 40 percent of the country is absolutely completely immunized against it, protected against it, what will happen? I don’t know.

On people having their own media safe spaces. Across the spectrum, people have increasingly been doing this—everybody has their own media. Really conservative talk radio’s become a safe space for conservatives, and they don’t want to hear other points of view. I’ll tell you, having an NPR show, I think that on the left there are also safe spaces. The cross-pollination has really broken down. We really want things that reinforce what we already believe. The confirmation bias is really intense. They’ve actually done studies that would show that, when you hear opinions that reaffirm your life view, you get a little shot of dopamine. In other words, hyper-partisanship is literally addictive.

I actually think that everything that’s happening that’s bad is about to get worse. All the trends in the division, in the polarization, are about to get worse. All of the worst actors and the worst elements have been empowered, have been enabled. They’re getting stronger.

On the rise of conservative media. I would hope that people will recognize what happened here. There’s a push and a pull. Why did the conservative media arise? I confess that my beating up on the media like every other conservative talk show did contributed to this de-legitimatization, there’s no question about that. That’s not the whole story though.

Many people in the media circled the wagons. I think there are a lot of people in the media who are perhaps not as aware of how entrenched the liberal pack mentality is. It’s like, how do fish not know they’re wet? Because it’s all around them. Everyone we know feels the same way.

If half of your audience was telling you for 50 years, “Hey. We’re not trusting you. We think you’re biased,” and for 50 years the media was saying, “No, no, no,” maybe there is a point where you go back and do introspection.

On bursting filter bubbles. What do you do about all of this? First of all, understand what an existential challenge this is. Not just to the media—this is not a media problem, this is a democracy problem. It really is. This is something that we Americans, I don’t think, have gotten our heads around. I actually think that the media needs to go back, engage in introspection—how do we win these people back? What is the way that we reestablish our connections with them? Figure out why did people stop listening to us and paying attention, and try to fix that.

On how to avoid being seen as partisan media. There’s a real possibility this is going to be a golden age for journalism in a sense that journalists are becoming self-aware, like, “Hey, you know, we actually are the pillars of democracy. This is not just a cliché. It is fun being adversarial. Let’s see what we can do. It’s going to be hard.”

I would say, do the best stuff. Really be sure you get it right. Pick things that people actually care about.

I had an interesting conversation with a guy from public radio, and we were talking about the problems of one of our hometown newspapers. He said, “You know? The problem is that somebody there has to say, ‘Hey. Maybe we should write, write more stuff that people will actually read.’” What a radical concept.

To the extent that you are in an ivory tower of any place, go out there, go meet the people, talk about them, figure out what is going to connect with them. What are the stories that are going to move them and affect them?

The power of facts I think is still there, but I may be really naïve about that. We can’t even have a political debate if everything becomes, “Well, you got that from so-and-so.” This is going to be a huge challenge. Maybe in the Trump era something will blow up in such a way that people will go, “Hey. You know what? Maybe I really had to listen to those, you know, other points of view.”

I honestly think that if we had the same media ecosystem during the Watergate scandal that Nixon would have survived.
One of a Kind
In creating a one night-only live magazine, Florence Martin-Kessler, NF ’11, finds a storytelling innovation that sparks excitement.

On a sunny Saturday afternoon in October of 2013, I entered a conference hall at the Charles Hotel in Cambridge to attend a roundtable that was part of the Nieman Foundation’s 75th anniversary celebration weekend. The topic: “Innovation in Storytelling.”

Over the 15 years that I had spent directing documentaries for French public television, I had given a lot of thought about precisely that question: How can we be more creative with form, while staying journalistic in the stories we tell? I was grateful that public funding made it possible to get films made in France, but classic formats—voice-over, interviews, experts, archives—felt increasingly imposed on us. A great number of promising projects would never come to light because they’d been deemed too personal for the current affairs shows (or too journalistic for the few auteur slots). There was little flexibility, and any fresh idea had little prospect. Meanwhile, I loved online short docs but there didn’t seem to be a revenue model for them and the nonlinear narrative possibilities offered by the internet with web-docs didn’t deliver on their promise.

So, back at that Saturday afternoon panel, Douglas McGray started to explain how he invented Pop-Up Magazine in San Francisco five years earlier, “as a hobby.” He’d wondered: “What if the future of journalism was not online but onstage?” and had come up with a format of unrecorded news stories, told live: a dozen journalists and authors would stand on stage to narrate their articles. In the contributor’s guide, he states: “Pop-Up stories are true, and most are based on reporting the contributors have done about the world around them. Pieces can be adapted from a big work in progress; or drawn from fantastic, unused material from some past work; or it might be new work produced specifically for the show. Pieces can be just talking, or talking with pictures, or audio, or film. They can be cross-disciplinary or collaborative—a radio producer can team up with an illustrator, a photographer with a musician. Pop-Up provides an ideal stage and supportive audience to explore work that challenges professional pigeonholing.”

So many of the questions that I’d had in mind—how to bring closer the different shades of journalism, bring first-person voices into outstanding journalism stories, experiment with nonfiction narratives, capture an audience—seemed to be answered. I loved the clarity of the concept—it was a eureka moment. In hindsight, I realize that it also resonated very much with the Nieman Soundings, a cornerstone of the fellowship experience where journalists humbly come in front of their peers to share the stories that are fundamental to their personal and professional life.

Later that day, I introduced myself to Doug and he encouraged me to start a show in Paris. I put on the first Live Magazine to an audience of 300 at the Gaité Lyrique Hall in Paris in April of 2014. I followed his principles scrupulously—no announcement of the lineup, no recording of the show whatsoever, a diversity of profiles, a touch of wonder—and added my own touches as I felt necessary. The fact I couldn’t watch a replay of the original proved liberating.

Our 24th edition will take place this September before an audience of 1,500. We have produced more than 230 stories in all, each carefully curated and edited, yet ephemeral (though some authors have been so energized by the audience response to turn them into articles, films, or podcasts).

We have teamed up with France’s biggest traditional media groups—Le Monde, Les Echos, Bayard—for co-productions. We also have launched a series for a younger audience, an outreach program for vocational school students, and started shows in Belgium.

And Pop-Up Magazine and Live Magazine have inspired shows in Denmark (Zetland Live), Romania (DoR Live, from the name of the printed magazine Decat o Revista which translates as “just a magazine”), Poland, and soon in Spain.

So why do audiences keep coming to our sold-out shows? As Guillemette Faure, a columnist said: “You can hear every breath in a living newspaper.”

Editions of Live Magazine, such as one last fall at the National Theatre in Strasbourg, France, attract enthusiastic crowds. Now there’s also a series for younger audiences.
“A Roller Coaster Ride of Emotions”
James E. Causey, NF ’08, tells a tale of Milwaukee’s decline through the lives of his third-grade classmates

When I set out to find out what happened to everyone in my third-grade class at Milwaukee’s Samuel Clemens Elementary School in 1978, I had no idea how mentally draining the project would become.

“What Happened to Us? Examining Milwaukee’s Persistent Problems Through the Eyes of One Class,” my four-part special report for The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, tells the story of how Milwaukee went from one of the best places for blacks to live to one of the worst. I told the story from the perspective of what happened to me and my classmates. Of the 28 students in my third-grade class, at least 13 have spent time in prison or had a close family member—a parent, brother, sister, or child—locked up. Some of my classmates have experienced trauma ranging from physical violence to years of drug use, and when I told their stories, I had to absorb those stories in order to understand them. It was daunting, but putting a face to struggles with housing, employment, and incarceration was necessary to get readers to care.

The months I spent on this project took me on a roller coaster ride of emotions. Many of my classmates cried during the interviews, and sometimes I did, too. Hugs and Kleenex were plentiful. After some of the interviews with my classmates, I couldn’t eat or sleep, haunted by what they had shared with me and realizing how fortunate I was and how unfair life could be.

In some cases, it took my former classmates months to open up because of their distrust of the media. Some refused to talk. Even the ones who did confide in me revealed that they only did so because it was me. To be honest, many would not have opened up to a reporter who didn’t look like them—black. Immersing myself in this project further cemented my view of how far we still have to go when it comes to race relations in this country.

Over my career of 30-plus years, I have seen and felt the distrust of the media by African-American communities. Many of my classmates looked at me as a friend, a familiar person with whom they could share. They didn’t vilify their lives in print. My position as a reporter and columnist carries weight, sure, but being a black person of the press carries even more when dealing with communities of color. But I wouldn’t change what I do for anything. My gift of telling stories is meant to be shared, and with that, I have a responsibility to tell those stories in a way that is respectful and authentic.

The city of Cleveland has had some success taking a cooperative approach to starting businesses and hiring city residents, and, prompted by my reporting, the Milwaukee Common Council is taking steps to implement a co-op model here. As a journalist, I hold a unique position to inspire our leaders to act and implement laws and changes for the greater good of our communities.

This takes time, but if we want to foster improvements in this country, we need more journalists willing to go to places and neighborhoods that they have not been before to tell those stories.

What Anthony Shadid Teaches Us Still
Rami G. Khouri, NF ’02, is studying the craftsmanship of the late Pulitzer-winning foreign correspondent to share it with a new generation

In life and death alike, Anthony Shadid was repeatedly recognized by his peers as among the finest foreign correspondents of his generation. To examine his legacy and share it with journalism students and the wider world, I am leading a one-year project at the American University of Beirut (AUB), co-sponsored by the Media Studies Department and the AUB Libraries Archives, with the cooperation of Anthony’s widow Nada Bakri Shadid. I am a professor of journalism and journalist in residence at AUB, home to Anthony’s personal papers and library. Our project will organize and make available an archive of his work.

Drawing on my research to date, I teach a course at AUB called “Narrative News Reporting and the Legacy of Anthony Shadid.” I knew Anthony throughout his 15 years of covering the Middle East for the Associated Press, The Boston Globe, The Washington Post, and The New York Times. Like so many others, I admired the almost musical flow of his prose that captured the sentiments and conditions of the people he portrayed across the Arab world. His stories ranged far and wide—Iraq under attack, Palestine at war, Cairo in revolution, a Jordanian roadside coffee vendor.

I have been reviewing Anthony’s personal papers, reading 350 articles he wrote while covering the Middle East, and interviewing his former colleagues and associates. I now appreciate better why Anthony won two Pulitzers and was widely sought as a speaker. His diligent reporting and organizing were craft techniques that any serious journalist could master; more rare was his very personal determination to convey the stories and sentiments of Arab people in a way that had never been done before.

Three aspects of his work stand out. First, his reporting always centered on the lives of ordinary people. He wrote about men and women living in exploding cities and neglected villages, not because they were the story that would shape the future of their countries. Second, his reporting was immersive and relentless. He probed every street, room, memory, torn chocolate wrapper, shattered window, and mother’s smile or frown in sight. He listened intently and empathetically for hours or days, in order to hear, capture, and relay the sentiments of ordinary people. Third, he organized his wealth of reporting with great diligence. He transcribed his notes and interviews, pulled from them the core story he wanted to tell, and wrote a detailed story outline with themes, characters, emotions, and color that had all the look and feel of a mini movie script. And then he wrote.
“WE WANT TO SPARK INFORMATION, LIKE THE FIREFLY DOES, TO ILLUMINATE AN ENTIRE COUNTRY”

—LUZ MELY REYES
HOW VENEZUELA’S INDEPENDENT DIGITAL NEWS OUTLETS ARE COVERING THE TURMOIL IN THEIR COUNTRY

BY DIEGO MARCANO
Venezuelan pop singer Miguel Ignacio Mendoza was part of a crowd of thousands of people on the streets of Caracas on April 10. He wasn’t giving a concert, but taking part in demonstrations against the Supreme Court’s decision to dissolve the National Assembly, a decision the court later reversed after three days of nationwide protests.

The largely peaceful protesters—including Mendoza, more popularly known as Nacho—were met with tear gas fired by police clad in riot gear on the streets and in helicopters. At a protest that same day in Valencia, 100 miles west of Caracas, a 20-year-old student was killed, shot in the neck by police.

Efecto Cocuyo was at the Caracas protest, too, broadcasting the clashes live over Periscope. The independent digital political news outlet has been using Periscope since the app’s launch in 2015 as an alternative to Venezuela’s legacy TV news organizations, which focus solely on pro-government content and studiously avoid showing any of the unrest that’s been roiling the country for the past three years. In February the site launched a weekly news program broadcast exclusively on Periscope. “Con la Luz” (“With the Light”) airs every Friday afternoon with in-depth interviews and debates on current social and political issues.

Efecto Cocuyo’s audience is still comparatively small—a typical Periscope piece reaches an audience of around 3,000; the April 10 broadcast was the site’s biggest ever, drawing over 60,000 viewers—but its effort is typical of the sense of energy and urgency among Venezuela’s digital news upstarts to provide accurate, independent coverage of the turmoil engulfing the country. “One of the biggest lessons and benefits we’re experiencing is that the most serious, responsible, and rigorous journalism is being recognized by audiences,” says Omar Lugo, a content director at El Estímulo, another new digital news outlet, “because people want to be truly informed instead of reading rumors on social media.”

During a round of unrest in the spring, clashes left more than 60 people dead and hundreds arrested and injured, including several journalists. Hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans have taken to the streets daily (at the height of the protests, the “Mother of All Marches” on April 19, that number rose to an estimated 2.5 million demonstrators in Caracas alone) to protest the policies of President Nicolás Maduro—who has become increasingly unpopular since being elected in 2013 following the death of Hugo Chávez—demanding Maduro’s removal from office, immediate elections, and the release of opposition leaders from prison.

The political turmoil is further fueled by severe shortages of food, medicine, and basic goods that have resulted from the oil-rich country’s economic collapse. At the end of 2016, the inflation rate hit 720 percent; it is expected to rise to over 2,000 percent by 2018, according to projections by the International Monetary Fund, though some believe these estimates are way off.
In the 18 years since Hugo Chávez came to power, winning an election six years after he led an unsuccessful military coup to overthrow centrist president Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992, five television channels have been closed and nine removed from cable television subscription services; 62 radio stations have gone off the air because of official prohibitions; and the government has fined media outlets 32 times. “Legislation has limited freedom of expression and access to public sources,” says Marcelino Bisbal, director of Postgraduate Communication Studies at the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello. “It has significantly reduced the number of informative sources available and has generated actual censorship and self-censorship.”

Though it has escalated in recent months, Venezuela’s current crisis began in February of 2014, when local protests about the sexual assault of a student at the University of Los Andes, in the state of Táchira, expanded to cities across Venezuela. The issues protesters wanted addressed expanded, too: improved public security, solutions for economic instability and high inflation, and an end to government infringements on civil rights. In the streets of Caracas, Venezuela’s capital, protests have become increasingly violent, with government forces threatening the opposition with not just tear gas, rubber bullets, and water cannons but firearms. Protesters, too, have at times resorted to extreme violence; at a demonstration in May, a large group surrounded a man, doused him in gasoline, and set him on fire. Maduro accused the crowd of targeting the man because he was pro-government, though witnesses say the group accused the victim of being a thief.

During the protests of 2014, images of what was happening were barely seen on mainstream media. The head of the National Telecommunication Commission announced that “coverage of the violent events” was punishable under the Radio, TV and Electronic Media Social Responsibility Law, which bans content condoning violence or hatred. The international television station NTN24, which had been broadcasting live coverage of the protests, was removed from the Venezuelan cable providers DirecTV and Movistar TV by government order, and access to it remains restricted today. President Maduro announced that his government would “adopt measures” against Agence France-Presse for having “distorted the truth” about the protests. The Ministry of Communication and Information also threatened to sue international newspapers for using what they said were “manipulated photos” showing government forces attacking demonstraters.

Opposition leaders demanded the exit of Maduro from power, and “La Salida” (“The Exit”) was the name given to the nationwide movement.

With the credibility of the country’s traditional media already battered by government censorship and punishing economic policies, the early days of The Exit movement provided digital outlets with new opportunities and new audiences. When television coverage of the February 2014 protests stopped, “That was a breaking point for us,” says Luz Mely Reyes, Efecto Cocuyo’s director. She and her co-founders, Laura Weffer and Josefina Ruggiero, reported on the demonstrations through Twitter, documenting the running battles between police and protesters. In just two days, they went from 0 to 12,000 followers. With $27,000 obtained through a crowdfunding campaign, the team launched the website and started doing more in-depth stories. It now has 270,000 Twitter followers.

Efecto Cocuyo, which means “Firefly Effect”—“We want to spark information, like the firefly does, to illuminate an entire country,” Mely Reyes explains—began with just four reporters but has since grown to 14. The commercial strategy is centered on advertising, which is a tough sell given the ongoing economic crisis and fear among many brands that the government will retaliate if it’s displeased by a site’s editorial content. So Reyes and colleagues periodically launch fresh crowdfunding campaigns and raise funds through private donations.

To evade government attempts to block specific websites, Efecto Cocuyo uses WhatsApp to deliver news and receive reporting tips. One such tip led to coverage of the eviction in 2015 of PG Corporation, an import-export business, from its facilities near Maiquetía Simón Bolívar International Airport outside Caracas. Employees sent photos and videos to Efecto Cocuyo over WhatsApp as National Guard officials and airport police arrived to enforce the government eviction order issued at the beginning of October. When authorities came to execute the eviction, PG Corporation’s workers refused to leave, arguing the eviction decree was unlawful. Ultimately, PG Corporation was evicted, but other media outlets picked up Efecto Cocuyo’s reporting, bringing the story much wider attention.

Efecto Cocuyo has also been following the stories of those affected by the country’s drastic food and medicine shortages. The “Without Treatment” series, which chronicles the ordeals of 10 children affected by health supplies shortages and was one of three finalists for a Gabriel García Márquez Journalism Prize, was shared widely on social media. Mónica Soler, a Venezuelan citizen living in Spain, read the story of Braian Lozano Salinas, a 12-year-old suffering from neurofibromatosis, which produces tumors throughout the body. Salinas needed an anticonvulsive drug called Keppra to stabilize him enough for urgent surgery. Soler bought the medicine and sent it to Salinas, allowing him to successfully undergo the operation.

Although “Without Treatment” did not produce any public reaction from the government, María Laura Chang, who reported and wrote the series, still believes journalism like hers can have an impact. “Through good journalistic work, we can expose public mismanagement by the government, even though that doesn’t mean the government will change its way of operating. Knowing we can do that must serve as a motivation to keep these issues under the magnifying glass. In Venezuela, it has been demonstrated that the government fears the mass media. If it didn’t, it wouldn’t have taken action against so many TV networks, radio broadcasters, and daily journalists.”

Prodavinci, where I am a reporter, is another digital outlet tackling issues, like lack of medicine and food, the government tries to suppress. The site’s multimedia special report, “The Hunger and the Days,” published in March, explores the impact of widespread hunger and malnutrition on Venezuelan society. “There is hunger, and the government denies it,” says Ángel Alayón, the site’s founder and director. To “propose solutions and alert people to the irreversible damage future generations will experience,” Alayón sent 32 reporters across the country to document how food shortages are impacting individuals, families, hospitals, and schools. The project made visible the human toll the government’s economic policies have had. The site also runs ongoing photo essays in which protesters caught up in clashes with police tell their stories in their own words.

Alayón started Prodavinci, with his own money, as a forum for “journalism of ideas, as a response to the lack of in-depth analysis and fact-based journalism,” he says. The
Covering a Collapsing Nation
Local photographers are building a visual testimony to Venezuela’s breakdown

Venezuela is a country rich in natural resources, fertile land, and the largest oil reserves in the world—more than Saudi Arabia. Once a regional powerhouse and preferred destination for tourists, businesses, and photographers, the Latin American country can no longer feed, educate, or heal its people.

During the past four months, demonstrations against President Nicolás Maduro—elected in 2013 following the death of populist leader Hugo Chávez—have assumed dramatic proportions. As of early August, protests were ongoing, leaving at least 120 dead and many more injured.

As the government is now blocking foreign correspondents from entering the country, coverage is left to native and international photojournalists who were already in Venezuela and a new generation of young and forceful visual storytellers.

“Especially during times of crisis, it is extremely important to have Venezuelan photographers, not only covering the situation for their own communities but also for their stories to be visible elsewhere,” says Fabiola Ferrero, a Venezuelan photographer whose work ranges from in-depth personal stories to frontline protest coverage.

Still, covering conflict areas has always been challenging for photojournalists, both international and local. Not having sufficient knowledge of the history and significance of what is unfolding in the country can be tricky. For instance, covering a political crisis with an exclusively aesthetic intention may be a misguided effort at narrating issues deeply affecting people’s lives and the political realities of a country. At the same time, local photographers might have the advantage of a certain degree of access as well as background knowledge about the story they are covering.

Considering that foreign correspondents have increasingly been denied entrance to Venezuela, the work of local photographers has become more and more significant: “The work of photographers has been crucial, in the sense that all the human rights violations committed by the security forces have been covered by a big group of photographers,” says Ferrero. “If things have reached this point even when local photographers have been covering it all, I can’t imagine what would have happened to us without that type of coverage,” she says.

The role of witness and of storyteller is pivotal in such moments, as is the role of citizen journalists who, like Giovanna Mascetti, draw attention to more subtle stories, stories from the sidelines. Her work represents a visual testimony to how civil society is organizing itself and has been campaigning to bring down an authoritarian government.

Despite the obstacles, vital work continues to be done in Venezuela. Investigative outfit Armando.info, which worked with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) to develop the Venezuelan stories derived from the Panama Papers, recently broke the story of how construction giant Odebrecht offered bribes to foreign government officials to secure public contracts. Unlike other digital start-ups, Armando.info does not accept advertising. “We are not interested in any advertiser putting conditions on the topics we are working on,” explains co-editor Alfredo Meza. Instead, the site is funded through donations from organizations like the Open Society. Meza is also looking into putting up a paywall and moving to a subscription model.

In addition to the financial challenges, Meza says lack of cooperation from official sources forces journalists to become more resourceful in obtaining statistics and more skillful in gathering eyewitness testimonies. "They’re very willing to talk to you, but you have to ask in the right way and you have to explain why you want to ask them," he says.

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fact-checking data. Since 2015, important economic indicators such as GDP, annual imports, exports, and the inflation rate have not been reported by Venezuelan government officials. As a result, journalists determine annual imports and exports, for example, by checking with the commerce departments of every country with which Venezuela has traded. For figures like the inflation rate, reporters have to cross-check numbers with different NGOs and international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund.

Back in 2009, Nelson Bocaranda, one of Venezuela’s most respected journalists, was informed by the radio broadcaster Onda that his political radio show “Runrunes” (“Rumors”) would not continue to air after the government threatened to revoke the radio station’s license if it didn’t silence Bocaranda’s criticism. In response, Bocaranda and his son, Nelson E. Bocaranda, took “Runrunes” online, turning the radio show into a digital platform for breaking news and investigative reporting. The site now has six staffers in its investigative unit, plus two regular collaborators.

Since the beginning of the current demonstrations in April, “Runrunes,” which has 1.8 million Twitter followers, has been documenting every case in which a protester has died, including infographics on the cause of death, the place where the person died, and whether those responsible for the death have been identified. As of early August, “Runrunes” had compiled cases for 156 deaths, 35 more than the official number recorded by the Attorney General’s Office.

The work of the Bocarandas highlights one of the ironies of this moment in Venezuelan journalism. As the government has cracked down on traditional outlets, it has inadvertently created a supply of experienced journalists to feed into the newly created digital outlets, including people such as Proavinci photographer Gabriel Méndez, who’s been covering the protests.

“One of the good things that has come out of the growing censorship and self-censorship is that a young journalistic movement has emerged,” he says. “Watching the sum of little sacrifices many citizens do to overcome daily challenges, the support of my family and colleagues makes me keep on going, no matter how exhausted I may be. It makes me be willing to give the little contribution I can give. I think that we, as a society, feed ourselves off everybody’s good work. It is a sort of crowdfunding, but of courage.”

DESPITE THE OBSTACLES, VITAL WORK CONTINUES TO BE DONE IN VENEZUELA

Mascetti started photographing the Cruz Verde (“Green Cross”), a group of medical students who assist injured civilians during clashes with the police and National Guard. She took to the streets and followed the “Green Cross” beginning back in April of this year.

“I wasn’t very drawn to focus my work on the National Guard or on the resistance per se. I felt that the bright spirit of the ‘Green Cross’ was something that I wanted to see in the media. This is a group that embodies the young Venezuelans who want to see their country move forward, which is exactly what I wanted to portray in my work,” says Mascetti.

These images and this type of work is of great significance for those in Venezuela, and for the international community watching the country’s citizens take on Maduro’s administration. “What we’re doing and how we’re photographing will also add to a bigger sociological, anthropological, and social body of research on how the people organized themselves and took to the streets,” says Ferrero.

Photojournalists dedicated to frontline and sideline stories will indeed teach us, outsiders and Venezuelans, about Venezuela’s history. Their visual testimony will be part of the record for generations to come.

—LAURA BELTRÁN VILLAMIZAR
The increasing use of anonymous sources and leaks has intensified the debate over how to vet information and sources.

By Jon Marcus
When longtime investigative journalist David Cay Johnston received two pages of Donald Trump’s 2005 tax return in the mailbox of his home in Rochester, New York in March, there were plenty of ways to trace who leaked it to him. Johnston had the envelope, with a postmark and a stamp, and far scanter evidence has been used to find people who have sent things through the mail. But hunting down the source of this long-sought clue to Trump’s financial history might have discouraged future leakers. So Johnston didn’t do it—not even for his own edification or to gauge the trustworthiness of the leak. In fact, he thought about burning those original documents.
IT’S ONE OF THE UNPRECEDENTED QUANDARIES faced by journalists in this new era of covering the government substantially through leaks and at a time of conspiracy theories, misdirection, power plays, deflection, allegations of fake news, and fears of pervasive government surveillance. Should journalists seek a source’s identity and motivations? Share these with readers or viewers? Publish or broadcast information that hasn’t been confirmed? Questions like these arise when WikiLeaks releases more information about a presidential candidate than journalists can effectively fact-check or when BuzzFeed posts a sketchy Russian dossier in spite of skepticism that any of the scandalous information in it is true.

At this divisive time in particular, it’s important to question a leader’s motivation for leaking. But while authenticating documents and scrutinizing why someone might have leaked them are longstanding parts of investigative journalism, that process has been newly complicated by the speed of the news cycle and the steady supply of disclosures. More people are being encouraged to leak, including by news organizations themselves.

Some current reporting on leaks appears to violate long-held ethics rules, most notably the cardinal one that no news be reported whose accuracy is not confirmed. It’s a practice they say has dangerously high stakes for journalists. Amid threats from Trump and some in Congress to prosecute leakers, there is also the risk of sources being compromised by official eavesdropping, much of it also exposed by leaks. The pace at which leaks and whistleblowers have been prosecuted picked up significantly under President Barack Obama, and under Trump at least one leaker has been arrested: 25-year-old federal government contractor Reality Leigh Winner, who allegedly gave classified information to the news site The Intercept.

There’s also still no federal shield law, meaning journalists themselves could go to jail in some cases if they know their sources but refuse to name them in a legal proceeding. In the memos in which he kept notes of his conversations with Trump, former FBI Director James Comey (who testified that he himself arranged for the contents of the memos to be leaked, through a friend) said President Trump told him to “consider putting reporters in prison for publishing classified information.” Comey also testified, before the Senate Judiciary Committee before he was fired by Trump that, “If I find out that people were leaking information about our investigations, whether to reporters or to private parties, there’ll be severe consequences.”

In this climate, once Johnston had authenticated the document by checking the math and that accounting practices on the tax returns met contemporaneous requirements, “Why in the world would I want to go find out where it came from?” Johnston asks. “Why would I want to put the person who did this in jeopardy, or put myself in jeopardy? I don’t see any upside. Plus, I’ve just said to anybody who might ever send me a document, ‘Hey, I’m going to investigate you.’ And I want people to send me documents.” Johnston needn’t worry too much. There’s been a strong and steady flow of leaks that shows no sign of slowing.

They include the WikiLeaks release, on the eve of the Democratic National Convention, of emails from inside the Democratic National Committee, some embarrassing enough to force the resignation of DNC chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz.

Then there was the leak of Trump’s 1995 tax returns to The New York Times, showing that Trump had posted a loss big enough to potentially avoid paying income taxes for as long as 18 years.

Next was a Russian dossier with purportedly compromising information about Trump supposedly recorded during a trip he made to Moscow.

After Trump took office, there were leaks that connected national security advisor Michael Flynn and others close to Trump to Russia; Flynn resigned.

There were leaks about who shared information with Republican House Intelligence Committee chairman Devin Nunes suggesting that intelligence officials in the waning days of the Obama administration had “unmasked” Trump associates. When that information was revealed as having come from a pair of White House staffers, Nunes stepped aside from his committee’s probe of Russian influence in the election.

There were leaks about the reasons for and the process that preceded the firing of Comey. By then, the culture of leaking had so deeply penetrated the administration, Trump felt compelled to warn in a tweet that Comey should hope there were no recordings of his conversations with the president “before he starts leaking to the press!” (Trump subsequently admitted there are no tapes.) There were the leaks, attributed to two U.S. officials, about how Trump himself, during a meeting in the Oval Office, shared highly classified information with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak about an operation planned by the Islamic State, purportedly making it possible for the Russians to discern the source of the intelligence. And in late June CNN was forced to retract a story saying the Senate Intelligence Committee was investigating whether a Trump transition team official had met with an executive of a Russian investment fund. The network said the story hadn’t gone through the required checks and it apologized; the writer, an editor, and the head of the investigative unit resigned. Critics of leaks, including Trump, vented on Twitter.

LEAKS AREN’T NEW, OF COURSE, BUT they are no longer limited to big stories. They have gradually become a major element of journalism, especially the political kind. “It’s become an increasing feature of Washington reporting in particular that people won’t speak for the record, even in official briefings, making anonymity a big part of how reporting is done in Washington,” says New York Times deputy managing editor and investigative journalist Matthew Purdy. “And that has spread throughout officialdom and the corporate world and everywhere else. That’s a problem for the media.”

It’s also one in which they’ve had a role. “It does take two to tango,” Purdy says. “You don’t have to print anything that you get without someone’s name attached to it. It just would make reporting some of the most important stories tough to do.”
The heavy reliance on anonymous sources has intensified the debate over—and public mistrust of—them. Contrary to appearances, journalists say, they are trying to push back. Citing what she calls the irony of the fact that Trump administration officials, who often complain about the use of unnamed sources, ask for anonymity themselves—including official federal agency spokespersons—Washington Post senior national affairs correspondent Juliet Eilperin says she and her colleagues usually won’t let them: “That’s a violation of the very idea” of what a spokesperson is paid by the taxpayers to do. “That’s their jobs. By cutting down on that, it reduces the numbers of times you have to cite unnamed sources in stories.

In general, however, she and others say, it’s hard to stop the practice, even though they acknowledge it hurts their credibility with readers. Times readers say the use of anonymous sources is among the things that bother them the most in stories, the newspaper told its staff last year in a memo, one in a series of memos over the years about the practice.

“You have to be as judicious as you can in using these anonymous sources so your stories aren’t riddled with them to the extent that people do lose faith,” says Eilperin. “I understand reader skepticism, but the flip side of that is I am incredibly conscious of the fact that [sources] are operating in an environment where they are very intimidated and feel they may be retaliated against” if their names are attached to the information they disclose. Eilperin herself co-authored a story, during the Obama administration, that cited “officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity” saying Russian hackers had penetrated the electric grid through computers at a Vermont utility company. Follow-ups reported that there was no indication this had occurred—that a code associated with Russian hackers had been detected in a computer not connected to the grid. Eilperin says the original headline and the assertion in the text that hackers had penetrated the electric grid were both quickly corrected. “We thought at the time, and still think today, that it is in the public’s interest to report on whether and where that code was detected,” she says. “And after getting preliminary information about this, we also worked to gather additional context so our readers were fully informed.”

SUCCESSIVE PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATIONS have also fought against leaks, of course, none in recent times as hard as Obama’s, whose “insider threat program” began after Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning’s 2010 leak of military and diplomatic secrets. The government charged eight leakers and whistleblowers during the Obama presidency under the Espionage Act of 1917, more than under all previous presidents combined. Six were convicted or pleaded guilty, one was convicted of the misdemeanor charge of unauthorized use of a computer, and one, Edward Snowden, remains a fugitive in Russia. The Obama administration also took such steps as scanning federal employees’ communications for suspicious logins, downloads, or printer use, and monitoring their travel.

That has had a further chilling effect on the availability of information through conventional channels, as had already begun happening under previous presidents of both parties. More than half of political reporters said in a Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) survey during Obama’s time in office that their interviews with government officials had to be approved in advance, and 85 percent that the public was not getting the information it needed. Three-quarters said that the controls kept getting tighter. “If employees are being told, ‘Do not talk to the press,’ we’re going to have to depend more on these leaks to get information we used to pick up the phone and call somebody about,” says Lynn Walsh, an investigative television journalist and president of SPJ.

Many media outlets have made it easier for anyone to send them tips, suggesting the use of software that encrypts texts and emails. And lots of people have, including government employees at all levels. “It has really risen to heretofore unseen levels,” says Mike Cavender, executive director of the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA). The Associated Press, for instance, got a leaked 11-page memo suggesting the National Guard might be used to round up undocumented immigrants, and the AP and The Washington Post were leaked information about heated calls between Trump and the leaders of Mexico and Australia. Even a State Department memo about how to reduce leaks was leaked, in February, to the Post.

Like the appetite for leaks, the risks have also grown, and now have to be weighed at a faster pace than ever. Where leaks were once a first step in the long, deliberative process of investigative journalism, they’re now part of a hyperactive daily news cycle. “We’re trying to make these judgments in hours or days rather than weeks or months,” says University of Kansas media law professor Jonathan Peters.

The 35-page dossier alleging that the Russian government had intimate compromising information about Trump, which had been making the rounds in Washington for weeks before BuzzFeed decided to go public...
with it, is a case in point. News of the Russian dossier overshadowed some extraordinary qualifications in the story, and in BuzzFeed’s subsequent defense of it. “The allegations are unverified, and the report contains errors,” read the subheading; those included the misspelling throughout the document of a company name. “Unverified,” echoed the first line. “Unverified, and potentially unverifiable,” the second paragraph said. BuzzFeed reporters had been investigating claims in the dossier, “but have not verified or falsified them.”

It was a huge departure from the journalistic practice of never reporting anything, ever, that is unconfirmed. That seems the most basic of all rules. It’s the first tenet of the SPJ’s code of ethics: “Journalists should take responsibility for the accuracy of their work [and] verify information before releasing it.” Not doing so feeds into the media’s adversaries’ attacks on “fake news.”

But a surprising divide has evolved. In the Internet age, readers can often see primary source materials anyway. Trump himself threw fuel on the BuzzFeed story, lashing out in three tweets, putting other media in the awkward position of seeming to ignore something the president was megaphoning to his followers.

Under this school of thought, reporting such things, with the caveat that they are unconfirmed, fulfills the journalistic obligation to put the news into context. That was BuzzFeed’s stated rationale, at least—publish now, verify later, if at all.

In an op-ed in The New York Times, BuzzFeed editor in chief Ben Smith said BuzzFeed had provided “appropriate context and caveats” for a document that was already in wide circulation in Washington. Yet the rest of the country wasn’t able to see those original source documents. Smith said readers expect transparency. “You trust us to give you the full story; we trust you to reckon with a messy, sometimes uncertain reality,” he wrote. It’s the rationale for not doing this, Smith wrote, that must be overwhelming. “Our audience inhabits a complex, polluted information environment; our role is to help them navigate it—not to pretend it doesn’t exist.” (BuzzFeed did not respond to requests for comment from Nieman Reports.)

Nonsense, says Leonard Downie, Jr., former executive editor of The Washington Post, who now teaches at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University. “That’s not journalism. Implicit in the definition of journalism is that a professional journalist is collecting information, synthesizing it, verifying it, and delivering it to the public.”

Cop-out, agrees The New York Times’s Purdy: “We’re responsible for what we print. We’re not responsible for whatever everybody else prints or puts online.”

Adds Cameron Barr, managing editor at The Washington Post: “We’re in the business of publishing things that are true, or where we get as close as possible to the truth.”

One way of doing that is to get, and link to, the original documents that detail the information, which journalists say—in most cases—have more credibility with readers. Another? Institutional experience, says Eilperin, who has been covering national politics since 1993. “I have a better sense of whether the documents and information I’m getting are reliable because I have been working with these people for years,” she says. The Post also has a two-source requirement, “so when someone who you’re unfamiliar with provides you with verbal information or a document, the key test is that you have to have corroboration. And that second source is how you get confidence that what you have is accurate.”

But many of the people now in national power are new to it, and to the reporters on the beat, which Eilperin acknowledges complicates the process. “What you have to gauge is how well versed some of these folks are in the subject matter,” she says. “It’s not just a matter of, Are they being straightforward with you? It’s also a question of, Are they steeped enough in the issues that when you’re having a conversation with them about the issues, you’re talking off the same page?”

In general, however, journalists are following the same process that they always have, says Mark Memmott, supervising senior editor for standards and practices at NPR. The same questions are asked, he says: Where is the information coming from? How does this person know this thing? Does he or she have direct knowledge? Is there a document the reporter can be shown or read from? Is there a second source? “It’s the same old basic steps and procedures, perhaps accelerated a little bit because we’re getting information out faster,” Memmott says.

Some things have changed, however. “It takes a significant degree of effort to make sure you’ve pinned things down,” Eilperin says—a process not helped by the fact that the White House often won’t respond to questions. While the Obama White House was also tough to cover, because it fixated on control of information, she says, “They still often would be willing to hear you out or send a response. That’s not always guaranteed now.”

While BuzzFeed’s may have been the most extreme example, it’s not the only news organization that has aired or published information it could not confirm. So did National Public Radio, in reports about the WikiLeaks dump of Clinton campaign emails (“NPR has not been able to confirm their authenticity”) and CNN and The New York Times when they reported that the president was briefed about the Russia dossier (“The New York Times has not been able to confirm the claims”; “CNN is not reporting on details of the memos, as it has not independently corroborated the specific allegations.”)

The Washington Post doesn’t do that, “as a general matter,” says Barr, though he adds it’s fair to bring attention to something a respected competitor with credible sources is reporting. Purdy, at the Times, says it also avoids doing this “to the extent possible in real time.”

The Russian dossier may have been a turning point. Most news organizations started to acknowledge it only when it became the subject of intelligence briefings in the Oval Office. “Once that dossier was reported and out there, we made references to the portions that were out there,” Purdy says of how the Times handled it. “We have to report the news. But we didn’t put the whole thing up.” He says blaming the fact that the original documents were being circulated in D.C. circles, as BuzzFeed did, does not absolve news organizations of responsibility for what they print. But newspapers do have to report the news—and the briefings in the White House raised it to that level. (In May, Mother Jones announced that it would launch a new project to more intensively investigate connections between Trump and Russia, including the dossier, and quickly raised $100,000 to do that, plus $15,000 in renewable monthly contributions.)

The speed of the news cycle only ratchets up the pressure to report things before they can be verified. So does competition among cable news shows trying to score exclusives. “Sometimes—and some of this can be blamed on the 24/7 news cycle we now live in—it’s very easy to hang out a line that, ‘We have not independently confirmed this,’ and then go with it,” RTDNA’s Cavender says.

But the fundamentals of journalism demand greater effort, according to SPJ president Walsh. She says that while it’s okay and transparent for journalists to tell the
An Investigative Toolkit For the Post-Snowden Era

How a decentralized platform enables reporters to collaborate across borders

BY MICHAEL BIRD AND STEFAN CANDEA

For over six months, an investigative team at the Spanish daily El Mundo has been waiting to hear whether they will face criminal prosecution for disobeying a legal injunction to stop publishing reports about alleged tax fraud by professional athletes in Europe. The Spanish injunction, issued in response to a complaint by a law firm representing top European soccer stars, was one of several against journalists in Spain, the U.K., and Germany related to Football Leaks, a cross-border project coordinated by the European Investigative Collaborations Network (EIC.network) that revealed tax evasion and corruption among clubs, league officials, agents, and some of the world’s best players.

Lawyers representing the athletes contend that the information was obtained by hacking and that publishing it is an invasion of privacy. Reporters Without Borders calls the injunction effort “an attempt to censor on a continental scale.”

Football Leaks, which consists of 1.9 terabytes of information and some 18.6 million documents, ranging from player contracts to emails revealing secret transfer fees and wages, is the largest leak in the history of sport. At the peak of the investigation, almost 100 journalists in 12 countries were working on the leaked material; in December of 2016, partners in the EIC.network—including El Mundo in Spain, Der Spiegel in Germany, Mediapart in France, The Sunday Times in the U.K., and several others—began publishing stories based on the leaked data. The project followed other high-profile leaks, the Pulitzer-winning Panama Papers most notably, which have been collaboratively investigated by journalists in many different countries.

The Panama Papers were investigated by more than 300 journalists from dozens of countries. But small-scale cross-border collaborations—such as that between Jakarta’s Tempo magazine and Taiwan’s The Reporter, revealing the human trafficking of Indonesian sailors on Taiwanese fishing vessels—can also have significant impact and reach. Organizations like the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and the EIC.network are part of a growing trend in which journalists collaborate rather than compete on stories that might be too complex or ambitious for one newsroom to cover alone.

Since Edward Snowden’s revelations about the NSA’s illicit spying activities, journalists have grown increasingly worried about both governments and tech companies gaining access to their data and monitoring their communications, potentially compromising the security of whistle-blowers and reporters themselves. The recent arrest of intelligence contractor Reality Winner, accused of leaking to The Intercept a classified NSA report about Russia’s hacking efforts in the days leading up to the 2016 election, has only heightened these fears.

At the EIC.network, we have come up with a decentralized and secure platform that allows journalists to launch their own cross-border investigative projects, free of government and corporate interference or surveillance. So taking inspiration from “liquid” democracies—also known as “delegative” democracies, where voters or personal delegates selected by voters vote directly on issues—we call our approach “liquid investigations” to reflect the idea of creating a secure, cooperative network with no hierarchical leadership, in which collaborators themselves decide who controls their data.

In any investigation, the security of data and conversations are major concerns. Investigative teams need to envisage threat scenarios by which authorities or other interested parties might try to gain access to data by hacking into journalists’ computers or phones. Storing all the data and communications for an investigation on a single platform offers would-be hackers an easy target. If that platform is compromised, so are the logistics of the entire investigative enterprise. If stored, that would include also the search histories of journalists and the documents they have accessed. Legal efforts can also be undertaken to block that platform’s activity, both before and during publication.

To minimize these risks, liquid investigations don’t put anything in the cloud; all email communication is done using PGP encryption; all our tools run on our own servers, behind multiple layers of security; and all investigations are carried out according to the following procedure.

At the start of an investigation, EIC.network partners meet face to face to brainstorm options on how to independently analyze the leaked material, without depositing the data in a centralized online format. These options include creating encrypted copies of the raw data and/or encrypted online channels for transferring information. Making the raw data available for all the media partners in our network, rather than just a select few, is what sets our approach apart from other large-scale cross-border

The European Investigative Collaborations Network uses a decentralized platform to protect the security of documents used in massive cross-border reporting projects such as Football Leaks.
investigative projects that use centralized platforms. We share administrative and control rights to our platforms among all the EIC.network partners.

During cross-border investigations, reporters need secure ways to refer to documents, either via a direct URL or by a unique identifier, rather than by sending documents back and forth by email. For the Football Leaks project, the Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism (RCIJ) constructed a secure search engine that allows journalists in our network to access and search large collections of documents. Called Hoover, the search tool (the code for which is open source under an MIT license and is available on GitHub) does not store search queries and does not record which journalists access which documents. As a result, no one can break into the platform to profile a journalist’s searches, and no administrator can monitor a journalist’s activities. The downside is, since the platform doesn’t store search logs and user activity, it cannot offer features like bookmarking documents or notification of new results on previous searches.

Since Hoover—which has a hidden URL and requires two-step verification from users, with access expiring every three hours—operates on a pan-national scale, if one national authority finds a legal means to shut it down, other EIC.network partners can make the search tool available from a different data center in a different country. This hasn’t happened yet, but the location of the hosting server changes from time to time anyway.

We have a separate platform for secure communications and information exchange. This follows a similar pattern to the Hoover search engine: EIC.network partners have access to the administration and user management and, if there is an emergency, the location of the hosting server can be quickly moved. This communications platform runs on Sandstorm.io, a platform hosting a number of open-source apps that are helpful to our collaboration, including Rocket.Chat (a chat server similar to Slack), Etherpad (which allows users to edit documents collaboratively in real-time), a Dropbox-like file storage server, and—most importantly—DokuWiki, wiki software that doesn’t require a database. Any user can launch these apps and invite and delegate access within the EIC network.

Wikis, along with annotations technology and a chatbot called Columbo, are part of the package of tools to enhance collaboration and communication among reporters working on an investigation. We use wikis to document and share everything from notes and research to questions for sources, interview transcripts, and drafts of the articles that come from our investigations. For the Football Leaks project alone, we created several hundred wikis and subwikis. Centralizing everything in one system means all our partner journalists can gain access and collaborate simultaneously. The wikis serve as an effective archive and a large-scale internal knowledge base that can be referenced in future investigations.

We are also experimenting with annotations technology that allows us to work directly on source documents, leaving notes, references to other findings, and tips other reporters might find useful. Columbo can alert collaborating reporters when new annotations are made, through a dedicated channel on the Rocket.Chat app on our communications platform.

Our toolkit was most recently brought to bear on #MaltaFiles, a pan-national collaboration published in May that details how the smallest country in the European Union has become a tax haven for figures connected to the Italian mafia, the Turkish elite, and Russian billionaires, with links to payday loan companies in the U.S.

By continuing to refine the liquid investigations bundle and workflow, we hope our open-source set of tools will increase the potential of journalists to securely collaborate across borders, even in ad-hoc groups and not necessarily through big costly networks.

public what they don’t know, they should not abandon ethics codes and the obligation to verify.

Some media critics, largely on the right, say many of the leaked stories have been false, something that can be surprisingly hard to determine after the fact. These reports often cite denials from the White House or its appointees. The Federalist senior editor Mollie Hemingway, for example, pointed out in The Federalist that a Washington Post story saying Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein threatened to resign when the White House said it was his idea to fire Comey (something Trump contradicted later in an interview) was refuted by Rosenstein himself. “Don’t trust anonymous sources,” she wrote, quoting from On The Media’s “Breaking News Consumer’s Handbook.” The Post’s Eilperin says that, under this credibility-challenged administration, a White House denial doesn’t mean that something isn’t true; Hemingway did not respond to a request to discuss this topic.

Even WikiLeaks criticized the dossier. “No credibility,” it tweeted. But the organization known for publishing leaks has presented other challenges to journalists.

One is that its data dumps are so massive they can defy even journalists’ best efforts to confirm what’s in them; the DNC leak alone consisted of 44,053 emails and 17,761 attachments. To compound that problem, WikiLeaks released some of its DNC and Clinton leaks at decisive moments such as the eve of the Democratic National Convention. And it made the documents not only freely available to anyone who Googles them, but indexed and searchable, meaning people could go right to them without the intervention of a journalist. More, not fewer, such massive leaks are likely to occur, taxing journalists’ ability to verify the information.

One organization attempting to bring journalistic standards to document
dumps is the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). As part of the ICIJ’s Panama Papers publication in 2016, an army of reporters worldwide from 107 media institutions vetted 11.5 million documents detailing financial information about public officials and others, including instances of taxes evasion. The ICIJ is still producing stories—and soliciting leaks.

ICIJ director Gerard Ryle says organizations like his should collaborate with journalists from the outset. “I was always taught that the first obligation of journalists is to get the facts right,” he says. “And we’re in danger of forgetting that that is our primary responsibility.”

Yes, moving slowly risks falling behind the news. Indictments of FIFA officials started taking place while ICIJ journalists were still reading through (but not yet reporting on) the Panama Papers, for example, which included revelations about the soccer federation’s officers. The documents included information on two major candidates in an election that was under way in Argentina. But the journalists continued to methodically review the documents and put them into context before releasing stories about them.

“Your instinct as a journalist is to rush into print, but we continued to try to take our time,” Ryle says. “If you want to fool the media into reporting something, you put time pressure on them.”

WikiLeaks also has worked with major media organizations. But its release of information about the Hillary Clinton campaign was raw. Mainstream media outlets responded with equivocation. One NPR story alone characterized the materials as “allegedly linked to Hillary Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta,” referred to them as “what WikiLeaks says are Podesta’s emails,” noted that “NPR has not been able to confirm their authenticity,” and said that, “If the emails are authentic, they provide insight into the private conversations happening at the highest levels of the Clinton campaign.” Then it proceeded to report what was in them.

That’s just being honest with the audience, says NPR’s Memmott. “We don’t want to lead people to think that NPR has seen these documents or knows for a fact that these emails were written by Mr. Podesta if we can’t say that,” Memmott says. “We want to tell people, here’s what we do know and here’s what we don’t know about this story that you’re hearing about everywhere right now, which we think is more valuable than—not to criticize some of our colleagues at other news outlets—but to constantly talk about the news as if they’ve got it all and here’s the whole story.”

The SPJ’s Walsh agrees that journalists are running information like this because the public has access to it anyway, “and I think journalists are feeling the pressure to report it. If we don’t talk about it, our users are going to go somewhere else to get it.”

It’s hard to determine reliably whether people are going online to see original WikiLeaks documents. WikiLeaks anonymizes user data and does not release traffic figures. Users who go there are most likely to have visited Google and Reddit immediately beforehand, and appear to be people who follow politics and right-wing media, according to Amazon subsidiary Alexa, which tracks Web traffic.

The Clinton campaign largely side-stepped the substance of the WikiLeaks disclosures and instead attacked WikiLeaks itself for being what it called a “propaganda arm” of Russia and the Russian hackers who, according to U.S. intelligence officials, filched the documents. It also accused the media of being dupes. “Media needs to stop treating WikiLeaks like it is same as FOIA,” spokesman Brian Fallon tweeted, in a reference to the federal Freedom of Information Act. The leaks, he said, came from “an illegal hack” by Russian cyber experts “colluding” with Russia to the benefit of Trump.

Later leaks from intelligence agencies backed him up on that point, and most media outlets did report this prominently in coverage of the WikiLeaks material. The leaks were, after all, part of a story about national security and foreign influence in an American election, says Indira Lakshmanan, a Washington columnist for The Boston Globe and Craig Newmark Chair for Journalism Ethics at the Poynter Institute: “Part of it is a competitive culture and part of it is what people see as an overwhelming public interest in threats to our democracy.”

Fallon was right about something else the WikiLeaks example shows: It’s essential that a reader or a viewer know, in general and whenever possible, who is behind a leak and with what motives.

That’s also another thing about the use of leaks that’s gotten tougher.

Identifying where leaks—as opposed to leaked documents—come from is often required by policy. The Washington Post’s standards and ethics rules mandate that as much information as possible be provided to readers “about why our unnamed sources deserve our confidence.” SPJ’s ethics code says: “Identify sources clearly. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources.” Anonymity, the Times reminded its staff last year, should be the last resort, and senior editors have to approve its use in every case.

Yet not allowing anonymous sources on some occasions, the Times’ Purdy says, would in the new reality of Washington reporting make some of the most important stories tough to do—situations in which, as the policy states, “the Times could not otherwise publish information it considers newsworthy and reliable.” When unnamed sources are used, it also helps to get as many as you can, newspaper editors say; one Washington Post story about the Obama administration’s response to Russian interference in the election mentions more than three dozen sources, almost all anonymous.
It isn’t just the advent of the likes of WikiLeaks, which does not identify its sources, that makes anonymous sourcing and the reporting of unconfirmed material more common. It’s the wider net the media itself has cast for leaks. Where once a leak might have come from a source known to a beat reporter, now a lot of other people have begun to offer information, people the beat reporter doesn’t know.

And there’s another danger in reporting information journalists haven’t yet determined to be true. “It’s only a matter of time before someone decides to bring a claim for defamation or potentially invasion of privacy over a false and libelous statement that an organization can’t confirm or deny,” says David Bodney, a media lawyer and the head of the Media and Entertainment Law Group at the firm Ballard Spahr. “There is absolutely a danger of placing a higher priority on speed than accuracy, or timeliness over truth,” says Bodney.

Two other leaks show what reporters do when they don’t know who their sources are: the successive releases of parts of Trump’s 1995 and 2005 tax returns, to The New York Times and Johnston.

In the case of Trump’s 2005 tax return, David Cay Johnston used his long career of scrutinizing tax documents to verify that the return looked real. That conclusion was confirmed when, hours before he was to talk about the leak with Rachel Maddow, live on TV, the White House released a copy of it, too.

That’s the simple bottom line, say he and others—and the best defense against the barbs of critics: Reporters should keep digging, until they can judge whether what they’ve been leaked is true. “The information, if you can vouch for its authenticity, is the most important thing,” says the Globe’s Lakshmanan. “If there’s a good reason for protecting the identity of the source, and the information is in the public interest and the harm does not outweigh the good, I don’t know that the identity of the source is necessarily that important.”

Some media organizations have been going to great lengths to demonstrate the reliability of their sourcing. In its story disclosing that Michael Flynn had discussed sanctions with the Russian ambassador, The Washington Post cited what it said were no fewer than nine current and former officials in senior positions at several government agencies. When The New York Times reported on a leaked draft memo proposing that CIA “black site” prisons be reactivated, it said that no fewer than three administration officials had confirmed it.

And in September 2016, when an envelope landed in the office mailbox of New York Times reporter Susanne Craig, with “The Trump Organization” as its return address and photocopied pages from what appeared to be three of Trump’s 1995 tax returns inside (from New York State, New Jersey, and Connecticut), the paper poured resources into evaluating whether they were real.

Yes, says Purdy, the Times would have liked to have known the source, not only to understand what motivation he or she had had for dropping this explosive leak in the middle of the presidential race, but to see if there were more documents where those had come from. The important thing, he says, was that the paper was able to make “some significant judgments through reporting” about whether they were real.

Trump, of course, had not released his tax returns, and there were also suspicious inconsistencies in the documents, including numbers typed in different fonts. Reporters combed through public records to cross-check such things as Trump’s Social Security number. They hired tax experts to review the forms. Then they found the accountant who had prepared them, flew to South Florida to meet with him, and got him to confirm that the returns were genuine—and that part of some numbers had been typed manually in a different font because the tax software used at the time didn’t allow for as many digits as the $916 million loss Trump had declared.

“I resist a little bit the term leaks as a useful category for this kind of information,” the Post’s Barr says. “My blanket description for all of this is reporting, which is the most important thing we do as journalists, especially when we’re trying to hold the government to account.”
To attract and retain millennial journalists, news outlets must better meet the needs of parents with young children—and create better work-life balance for everyone.

BY KATHERINE GOLDSTEIN
Members of The New York Times’s Women’s Network, an employee group that convinced Times management to improve leave policies for new parents: from left, Alex Hardiman, Alex MacCallum, Rebecca Grossman-Cohen, and Erin Grau.
“WE’RE HAVING A BIT of a baby boom,” says Lauren Williams, executive editor of Vox.com and the mother of an 18-month-old. When the news startup began in 2014, there wasn’t a single parent working at the site. But as the website has grown, so have employees’ families. Now, around 15 percent of the 90-person staff have children.

Margaret Wheeler Johnson, who has a 2-year-old and an infant, was the first person to have a baby while working at Bustle.com, a startup women’s site. She’s now managing editor of Romper.com, owned by the same company, a site for millennial moms that is also experiencing a surge in new children among staff.

“We’re all in that early- to mid-30s life shift,” is how Kate Sheppard, with a 20-month-old son, describes the leaders of Huff Post’s Washington, D.C. bureau. Three quarters of the senior staff have children under 2.

“Any company that wants to employ millennials needs to address this,” says Laura Wides-Muñoz, mother of a 7- and an 8-year-old and vice president of special projects and editorial strategy at Fusion. She’s seen a wave of new parents enter her workplace. In contrast to even 10 years ago, she’s noticed these staffers have often been more upfront about their parenting realities and more vocal about their desire for better policies. “I think it’s a positive development,” she says.

In the conversation about how to create more diversity and gender balance in newsrooms, one group has been routinely ignored: mothers. What are newsrooms doing to retain women who have or plan to have children, to make sure more women stay in the talent pipeline?

While legacy news organizations have had some working mothers and (sometimes less than ideal) family leave policies for many decades, for a certain set of younger digital news organizations, this is all unfolding in real time. What happens when the people who took blogging mainstream in the mid-2000s, and who now hold demanding jobs in national news, start to have babies? A recent Pew study puts the median age for a first child among highly educated women at 30, and one million millennial women (born between 1981 and 1997) are becoming mothers each year in America.

A 2015 University of Kansas study found female journalists were at higher risk of burnout and more plan to leave the industry than their male counterparts, citing a feeling of less support from their organizations. Their dissatisfaction with the field was, in part, attributed to women’s desires to balance work with family responsibilities.

How both legacy organizations, hungry for journalists with 21st-century skills, and startups with nascent HR policies handle this may determine how diverse news leadership and coverage is for decades to come.

What follows is a four-point plan for helping women—and men—with young families better manage work and parenthood.

WHEN I FOUND OUT I WAS PREGNANT WITH my first child, I had been working for six months as a leader at a fast-paced news website. I was to be the first person on this digital team to be a parent. I’d spent my 20s deftly climbing the career ladder in digital journalism, reaching senior management positions at a young age. I had a loving and supportive husband, who was happy to go down a less intense career path while I was the breadwinner. I presumed after our son was born I would take 12 weeks of maternity leave and keep charging ahead in journalism.

My son, Asher, was born in July of 2015. There were the joyous moments—the discovery that listening to Stevie Wonder at full blast seemed to make Asher stop crying, and his love of making eye contact and cuddling. What wasn’t typical was, when my son was 6 weeks old, we took him for a follow-up appointment to a specialist because of a potential issue originally identified on a prenatal sonogram. My husband, Travis, and I were in the middle of laughing at a joke when the doctor with well-coiffed hair and a TV anchor smile came in with a somber look on his face.

We were shocked to learn that our son had a number of serious problems with his kidneys and would need surgery as soon as possible. What followed was a multi-week saga involving surgery, two hospitalizations, endless blood tests, and a spinal tap in the longest day of my life at the pediatric ER. I remember walking out of the hospital in a dress covered in a mixture of my son’s blood and urine. My eyes were glazed, but the clearest thought in my mind was, “I will never be the same person after this.”

I’m so grateful my son has recovered from those early ordeals, but as I prepared to go back to work, thoughts about his need for a second surgery loomed. Warnings about monitoring him for infections were sternly passed on by doctors, along with the directive that continuing to nurse him was “the best thing I could do for him.” Despite the traumas of Asher’s early life, I was back at
my desk when my 12 weeks of maternity leave were up.

Many mothers find the early weeks and months of being back at work difficult. In the only developed country in the world with no requirement for paid maternity leave, the average length of maternity leave, when taken, was 10.3 weeks in 2006–2008, according to a federal study. A 2014 Careerbuilder.com survey found that 11 percent of working mothers took a maternity leave of two weeks or less. There’s some hope this could change in the near future—in the 2018 budget, President Trump included a proposal for six weeks of paid leave for all new mothers, fathers, and adoptive parents—but the current reality is far from ideal. And while my son’s health crises weren’t typical, there is not a parent on the planet who hasn’t dealt with some kind of acute stress, whether it’s a sleepless baby, colic, or the inability to find reliable and affordable childcare.

Although I was the first person within my digital news team to have a child, I started to notice something on social media that made me realize I wasn’t alone. More and more journalist colleagues from past jobs, acquaintances, and women I’d met at conferences over the years were starting to post pregnancy announcements, followed by that newborn photo with the blue and white hospital blanket. As I saw their sleeping infant photos or their anguished first-day-back-at-work posts I wondered: How do they manage the demands of this industry?

And, if all, most, or even many of the new mothers leave this business, who’s going to be left?

Increasingly, journalists are asking questions about how their own newsrooms and the industry at large can do better at creating policies that specifically support parents. Rebecca Ruiz asked journalists to report on the family-friendliness of their newsrooms for the Poynter Institute, and Melody Kramer, also for Poynter, has surveyed newsrooms’ family leave policies. Both efforts are important first steps in starting conversations and getting data on these issues. Additionally, journalists are bringing their unions into the conversation about better family leave policies and employer support for childcare needs. The Wall Street Journal’s editorial staff wrote a letter in March demanding more newsroom diversity, gender pay equity, and specific protections for the careers of parents. William Lewis, the CEO of Dow Jones, the parent company of The Wall Street Journal, recently released a statement about this, promising to address gender equality and other diversity issues at the paper, but did not mention mothers or parents specifically.

To research this article, I interviewed nearly 20 mothers at a wide variety of news organizations. I picked women who work in senior leadership or management positions: women who work in digital mediums and will have the most capacity to direct news coverage and story topics for years to come. I chose women who are fully immersed in newsroom environments and culture—editors, managers, strategists, assigns, and idea generators. I chose this group to get better insights into how newsrooms operate and what official and unofficial
policies are in place to support them. In focusing specifically on how to retain mothers in the news industry, I hope to promote solutions for tackling the pernicious gender gap in journalism. Most women spoke to me on the record, but some asked for their names to not be used when discussing sensitive workplace situations that could upset current or former employers.

While the women I spoke with earned more than many working mothers, they also frequently lived in expensive metropolitan areas, like New York or Washington, D.C., with some of the highest housing and childcare costs in the nation. While financial resources undoubtedly relieve many kinds of parenting stress, education and salary don’t seamlessly translate to an easier time for working mothers. A Pew study found that 65 percent of parents with college degrees found it tough to balance family and job responsibilities, compared to 49 percent of nongraduates. According to the same study, mothers are more likely to find it difficult than fathers, and women still do a majority of household and childcare tasks, even when both parents work full time.

As detailed in the 2014 Nieman Reports feature “Where are the Women?,” there is a crisis in American journalism where fewer women are leading newspapers, and the number of women in supervisory roles at papers has remained flat since the 1980s, around 37 percent. The Women’s Media Center 2017 report found “Men still dominate media across all platforms—television, newspapers, online and wires—with change coming only incrementally. Women are not equal partners in telling the story, nor are they equal partners in sourcing and interpreting what and who is important in the story.”

Today, women make up about two-thirds of graduates of journalism programs but little progress has been made overall in terms of byline representation and gender parity in leadership at legacy news organizations. Some of the lack of gender balance must be attributed to a failure to retain mothers. Aminda Marqués Gonzalez, executive editor of the Miami Herald, observed in the 2014 Nieman Reports article, “Of the women in my peer group who had kids, I’m the only one who stayed in the newsroom or came back after some time away. Most of them quit.”

Digital news organizations and people working at the forefront of new forms of storytelling—in video, multimedia, data visualization, social media, and audience development—have the opportunity to break traditional newsroom hierarchies. Many digital news operations are relatively flat; it’s not uncommon for talented journalists to reach management positions while still in their 20s. In its 2016 report, the American Society of News Editors found 50 percent of online news employees were women, compared to 38 percent of daily newspaper employees.

The gender makeup of news organizations has an outsized influence on society at large, in how newsrooms cover all topics, from sports to public health to national politics. The 2017 Women’s Media Center report found that more than half of stories about reproductive rights were written by men at major outlets like the Associated Press and The New York Times. Women were quoted, on an issue that is central to their lives, only 33 percent
of the time. On the hot button topic of campus rape, the same study found that men wrote a majority of the stories, and more often focused on the crime’s impact on the alleged perpetrator rather than the alleged victim. Editors often draw on their own experiences in deciding which stories to pursue and that is as true with mothers as anyone else. Julia Turner, editor in chief of Slate, pursued an editorial partnership to cover the science and policy around education. She says, “My interest in advocating for us to do that work was informed by my own experience navigating early childhood education for my own kids and becoming much more aware of the vast disparity of opportunity available to kids with different kinds of resources.”

Turner sees it as a clear-cut case that newsrooms must have a diversity of perspectives in order to thrive. “Journalism is an incredibly competitive landscape,” Turner says. “If you create a workplace where [women] see that if they make the fairly common life choice [to have kids] they will no longer have opportunities to do amazing work or to be promoted to take on leadership roles, then you’re shooting yourself in the foot. We need that brainpower, talent, and those ideas.”

Certainly, it’s not just birth mothers who need better support in the workplace. Fathers and non-birth parents, people caring for aging parents, and even those without family responsibilities can also benefit greatly from progressive family policies and supportive work cultures. But the reality is that the news industry and society at large don’t have the same systemic problem retaining and promoting talented men after they have children. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that 93 percent of fathers with children under 18 are participating in the workforce, compared to 71 percent of mothers. Fathers are also more likely than mothers to be granted requests for childcare-related flexibility and to be seen more favorably than women by their employers after asking.

The Affordable Care Act mandates insurance companies to provide breast pumps for free to new moms, and because of the lack of mandated paid family leave, many mothers who choose to breastfeed attempt to pump a majority of their infants’ food not long after birth. The logistics and time commitment related to this can be strenuous. Pumping sessions can last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour and must be done on a regular schedule, so figuring out how to fit pumping into a busy day of meetings, commuting, or breaking news is no small feat. (One woman I interviewed on the phone managed to pump milk, eat her lunch, and answer urgent emails while we spoke.) Producing breast milk can for some women be physically demanding, and many of the mothers I spoke to gave up on breastfeeding sooner than they’d initially planned. Ruiz’s survey for Poynter found that nearly a third of respondents said their employer was unsupportive of breastfeeding.

But the challenges around being a working mother in news don’t stop when you throw away your breast pump. The reality of the job can mean long hours, high levels of unpredictability, and working for companies that are often strapped for resources and demand a lot from their employees. This can often come to a head when dealing with the relentless pace of the 24-hour news cycle, which has only accelerated after the 2016 election. Jill Abramson, former executive editor of The New York Times, who has two grown children, saw supporting female journalists and parents as a priority when she was at the helm. “There’s no way I would have managed to keep my career going if I was starting out now,” she says. Elizabeth Bruenig, assistant editor for the Outlook section at The Washington Post and mother of a 1-year-old, describes how the current intensity, if it keeps up, will influence her life: “It will definitely strongly impact my future childbearing because it is tough to imagine having another kid in this kind of [news] environment.”

While an understanding boss helps create a good work environment for all employees, especially mothers, it’s hardly a retention strategy. Women who are met with a lack of understanding about family realities and have been refused flexibility often leave the industry. Anne Hawke was a producer on NPR’s “Morning Edition” when it was announced that every three
For president and CEO Mark Thompson and members of the Times executive committee. They had found an ally on the executive committee, now chief operating officer Meredith Kopit Levien, who advised them, supported their efforts, and helped broker the high-level meeting. The group was armed with arguments and data from a compelling source: articles touting the economic benefits of paid family leave that had appeared in The New York Times, such as the money-saving success of California’s paid family leave policy, the fact that mothers who take leave are more likely to be working a year later, and turnover of female employees is often significantly reduced when leave benefits are increased. At Google, for example, the attrition rate of female employees decreased by 50 percent when the firm increased maternity leave from three to five months and from

Rebecca Grossman-Cohen, a member of the Women’s Network at The New York Times, with daughter Hazel

months, producers would be required to rotate their shifts to nights, evenings, or weekends. As the single mother of an 18-month-old, this was untenable. Her requests for flexibility or a job change were not accommodated. When the company announced buyouts the next month, she leaped at the chance. “It was very bittersweet because I really wanted to stay,” she says. “I loved the place and thought I’d spend my whole career there, but I had to find the exit door.” She now works in communications for a nonprofit.

Asking to comment on Hawke’s story, NPR released a statement that pointed out the demands of 24/7 breaking news and defended the rotating shift schedule as a good solution so tough shifts are shouldered more fairly by the whole “Morning Edition” staff. The statement says, “NPR is committed to retaining talented staff before and after they have children: we offer maternity/paternity leave, rollover vacations and sick days, and a leave-sharing program.” It also mentions that NPR offers a number of other employee well-being initiatives, including assistance with childcare.

If you want to see your newsroom better support working mothers, a highly instructive story is how a group of women at The New York Times demanded—and got—a better family leave policy. The Times has a formal organization called the Women’s Network, which provides networking and mentorship opportunities and arranges discussions and speakers. About two years ago, five senior women who were involved in the Women’s Network, all in their 30s and beginning to start families, felt the group should start focusing on policy changes around family leave.

“We did this because we felt like, as new mothers, there was no one looking out for us,” says Erin Grau, who is vice president of operations and has two young children.

At the time, the family leave policy was 11.1 weeks paid for birth mothers with vaginal deliveries, and 6 weeks for a non-birth parent. The group didn’t feel it was adequate, given the company’s aggressive growth goals, stated interest in gender diversity and retaining top talent, and the fact that the Times now competes with tech companies, not just other newspapers, for sought-after employees. The women decided to focus on the business case for why the company needed to think differently about family leave. “We worked on it with the same rigor and structure we bring to [our regular jobs],” says Grau. “We became the most educated people on the issue in any room.”

The women, four of five of whom had given birth in the last six months, prepared a memo and presentation
Thompson was persuaded by their case, and told them so at the meeting. “We believe family leave policies that work well for employees make good business sense for the company. The Women’s Network presented us with a cogent, well-researched case and we quickly changed our parental leave policy as a result,” says Thompson. Maternity leave was extended to 16-18 weeks paid (for vaginal versus cesarean-section births). Furthermore, partners, birth fathers, and adoptive parents get 10 weeks paid leave. Employees are eligible the day they are hired. The policy went into effect in March of 2016.

Jeremy Bowers, a senior editor who works in interactive news at the Times, last year took his 10 weeks paternity leave after the birth of his second child and treasures his experience. He had wanted to take the full 10 weeks, but worried that taking that much time could be seen as selfish. A female colleague made a comment that changed his perspective.

“She said, ‘I really wish men would take their leave because of the examples it sets. If 100 percent of women take the leave, and only 50 percent of men do, it makes a male employee appear more valuable and less of a liability.’ When she said that, my perspective changed. I started to see that family leave wasn’t just a personal decision, but something that we should embrace collectively.” Ultimately, Bowers ended up taking four weeks when his child was born and six after the election, a decision, he notes, that was his choice, not one the Times urged him to make.

There’s evidence that taking paternity leave is actually contagious. An American Economic Review study found that when a man’s co-workers took paternity leave, it increased the chance that he would take it by 11 percentage points—and that if his brother took it, by 15 points.

Bowers is now such a big fan of the Times’s policy, he mentions it in all the job descriptions he posts for his team and brings it up with candidates in interviews. He believes the new, more generous policy helps the Times stand out with top talent and assists with his recruiting efforts.

The current pace “will definitely strongly impact my future childbearing because it is tough to imagine having another kid in this kind of [news] environment” —Elizabeth Bruenig, Washington Post

Grau’s advice to others wanting to advocate for policy changes is, “Don’t wait for someone else, or HR, to do the work for you.” She believes part of the network’s success was having a concrete, well-researched proposal that bosses could just say yes to. Creating allies at the top, and “safety in numbers” through an organized group, rather than just one individual who could be seen as complaining, is also a smart strategic move.

As a next step, Grau and others in the Women’s Network are advocating for an official flextime policy and an on-boarding and preparation handbook for those who are going on leave. It doesn’t exist at the company, so they are writing it themselves. The one part of their initial proposal that wasn’t approved involved creating pools of money to hire freelancers to backfill for people on leave. This was the most expensive aspect of their ask, so they are continuing to look for new ways to advocate for it.

Another important part of the success of the women’s efforts is that everyone at The New York Times is eligible, from copy editors to vice presidents. I’ve spoken with several men and women who have negotiated better family leave for themselves than was officially offered by their companies. While understandable, this practice reinforces the idea of family leave as a “perk” and flexibility as something granted to “valuable” employees. It also leaves too much up to an individual manager’s discretion and doesn’t push companies to make fair and smart policies that benefit everyone.

Throughout my interviews, recurring themes highlighted what some organizations were doing well to help retain mothers as well as areas that must be improved if companies are serious about keeping talented women in the workforce.

Here are four recommendations all companies should consider to create news organizations that support the growing millennial workforce and diversity in family responsibilities. All of these recommendations are given in the context of the realities of the news business in the United States. While some recommendations are informed by successful, progressive policies in other industries, some of these suggestions cost nothing to implement.

**Give Paid Maternity Leave**

There is no “industry standard” for maternity leave in news organizations. With no mandated paid leave in the United States, companies are free to set widely vary-
ing policies. Only 14 percent of U.S. workers even have access to paid leave.

As a culture, we too often frame parental leave as a “perk” rather than an essential component of healthy families and productive companies. But paid leave reduces the infant mortality rate, leads to less postpartum depression, and improves the chance women will return to work. Women who receive paid leave are more likely to subsequently work more hours and earn more money than their counterparts who don’t.

According to the Center For American Progress, an independent public policy think tank, replacing a skilled worker costs about 20 percent of the employee’s salary. The more senior the position, the higher the cost, with executive replacement costs ballooning up to 213 percent of the original salary. Many news organizations have recently been more focused on buyouts and layoffs than retention strategies, but to ignore gender diversity and younger employees with valuable 21st-century skills in an effort to cut costs further puts an organization’s long-term viability in peril.

Many of the women I spoke with in large cities at organizations with 50 or more employees and are therefore subject to Family Medical Leave Act, which guarantees 12 weeks of unpaid job projection after one year of employment. Virtually all the women I spoke with were able to get 12 weeks of mostly paid leave, often combining a paid policy with vacation days and short-term disability payments that covered part of their salary. In Melody Kramer’s survey about family leave in newsrooms, she found cases of women who were only paid if they had sick time accrued or women who were required to ask colleagues to “donate” their sick days to cover a maternity leave. Several newsrooms surveyed had no formal parental leave policies in place.

A start for all news organizations would be to offer a blanket 12 weeks of gender-neutral paid leave, without forcing employees to use vacation and sick time to reach that number. Additionally, companies should follow the Times’s lead and make the policy effective on the first day of employment. This might help companies attract talented men and women who are planning or expecting children.

Give Fathers and Non-Birth Partners Paid Family Leave

The first person to kick off the baby boom at Vox was one of the co-founders, Matt Yglesias. He took a four-week paternity leave and even wrote about what he learned from the experience. At the time, Vox.com was still very small, and everyone usually stayed quite late at the office. It was immediately noticeable that Yglesias began coming in much earlier in the morning, leaving at 5 p.m. and then logging on later.

“We didn’t have a real template in place [for being a working parent],” Yglesias says. “Ideally, I wanted to set a tone. I’m aware that websites, particularly new ones, often operate on an unsustainable, exploitative culture. They are creating a work environment that’s maybe an OK place for young people to get their start, but doesn’t really work as an adult job for people who want to have families. We want Vox.com to be a place where people can work for a long time, so that means thinking seriously about the needs of people in their 30s and 40s and beyond.”

“It was really helpful for all the women who got pregnant after he had a child,” Lauren Williams says of Yglesias’s example. “He pioneered a sense of work-life balance for parents. No one else really had to fight for understanding or anything like that. A [new kind of culture] became established. It was a big deal, and I think it would have been hard for someone who wasn’t a co-founder to start that precedent.”

Newsroom leaders should encourage men to take their full parental leave and make public what they are doing. Over the last 20 years, the number of men taking parental leave has increased by nearly 400 percent—something that’s not just beneficial for fathers and their children, but for women, too, who see improvements in everything from their health to their earnings and career advancement.

Most importantly, perhaps, greater access to paternity or gender-neutral leave policies helps increase gender equity, both at home and in the workplace, in part by lessening hiring and promotion bias against women.

Paternity leave has been shown to have a long-term im-
Impact on how involved men are in childcare duties and household work. A recent study from the National Partnership for Women and Families found that fathers who take two or more weeks of leave after the birth of a child are more involved in the child’s care nine months after birth. A more equitable division of childcare and chores would undoubtedly increase women’s participation in the workforce, considering more than 60 percent of women cited family responsibilities as a reason they weren’t working in a 2014 Kaiser Family Foundation/New York Times/CBS survey, compared to only 37 percent of men.

Create Official Work-from-Home and Flex Policies

S. Mitra Kalita is the vice president of programming for CNN Digital and has two daughters who are 12 and 5. She found out she was pregnant with her first child while working as a general assignment reporter at The Washington Post. Her own mother had been a stay-at-home mom for most of her childhood, and she had imagined she might become one, too, especially while she had young children. She decided to take a six-month maternity leave when her first daughter was born, some of which was unpaid.

As the six months of leave came to a close, she met with a senior editor who was also a working mother and expressed her trepidation about coming back to work. She told her she was considering leaving the job to stay at home. The woman offered her a deal to come back part-time. Kalita was thrilled with the arrangement, and eventually returned to full-time work.

When her second daughter was born, continuing to breastfeed after maternity leave was extremely important to her. She was upfront with her boss at Quartz about her desire to work from home on certain days so she could nurse her baby. Her male boss, the son of a lactation consultant, was supportive of her commitment to breastfeeding and the logistics she needed to make it work.

It’s hard to imagine that Kalita would have advanced as far as she has in her career if her requests for flexibility were refused and if, as a result, she decided to take off several years when her children were young. In accommodating her, her bosses saw—and expressed—the value of her as an employee.

But, again, relying on good bosses is not enough. Flexible work options should become part of stated company policies, rather than leaving them up to an individual’s negotiation skills. Pamela Stone, author of the book “Opting Out?: Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home,” found that when women were offered flexibility, it was often offered as a “privately-brokered special favor,” making her vulnerable if the boss left the company or changed his or her mind.

Flexible work policies can take many forms, including compressed work weeks, partial work from home days, and full- or part-time telecommuting. Many news organizations use chat software like Slack to communicate about work assignments, and ubiquitous video software allows for teleconferencing. And these policies are not just sought after by parents. A 2014 survey found that 43 percent of workers would choose flexibility over a pay raise, something that should be noted by cash-strapped newsrooms. And flexibility has become the norm at many professional services firms. PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte, and Ernst & Young LLP, among others, are well represented on the Working Mother’s 100 Best Companies list, and collectively these firms top the list in use of flextime.

Studies have shown that when flexible policies are thought out and well-adopted, they can improve productivity and reduce stress. Codifying flexibility can also help attract and retain millennial talent, with people in their

Source: 2014 survey by communications software and services firm Unify of more than 800 participants, at different levels of their career, at jobs in IT, finance, marketing, customer service, operations, sales, and other areas.

43% Percentage of workers who would choose flexibility over a pay raise

Alex MacCallum, a member of the Women’s Network at The New York Times, with son Teddy
childbearing years more likely to prioritize paid parental leave policies and flexible telecommuting in evaluating potential jobs. A study conducted by Stanford University found that when an employer allowed workers to opt-in to a work-from-home arrangement, employees were happier, more productive, and less likely to quit.

“We really need to think much bigger in terms of re-designing and redefining excellent work because right now we think excellent work means you have to work all the time and be physically present in an office,” says Brigid Schulte, a veteran journalist, author, and director of the Better Life Lab at New America, which focuses on gender roles and family policy, in and out of the workplace. “Newsrooms need to start understanding that that’s actually not the way to do the best work. It leads to burnout. It leads to inefficient work. It leads to fewer innovative, creative, and breakthrough ideas, and it punishes people who have caregiver responsibilities, who tend to be women and mothers, but also are increasingly men.”

Going from being totally disconnected from work to being back in the office full time can be great for some, but others crave a different on-ramp and have specific, short-term flexibility needs immediately after maternity leave.

One woman I spoke with was put off by having to commit to her exact leave schedule before her baby was born. She saved two weeks for when her daughter was a bit older, and she felt like everyone just treated it as her going on vacation, with work requests coming in throughout that period. Others I spoke with didn’t feel there was much leeway to adjust their initial plans once maternity leave began.

Some women I spoke with were able to negotiate a four-day-a-week schedule, additional work from home options, or leaving earlier in the afternoons at the beginning of their time back to ease the transition. One woman I spoke with wished she could have started smaller projects earlier, at the end of her leave, to give her a window back into work life.

Fusion’s Wides-Muñoz, who at the time worked at the Associated Press, arranged to work from home on Wednesdays while her nanny cared for her child in order to give her a break from commuting and pumping. This one day a week of flexibility made a world of difference to her, and she thinks could for others as well. “It was the difference between a happy working person and a miserable one,” she says.

A 2014 survey in the American Sociological Review found many benefits to a flexible work schedule.
Researchers found that employees who were given greater control over when and where they worked, as well as more support from their workplace regarding their family lives, experienced a reduction in work-family conflict. While there’s no one-size-fits-all solution, offering and allowing a range of company-sanctioned options, and the flexibility to adjust once the realities of working motherhood set in, can have a major long-term impact on job satisfaction and retention rates.

Prioritize Work-Life Balance for Everyone

The women I spoke with who felt most supported in their workplaces were the ones who also felt like it was OK to be honest with their bosses and coworkers about the realities of being a working parent. Allison Benedikt, who is the executive editor of Slate and has three young children, feels she can be up front about the challenges of balancing her different responsibilities. (Disclosure: I worked at Slate from 2011–2014, before I was a parent.) She credits David Plotz, who had three young children when he was editor in chief at Slate, with creating an understanding culture.

In 2014, upon assuming the role of editor in chief, Julia Turner, mother of young twins, continued the culture of promoting transparency about work-life challenges and conflicts. Now Slate has a Slack channel called “whereabouts” where people regularly post if they are working from home because of a childcare issue or will be in late because of a kid’s dentist appointment. It’s probably no coincidence that Slate has a strong track record of employing working mothers, and 31 percent of Slate’s editorial staff are parents.

A study conducted by Deloitte University found that 61 percent of all employees felt they needed to downplay their personal differences from their coworkers, which is termed “covering” and can apply to everything from being a parent to being gay to being a member of a racial minority to dealing with a health issue. Management experts Dorie Clark and Christie Smith wrote in Harvard Business Review that “enabling employees to feel comfortable being themselves could unlock dramatic performance gains because they can focus their attention on work, rather than hiding parts of themselves.” One of their recommendations for setting the tone in an organization is for leaders to share more about their personal challenges and strategies for dealing with work and life. “Everyone on our team knew that my boss’s new baby was a bad sleeper. We’d all pitch in to help him out, too,” says Elizabeth Bruenig of The Washington Post.

When a leader shows this kind of transparency, it can have clear benefits for parents, but it also creates a culture of inclusion, where anyone can feel supported in dealing with a wide range of challenges—whether that’s a childcare crisis, caring for ailing parents, going through a divorce, or just owning up to needing to leave the office for regular therapy appointments.

Yet, the American workplace in general isn’t all that great about encouraging work-life balance. A recent study found that the average American only uses 54 percent of their paid vacation time. Another study, with a small sample size, found that the realities of the profession may lead some journalists to self-medicate with alcohol and caffeine and not get enough sleep, resulting in lower than average abilities regarding creative thinking, problem solving, regulating emotions, and staying focused. How managers think about supporting employees should extend beyond just being understanding to parents about daycare pickups and school holidays. “If you create these systems that allow you to have a life outside of work but you’re saying it’s only related to parenting, then you have just frozen everybody else in place,” says Schulte.

“It’s not fair in general, but it’s also really bad for parents when you give parents a lot of choices that you don’t give other people, because then everyone hates them,” says Romper.com’s Johnson. She believes flexibility and understanding should be applied to all employees equally. “I have a lot of young people without kids [on my team] who are so smart and work so many hours a day and are at such risk of burnout that I’m constantly encouraging people to take vacation.”

In an era of cost-cutting and layoffs, ongoing technological disruption, lack of public trust in our work, and a hostile political climate, newsroom environments still matter. It’s precisely because of these uncertainties that news organizations need to be smart about how to keep talented, diverse groups of journalists, including mothers with young children, in our ranks, doing the vital work that needs to be done. Paid family leave, inclusive, flexible work policies that benefit everyone, and improved office cultures are not tangential priorities; they are crucial to fostering a pipeline of young, innovative thinkers—the future leaders of our industry.
TELLING INDIGENOUS STORIES
Neglecting to cover indigenous communities not only represents a missed opportunity, but a significant failure for an industry hoping to find voice and relevance in the 21st century.

By Tristan Ahtone
Cree woman Connie Oakes said she was innocent of the murder of Casey Armstrong. She said it when the police failed to produce fingerprints. She said it when they failed to produce DNA evidence. When the jury in the city of Medicine Hat, Alberta, where she and the victim lived, found her guilty, she said it again. And when the sole witness to the crime recanted her testimony, she said it one more time.

“The whole case was built on the shoulders of Wendy Scott, who had an IQ of 50 and admitted to lying to police,” says Jorge Barrera, an investigative reporter with Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) in Canada. “We seemed to be the only ones who cared about the case.”

During his investigation, Barrera learned that police fed information to Wendy Scott during interrogations while she was high. Barrera obtained court documents revealing the car police believed was used at the time of the murder, and he followed a trail of drugs and money to discover the vehicle had been sold to a drug dealer for crack and cash long before the killing took place. He meticulously chronicled each twist and turn in the case, from a judge’s ban on releasing Wendy Scott’s interrogation videos to retrial delays due to a prosecutor’s handling of files. After nearly three years of dogged investigation, Barrera’s reporting helped secure Oakes’ release from prison.

Since Oakes’ release, officials have called for a public inquiry into how the police investigation was conducted. But apart from APTN’s ongoing coverage, the story has received little attention. “We covered it, we followed it, and thanks to the coverage, Connie was, in fact, set free,” says Jean La Rose, APTN’s chief executive officer. “There was a brief mention of it on the public network in Canada, the CBC, but a very small mention and that’s it … In the case of Connie, it was of interest to us, but not very much to Canadians.”

The struggle to bring indigenous stories to a wider audience isn’t new and isn’t uniquely Canadian. Coverage of indigenous affairs often remains limited to dying languages, cultural pageantry, disheartening living conditions, or troubling drug, alcohol, or suicide statistics. In the United States, news outlets routinely ignore indigenous communities except when stories such as the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) thrust Native people into the spotlight. In the case of DAPL, reporters often treated the incident as an isolated event despite the fact that the social, historical, and legal environment that ignited protests in North Dakota are not unique to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. They are, in fact, shared across Indian Country by all tribes.

Yet in other parts of the world, media organizations are moving toward more substantive, representative coverage of indigenous issues. In the Nordic countries, indigenous Sámi news units primarily cover Sámi affairs in Finland, Sweden, and Norway and produce content for the countries’ public broadcasting networks. In Australia, BuzzFeed launched an aboriginal affairs beat in 2015 after high demand for indigenous content from young audiences.

One solution to covering communities that have been traditionally closed to outsiders and distrustful of media: Hire indigenous reporters. However, a more radical approach is for news organizations to make reporting in indigenous communities a priority—regardless of whether the reporters are indigenous themselves—and rethink old


“IF YOU’RE GOING TO COVER INDIAN COUNTRY, COVER IT AS A PLACE AND ALLOW STORIES TO TAKE YOU WHERE THEY TAKE YOU”

— JORGE BARRELLA, ABORIGINAL PEOPLES TELEVISION NETWORK

attitudes toward newsgathering in marginalized communities.

“I’ve always strongly felt that indigenous journalists telling indigenous stories is critically important,” says Duncan McCue, an Anishinaabe journalist with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and creator of “Reporting in Indigenous Communities,” an online guide offering tips for non-Native journalists. “That said, I also believe that indigenous issues and indigenous communities are not communities that should be left solely to indigenous journalists. If we do that, if we simply play in our own sandbox, then we’re not speaking to the broader audience and we need to be.”

With more than 370 million indigenous people on the planet—nearly 5 percent of the global population—occupying about 20 percent of the earth’s territory, insufficient to nonexistent coverage of their communities not only represents a missed opportunity, but a significant failure for an industry hoping to find voice and relevance in the 21st century.

According to the United Nations’ 2015 “State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples” report, poor living conditions, low employment rates, and insufficient access to food, water, and health services have severe impacts on the health of indigenous communities, while climate change and environmental pollution pose serious threats to indigenous well-being. Mix those issues with geographic isolation, add discrimination, racism, and a lack of cultural understanding, and you have a recipe for one of the most marginalized groups in the world. Unsurprisingly, access to media is also a serious problem for indigenous groups, and a lack of educational opportunities for indigenous people can solidify existing inequality in newsrooms.

“If you’re going to cover Indian Country, cover it as a place and allow the stories to take you where they take you instead of coming with pre-conceived ideas,” says APTN’s Barrera, who is not indigenous. “Pretend you’re a foreign correspondent and you’re going to a different country and cover it like that.”

According to Barrera, the best way to think about Indian Country—a legal term with popular usage denoting areas with indigenous populations in the U.S. and Canada—is to imagine it as an archipelago: Independent entities living in parallel with the country in which they exist. Each island has its own perspectives, histories, heroes, agendas, and desires. By focusing on Indian Country as a place, Barrera says journalists can avoid doing the occasional one-off special coverage series driven by an issue or a tragedy. Most often, mainstream outlets resort to parachuting into indigenous communities, leading to a poverty-porn style of journalism, while stories about sports, food, technology, education, healthcare, sex, fashion, art, or science rarely make the news despite being integral parts of indigenous life.

“Comparisons to reporting as a foreign correspondent are apt for most non-indigenous journalists,” says CBC’s McCue. “You wouldn’t simply throw a reporter from another country into the deep end of a foreign country and expect daily journalism when they’re operating on their own in difficult circumstances. A foreign correspondent needs to have support.” By treating Indian Country as a place, reporters like Barrera and McCue have been able to follow and engage with communities to advance stories in meaningful ways.

The lack of coverage by mainstream outlets played out when Canada finalized the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) in 2006. In the 1900s, tens of thousands of indigenous children were taken from their families and placed in the residential school system, a network of boarding schools created to forcibly assimilate Native children into Canadian culture. The settlement was the largest class action lawsuit in the nation’s history, creating a compensation package of about $2 billion for survivors. While the settlement made national headlines, only a few outlets continued reporting on IRSSA after the verdict.

“APTN, in following the story, started to realize that a lot of lawyers were, in fact, milking the survivors to the point that by the time the payment came in, they owed most of it to a lawyer,” APTN CEO La Rose says. “If you have a lawyer, who, by settlement agreement, was to charge no more than 10 percent of the total amount payable to the survivor who ends up pocketing 80 percent, it’s an illegal act.”

In the same way reporters cover any other beat, familiarity with the issues can pay off. In 2015, when millions of gallons of toxic water spilled out of the Gold King Mine in southern Colorado, turning the Animas River bright yellow, reporters from around the country were quick to cover the disaster. But as the sludge made its way south into the Navajo Nation, only a handful of news outlets followed.

“I think in the very beginning a lot of reporters were focused on the discoloration and sensationalizing the spill but weren’t really looking at how it impacted people,” says Antonia Gonzales, anchor and producer of National Native News (NNN). “Part of our coverage that was unique and different was exploring the Native angle and finding out how the tribes in the area were being impacted.”

Broadcast on over 200 public radio stations in the U.S., NNN serves as a headline news service, providing daily newscasts with indigenous stories from across the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world. Gonzales says the news is produced from a Native perspective, and her coverage of the Gold King Mine spill is a good example.

When the spill happened, Gonzales and fellow Navajo reporter Pauly Denetclaw knew two things that informed their coverage. First, the Animas River in Colorado fed the San Juan River, a waterway Navajo farmers rely on to grow crops and feed livestock. Second, water is more than a resource for Navajo businesses and livelihoods; it’s intertwined with Navajo culture and spiritual beliefs, meaning heavy metal and chemical contamination would have serious impacts on cultural practices.

The two spoke with Navajo farmers and ranchers near the river who were forced to rely on water deliveries to feed livestock and crops; they reported on how the federal government tried, and generally failed, to aid local families by providing water storage containers from reused, unsanitary oil barrels; and they examined how contamination impacted corn, a crop with multiple religious uses that would be tainted by toxic chemicals for generations due to the spill’s impact on soil and sediments.
While cultural and geographic knowledge helped Gonzales and Denetclaw produce award-winning coverage, Gonzales says curiosity and solid shoe-leather reporting was essential, too. “Just because we’re Native press doesn’t mean that we have any kind of special access by any means. We get told ‘no’ by people just the same as non-Native reporters do,” says Gonzales.

Other indigenous outlets in the U.S. face the same challenges. Mvskoke Media in Oklahoma covers Muscogee (Creek) Nation politics, community happenings, and other relevant stories for Muscogee readers. The outlet’s staff is both Native and non-Native and, according to Sterling Cosper, Mvskoke Media’s manager, there are two things reporters should keep in mind when reporting in indigenous communities: Leave your assumptions at the door and be respectful. “Native issues are important, and we really want as many people as possible covering Indian Country, just doing it the right way,” he says. “Don’t go into it thinking you’re going to be a champion saving some disenfranchised people. Be a humble reporter and do your job.”

Cosper and his reporters cover the community for the community, writing stories on everything from how officials dealt with a massive deficit in the Muscogee Creek Nation’s department of health budget to a federal audit of the nation’s housing program deficiencies. But Cosper adds that Indian Country shouldn’t be the sole dominion of Native reporters.

Journalism schools in Canada are beginning to give non-Native reporters the knowledge they need to cover Indian Country. As part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was formed to listen to survivors and make recommendations. One of the commission’s instructions: Require Canadian journalism and media students to learn “the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations.” “The students who are going to be the next generation of journalists need to learn ‘the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations,” says CBC’s McCue. “[We’re] going to see, I think, a new generation of journalist who finally are getting the kind of training and background every journalist needs.”

In Norway, Sámi University of Applied Sciences, the equivalent of a tribal college in the United States, has taken this idea a step further by creating what it claims is the world’s first master’s degree in indigenous journalism. “[There is an] evident lack of education in this field worldwide,” says Tom Moring, a non-indigenous journalism professor at Sámi University. “We are talking about millions and millions of people, and they do not have education in the very, very important field of media that would be targeted to these issues.”

One of the university’s primary goals is to train Sámi journalists to report Sámi stories for Sámi and mainstream audiences. However, the program is conducted entirely in English, and this year’s class includes Sámi students as well as students from Finland, Hawaii, Ecuador, and Greenland. Besides teaching journalism principles and exploring ethical guidelines for reporting in indigenous communities, the university also works to create a robust understanding of indigenous journalism and media, and students choose from a range of research areas to analyze during the two-year program.

With more options for publication on the web, through social media, and other distribution channels, Moring says indigenous reporters can sidestep mainstream outlets by creating their own indigenous news organizations or join existing ones. With a strong educational base, he says those indigenous organizations can fill coverage gaps or even compete with larger outlets.

As part of the curriculum, students study the indigenous media ecosystem, exploring in what parts of the world indigenous media operations exist, what those organizations generally look like in terms of identity and ethnicity, how content differs from mainstream outlets, and how little data exists on indigenous outlets. But students are also asking questions: Does ownership affect the content of indigenous media? Will there be global cooperation among indigenous media makers in the future? Are indigenous journalists’ watchdogs of their communities or spokespersons for the group to non-indigenous authorities?

Canada and Norway aren’t the only countries that have made the decision to rethink journalism education. In 1991, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in Australia released recommendations similar to the IRSSA after investigating the deaths of 99 aboriginal people where arrest or conviction was involved. Racial stereotyping by reporters, the report concluded, was institutional, stemming from journalists’ inability to abandon preconceptions before reporting on aboriginal communities. The commission’s recommendation: Media organizations should develop codes and policies relating to the presentation of aboriginal issues; institutions providing journalism courses should create courses related to aboriginal affairs; formal and informal contact should be made between media makers and aboriginal organizations to foster better coverage; and aboriginal people should control their own media and receive adequate funding to do so. In 2007, National Indigenous Television went live, funded by, yet editorially independent of, the Australian government.

In Norway, NRK Sápmi—a division of Norway’s public broadcasting system NRK—has been broadcasting radio and television news for decades. Beyond producing news in the Sámi language for broadcast on the state’s national networks, NRK has made it a corporate goal to strengthen Norwegian and Sámi language and culture, primarily by creating content that “provides shared experiences and strengthens Sámi and Norwegian culture and identity.”

In New Zealand, Māori journalists have created government-supported Māori Television, which produces content in the Māori language as well as English for national audiences. One of the outlet’s major accomplishments has been telling Māori stories from a Māori perspective. “What we’re trying to do is change the gaze from the outside looking in telling our stories to the inside speaking out from our own perspective,” says Maramena Roderick, head of news and current affairs at Māori Television. That means events that are important in the Māori world, but not necessarily to the rest of New Zealand, are covered with diligence.
and respect. By honoring cultural protocols and allowing communities to get a sense of the journalist, Māori reporters can get stories other outlets have a harder time accessing.

A

n outlet’s proven track record in indigenous communities can help, as can prior experience working with indigenous people. But credentials can be a hindrance, too. With indigenous people, distrust of media can be generations-long, and what works in mainstream society doesn’t always work in indigenous communities. “Some reporters are surprised when they show up and say, ‘I work for The New York Times’ and expect that will give them some sort of legitimacy,” says CBC’s McCue. “The outlets we work for and the value that we place on operating in legacy media may not necessarily bring any currency in Indian Country if you don’t have the knowledge and background of Indian Country to back up your credentials.” BuzzFeed is taking this approach seriously.

Back in 2014, Prime Minister Tony Abbot traveled to Tasmania to deliver a keynote address to the Australian-Melbourne Institute. During the address, Abbot took a question on real estate and foreign investment. In an attempt to explain why foreign investment was important, Abbot said: “Our country is unimaginable without foreign investment. I guess our country owes its existence to a form of foreign investment by the British government in the then unsettled or, um, scarcely settled, Great South Land.”

BuzzFeed Australia jumped on the story. “We basically gave a history lesson,” says editor Simon Crerar. In typical BuzzFeed style, the outlet published “This Is How ‘Unsettled’ Australia Was Before the British Arrived In 1788,” complete with images and captions explaining the millennia-long history of aboriginal people in Australia. “It went insanely viral in Australia for us,” says Crerar. “That was a signal that our young, engaged millennial audience really—excuse my French—gave a shit.”

BuzzFeed hired aboriginal reporter Allan Clarke (who has since moved to NITV as a presenter) shortly after and established an aboriginal beat. From reporting on the transgender “Sistergirls” of the Tiwi Islands to covering disgracefully high rates of indigenous youth incarceration in Western Australia, BuzzFeed has become one of the only private, non-indigenous mainstream outlets dedicated to covering indigenous affairs. While aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up only 3 percent of the Australian population—a statistic similar to indigenous population estimates in both the U.S. and Canada—Crerar says his decision to tackle the subject stemmed from a desire to tell a more complete national story. Although Crerar also credits audience enthusiasm around aboriginal issues for the beat’s creation.

Indigenous journalism isn’t simply indigenous outlets telling indigenous stories or indigenous reporters telling stories for non-indigenous outlets. It’s the ability to report on the unique realities of the indigenous world for indigenous communities as well as for wider audiences. Including indigenous voices and perspectives in mainstream news organizations isn’t about granting concessions to historically oppressed people or improving diversity numbers. It’s about revisiting the founding principles of journalism—accuracy, fairness, integrity, and respect—and changing what have long been institutions of power to institutions of justice.

“It’s about getting to know your community and getting to know your neighbors and learning about the people you live next door to,” says NNN’s Gonzales. “It’s about being a journalist and forgetting that it’s a Native-centered story and handling it as you would any other story.”

Moving beyond racial stereotyping of aboriginal people in Australia is an imperative of the government-funded National Indigenous Television
The University of Kentucky's campus paper is clashing with the administration over sex assault records.
With an extended reach online, newly energized college journalists are facing off against university administrators

BY JON MARCUS
University newspapers generally come alive at night, and on a gloomy weekday afternoon the office of The Cornell Daily Sun is dimly lit and nearly empty.

Housed in a former Elks lodge in downtown Ithaca, New York, the newsroom seems a throwback, paneled in dark wood with wall sconces and a fireplace at one end. There are bound copies of back issues dating from the 1880s and dusty records in file cabinets. Marked-up pages from previous editions hang over vacant desks, and assignments are listed on a whiteboard.

The Sun is far from sleepy, however. Like a growing number of university and college newspapers, it's been producing bold and aggressive journalism.

Alone in the quiet newsroom last semester, city editor Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs is recovering from an all-nighter he spent writing about a rare public hearing the previous day involving Cornell's judicial administrator and an undergraduate charged with violating the campus code of conduct. The student was accused of leaking documents to the Sun disclosing that a working group on which he served might recommend Cornell consider transfer applicants' ability to pay before admitting them, a departure from the university's longtime practice.

The resulting stories and the newspaper's coverage of the conduct case were mentioned in a Politico email newsletter and other national media, scoring more than 30,000 hits online on the day of the hearing—three times the entire newspaper's typical daily traffic. “It's interesting that the first public hearing in years directly involves the Sun itself, and we're the ones reporting on it,” Bogel-Burroughs says with enthusiasm that belies his lack of sleep.

Interesting, but not surprising. Student journalists nationwide are forcefully asserting themselves as they report on not just homecoming games and visiting speakers but about such high-profile topics as sexual harassment, athletic scandals, cost, privacy, and access for low-income applicants and racial minorities. They've exposed embarrassing hacks of campus IT systems, toxic mold in dorms, high-priced travel by trustees, previously undisclosed cases of sexual harassment by faculty and other university employees, and private comments by a college president who spoke disparagingly about academically struggling students.

This kind of coverage has invited conflict with universities concerned about their reputations in the eyes of legislators and prospective applicants, donors, and funders. Some institutions have taken steps to thwart their own student media, including locking them out of their offices, cutting off funding, and firing advisors.

Among the reasons student journalism has been getting more and more exposure: Publishing online vastly expands its reach beyond the campus cafeterias and dorms where students read their print editions. It has also filled a void left by cutbacks in coverage of the higher-education beat by many other news outlets. Some of the extreme responses by universities, too, have had the paradoxical effect of drawing more attention to the reporting that provoked it.

But what's increasingly inspired them, say student journalists, is the experience of witnessing a re-energized national media. They say they've seen more of their classmates signing up to write for campus newspapers, and more considering careers in journalism. Bogel-Burroughs and his colleagues and counterparts, he says, are seeking to be "as aggressive as reporters as we see national reporters being."

Universities and their campus media have been going head to head more publicly and uncompromisingly and with higher stakes than ever, according to organizations that monitor this and help defend them. The students also know they're under a spotlight. "At a time when Donald Trump is shouting 'fake news media' on Twitter, we've really been inspired to keep pushing," says Nicole Ares, managing editor and digital editor of the College Heights Herald at Western Kentucky University.

When Western Kentucky refused its public-records requests for files of investigations into sexual misconduct by faculty and staff, the newspaper appealed, and the state's attorney general ordered that the records be handed over. Instead, the university, in February, sued the Herald.

The other thing that has inspired her to persist with this story, Ares says, was a similar case at the University of Kentucky, or UK, in which the Kentucky Kernel student newspaper filed public-record requests for documents about a sexual harassment case involving a faculty member accused of groping students. The professor, who denied the charges, agreed to resign. The university wouldn't release the documents, however, even after the state's attorney general ruled that they were public. Instead, it also sued the newspaper.

Even though the information had already been leaked, UK said, it wanted to establish a precedent that victim confidentiality could be used as grounds to hold back records of investigations. If they saw that documents about sexual harassment cases might be made public, president Eli Capilouto said, victims would be discouraged from reporting it. He blamed the Kernel for a 37 percent decline in campus sexual misconduct reports after it began to cover the story.

Student confidentiality is often the basis for public universities denying records requests from student and professional journalists alike. A 1974 federal provision called the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA, says records maintained by an educational institution that identify a student cannot be released without the student's permission. The Student Press Law Center and other advocacy groups contend that it is widely misused to deny requests for public documents, such as those in sexual harassment cases and athletics scandals. These groups want the opposite precedent—that universities not be allowed to automatically keep information about sexual harassment cases secret by citing FERPA.

Student journalists say that's the only way to scrutinize how the institutions are handling these cases.

A circuit court judge in January sided with UK, though the newspaper is appeal-
Callaway, president of the College Media Association and director of student media at Rice University.

The Daily Californian at Berkeley, for example, using documents obtained through a public-records request, reported in February that University of California employees and contractors statewide had violated the system’s sexual-harassment policies at least 124 times in three years. These included top faculty, department chairs, and coaches, about one-third of whom were still in their jobs.

The University of North Carolina’s Daily Tar Heel has been trying since the fall to get the names of students found responsible for sexual assaults there, arguing that other students had a right to know. It sued, too, in November, after the university, citing the privacy of victims and witnesses, failed to respond to a public-records request. A judge ruled in May for UNC, saying FERPA superseded state public-records laws.

The university has said its policies for dealing with sexual assault and sexual harassment “are among the best in the country, but we can’t see anything about how it’s being executed,” says Daily Tar Heel editor Jane Wester, who wrote a rare front-page editorial at the end of the spring semester to demand “that university officials speak clearly to us, their constituents, and stop acting like a business bound by profit.” UNC is still recovering from a scandal in which athletes were found to have taken courses that required little or no work and their grades altered to maintain their eligibility to play.

Vice chancellor of communications and public affairs Joel Curran responds that the scandal has resulted in the university becoming more, not less, transparent: “Are we always going to be aligned with the media? Probably not. But we’re as open as we can be in the [sexual assault] policy and how it works. We do make public what we can make public.”

Complaints that higher-education institutions are hypersensitive about their images are not unique to UNC. Universities are battling low public approval and mistrust. Nearly half of people surveyed by the nonprofit Public Agenda said that students now go into so much debt to get a higher education, it’s no longer necessarily a good investment. Nearly 60 percent said colleges mainly care about the bottom line, and 44 percent that they’re wasteful and inefficient.

Legislative allocations for public universities have only slowly rebounded after dropping sharply following the 2008 economic downturn; few states have returned to pre-recession spending on higher education. Private colleges are competing fiercely for a shrinking pool of applicants as a demographic dip in the number of high school graduates enters its sixth year, and enrollment declines.

Meanwhile, much more bad news originates in campus newspapers as off-campus ones cut back on higher-education coverage. Sixty-five percent of professional journalists on the education beat say they have little time for in-depth stories, and a third that their outlets’ education staffs have shrunk, according to a survey conducted last year by the Education Writers Association. More than 40 percent of higher-education beat reporters also have to cover primary and secondary schools. “College journalists almost have the field to themselves these days because they’re filling a vacuum,” says Frank LoMonte, who until recently was executive director of the Student Press Law Center. And colleges “are being more aggressively adversarial than ever” toward them.

The University of Central Florida, for instance, asked a court to order that its legal fees be paid by Knight News in a case the student-run website brought against it for failing to respond to a public-records request. LoMonte says he thinks it’s an attempt to discourage such lawsuits by ratcheting up the cost.

It was the third time Knight News has sued the university for blocking its access to documents. This time it asked for budget
requests from extracurricular organizations submitted to the Student Government Association, which controls nearly $19 million collected from mandatory student fees. The university, citing FERPA, redacted the names of some student government representatives who made the funding decisions. “All the students here pay money, they give activity and service fees to the student government, and they have every right to know how that money’s being spent,” says Kyle Swenson, Knight News’s editor in chief.

A circuit court found for the newspaper and rejected the university’s argument that the names of student government members could be withheld as “education records” under FERPA. It also threw out the claim for legal fees. UCF has separately been reported to have spent at least $220,000 to block Knight News’s public-records requests. The university would not answer questions about the case, providing only a written statement saying it treats student journalists the same way it treats professional ones.

In one important way, however, the way universities treat student journalists is different from the way it treats professional reporters: Universities have more tools available to slow down or discourage reporting by campus newspapers. They can run down the clock, for instance. Campus editors say controversial announcements are often timed to coincide with academic breaks or final exams, or that their fights for information go on for longer than their time in college. Ares says her lawyers estimate the lawsuit seeking records from WKU could take as long as six years. “I won’t be around to see this play out,” she says.

Cornell Daily Sun managing editor Josh Girsky says the university asked him to delay reporting on that proposal to consider transfer applicants’ ability to pay until a final report was ready. He refused. “Maybe they thought they could avoid some of the uproar that might happen,” Girsky says. “But I think it’s very important to publish while deliberations are going on, and I think people should have a voice in the policies that affect them.” The university also asked that the Sun not run a story about a for-profit company the university had hired to handle student financial aid because he feared that reviewing applicants’ ability to pay would put at risk the “any person” part of the university’s mission to be a place where “any person can find instruction in any study.” “I think they wanted to explain it in their way. And I think that’s why they went after me,” says McBride, who took the unusual step of asking that his hearing on charges that he violated Cornell’s code of conduct be public.

Even though McBride was acquitted, he and student journalists said bringing charges against him could chill the willingness of other whistleblowers to come forward, a fact not lost on angry students and faculty who lined up outside a classroom where the hearing was being broadcast.

Cornell would not respond to this suggestion. John Carberry, senior director of media relations, who often deals with the Sun and its reporters, declined to discuss the case and said no one at the university would comment. He instead provided a link to a letter to the Sun from provost Michael Kotlikoff that did not dispute the accuracy of
the documents McBride leaked to the newspaper but complained they’d been reported “without context and misrepresented as an attempt to disadvantage poorer students and enroll more wealthy students,” which he called “a gross mischaracterization,” and that a “lack of respect for confidentiality undercuts our ability to work together.”

Of course, university crackdowns on student journalists and leakers have the presumably unintended result of bringing more attention to their work, not less. “If the university was trying to distract people from the substance of the documents” by putting McBride on trial, Bogel-Burroughs said, “the whole process had the opposite effect.”

In the end, the working group on which McBride served dropped the idea of considering transfer applicants’ ability to pay, as the senior vice provost in charge of the committee, Barbara Knuth, announced in the Cornell Chronicle, the newspaper produced by the university’s media relations department—bypassing the Sun. “It’s very much a shame that the Daily Sun picked it up,” Knuth would later say of the matter when she spoke before a Student Assembly meeting attended by people protesting the proposal and other changes to financial aid policies.

Crowdfunding campaigns have helped the Kentucky Kernel cover the costs of its legal defense, with many of the contributions coming from professional journalists, and The Daily Tar Heel’s suit against UNC was joined by The Charlotte Observer and The Durham Herald.

At Duke, when The Chronicle persisted in reporting that the executive vice president hit a campus parking attendant with his car and then yelled a racial epithet at her—he acknowledged unintentionally hitting the attendant but denied using the slur—it didn’t escape notice that the same executive vice president oversees the rental agreement for The Chronicle’s campus office space. But there were no overt repercussions, says Amrith Ramkumar, who covered the story and is now sports editor. “The administration knows they can yell at us off the record but they probably can’t do much more,” Ramkumar says. The Chronicle, too, he says, has a board of directors made up of alumni who are journalists, including at The Wall Street Journal.

It’s not just university bureaucracies with which student journalists often find themselves at odds, however. The student government at the University of Kansas cut the budget of The University Daily Kansan by 50 percent after the newspaper ran an editorial critical of a student government election. The decision was reversed after the Daily Kansan sued.

Like that editorial, much coverage by university media remains decidedly inward looking. But student journalists are also covering big stories off campus. The Indiana Daily Student at the University of Indiana ran a long, poignant feature about a Syrian refugee family after then-Governor Mike Pence banned Syrian refugees from the state. The student newspaper at California Polytechnic State University exposed sex trafficking in San Luis Obispo.

There are also signs that more students are newly interested in careers in journalism in what LoMonte calls the same sort of “Trump bump” law schools say may have contributed to an increase in the number of applicants this year.

Far more than usual turned up to apply for jobs at The Daily Tar Heel in the spring semester, for example, its editor, Wester, says. She’s since graduated and gone on to a job as a police reporter at The Charlotte Observer. Bogel-Burroughs has an internship with Reuters, Girsky with NBC News, and Ramkumar with The Wall Street Journal. Ares is heading off to graduate school in communication and Swenson, who hopes to become a financial reporter, has an internship at the Orlando Business Journal.
“A Good, True Friend”

Pioneering environmental reporter Cornelia Carrier, NF ’76, is remembered by her classmates for her tenacity and love of birds.

Cornelia Bowling Carrier, a pioneering environmental reporter for The Times-Picayune in New Orleans, died April 8, in Charleston, South Carolina. She was 78.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Cornelia grew up in Nashville, Tennessee, and received degrees from Tulane University and the University of California, Berkeley.

The 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, the first Earth Day rallies a year later, and a burst of federal laws and regulations, elevated environmental protection to front-page rank in the 1970s. Cornelia was one of the first reporters in the South to focus on the environment, The Post and Courier in Charleston noted a decade ago.

Her reporting on the threats to Louisiana marshlands from real estate development led to her Nieman fellowship. She returned to The Times-Picayune, continuing to expose environmental hazards as a reporter, columnist, and editorial writer. Her appointment as the state’s tourism director followed, and later, Cornelia taught at the University of Texas and the College of Charleston.

Her concern for the environment never waned. Cornelia wrote recently to The Post and Courier advising that the city “should place a moratorium on all development of sea-level land until they have a plan in hand to protect those developments from tides that will inevitably rise year after year.”

Jessica Hardesty Norris, who followed Cornelia as president of the Charleston Audubon, recalled, “She was completely uninterested in anything shallow and had a very fierce reputation from having resurrected the organization from near death.” At the same time, her friends loved her charm and loyalty and her tender concern for wildlife, Norris said.

Nieman classmate Lester Sloan said, “She was a globe-hopping bird watcher who tolerated my desire to ‘capture’ them with a camera. Her library reflected an interest in everything from crystal to voodoo. She peppered her conversation about people with metaphors that reflected her various interests.”

Paris was one of Cornelia’s favorite destinations and she often stayed with Nieman classmate Robert Fiess and his wife, Inge. She was “a good, true friend, with whom we shared precious moments. Her intelligence and her sense of humor made our encounters always interesting and with peals of laughter,” they wrote.

Nieman classmate Arnold Markowitz recalled a visit from Cornelia two or three years ago when she stopped in Miami after a birding trip to Cuba. “I drove her around in rural areas to find South Florida birds she wanted to see. I’ll never forget how thrilled she was to see limpkins up close.”

In her final years, Cornelia battled cancer with toughness and wry humor. “One of Cornelia’s favorite expressions regarding foreign travel was, ‘I got that behind me,’” Lester Sloan said. “She embraced her last journey as a satisfied traveler.”
unlikely friendship and how it helped them both recover—physically and mentally—from the trauma they experienced as an embedded photojournalist and Marine squad leader in Afghanistan.

**2014**

Susie Banikarim is the new editorial director of Gizmodo Media Group, where she will oversee all eight of the group’s sites: Gizmodo, Deadspin, Splinter (formerly Fusion), Jezebel, Kotaku, Lifehacker, Jalopink, and The Root. She most recently served as chief content officer for Vocativ.

Cristian Lupsa is an organizer of the seventh edition of The Power of Storytelling festival taking place Oct. 17-22 in Bucharest, Romania.

Greg Marinovich has accepted a position as a visiting associate professor at Boston University’s College of Communication, where he has served as an adjunct lecturer since 2014. Marinovich won the Pulitzer Prize for spot news photography in 1991 for his coverage of a brutal murder by supporters of the African National Congress in South Africa.

**2015**

Jason Grotto has joined ProPublica Illinois as a Chicago-based reporter on a team that plans to grow to 10 news staffers later this year. Since 2007, he had worked as an investigative reporter at the Chicago Tribune.

Laurie Penny’s new book “Bitch Doctrine: Essays for Dissenting Adults” takes a look at some of the definitive issues of our time, from transgender rights to Donald Trump’s election. It was published by Bloomsbury in August.

Vladimir Radomirović has been elected president of the Journalists’ Association of Serbia, the largest journalistic organization in the country. Radomirović is the editor in chief of Pistaljka, an online investigative journalism outlet that he founded in 2010.

**2016**

Wenxin Fan has joined The Wall Street Journal in Hong Kong as a reporter.

**2017**

Lewis W. Diuguid is the author of “Our Fathers: Making Black Men,” which was published in March by Universal Publishers. A memoir of his father, it focuses on his St. Louis neighborhood, where African-American businessmen in the mid-20th century created a sense of community for their boys.

**A Career That Spanned From Asia to the States and Beyond**

Melvin M.S. Goo, a 1977 Nieman Fellow and a longtime journalist who reported from Asia, died in Honolulu on October 25, 2016. He was 68.

Nieman classmate Paul Solman writes, “Mel was the most gentle [member of our class]: always shyly smiling, always understated, always kind. I visited him once in Hawaii many years ago and he was his unfailingly gracious self, taking me around Oahu to show me its sights, its snorkeling, its cemetery.”

Former Nieman curator Howard Simons, Solman writes, “used to deride our class, playfully, for having produced so many ex-journalists: a pair of Ph.D.s and a law school J.D. among them. It was Mel who got the law degree, in 1982.”

Born in Macau, China, Goo attended Iolani School, a preparatory school in Honolulu, Hawaii, before spending a year at the University of Southern California and then transferring to the University of Washington. He graduated with a degree in political science in 1970.

Having held internships and part-time jobs at The Honolulu Advertiser, The Washington Post, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, and Newsweek while in college, Goo began his journalism career—while serving in the Army, based in Fort Ord, California—at the San Francisco Examiner as a part-time copy editor. In 1972, he returned to Hawaii and began working for The Honolulu Advertiser, holding several reporting and editorial roles over the next 18 years, traveling on writing assignments to Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

In 1990, Goo joined The Nikkei Weekly, an internationally-circulated English-language publication covering the Japanese economy. He spent nearly a decade, rising to the position of chief news editor, at the paper. In addition to his editorial and managerial responsibilities, he wrote op-ed columns on political and economic issues. In 1999, he became managing editor of the Taiwan News, a daily English newspaper based in Taipei, and soon became editor in chief, responsible for all news policies and operations of the newspaper.

Goo was also a licensed member of the Hawaii Bar Association, earning his J.D. from the University of Hawaii. He lived in Hong Kong and Shenzhen between 2011 and 2014 before returning to Honolulu for cancer treatment. He is survived by two sisters, two brothers, and several nieces and nephews.

**Visiting Fellowships**

Each year Knight Nieman Visiting Fellows spend up to 12 weeks on Harvard’s campus working on ideas to improve journalism.

In nearly six years of supporting visiting fellows, the Nieman Foundation has welcomed editors and academics, reporters and developers, veterans and junior practitioners from the U.S. and abroad. The foundation is accepting applications online through Sept. 29 for the next group of visiting fellows who will spend time on campus in 2018. Many visiting fellows have produced publicly available reports about their research on subjects such as the future for news on wearables, an alternate vision for public radio membership, and rewriting the future for journalism schools.
My grandmother was well known for telling extraordinary tales. One in particular has stuck with me since the summer I was dispatched alone to her in Delhi. At the time, I was living in Kuwait where my father had found work. I was 6 years old and my parents were worried I was losing touch with where we came from, so off I went.

I can recall my grandmother and I were taking a morning stroll through the walled gardens of Humayun’s Tomb, just behind my father’s childhood home. Built some 450 years ago as a vision of paradise for a Mughal emperor, it was a fantasy playground to me.

Plucked from a fairy tale, the monument’s white marble dome rose above tiers of sandstone vaults. Around it, peacocks grazed amongst a geometric network of water channels and paths, ignoring the signs to stay off the grass.

It was here that my grandmother told me the story of djinns: supernatural creatures that roamed the earth with humans and angels.

According to Islam, these third beings were made of fire and could transform themselves into any form, human or beast. Though shape-shifters were difficult to spot, they were cunning and courageous. She cautioned me not to be frightened of them as they could grant you a wish.

I became obsessed with looking for djinns through my childhood, but never found one. Yet the tale kept returning to me during my time at Harvard—a year of tremendous social, political, and media upheaval. It came to me when I thought about people who are not seen by those with power. It came to me when I reflected upon what journalism is missing at this moment.

I should explain that I entered journalism through an unusual path—writing an algorithm as an undergrad to automatically sort and filter company news for young people to help them decide where they want to work.

The news service, which ran on a computer in my dorm room, landed me my first full-time position at Reuters’ headquarters—a handsome stone edifice on Fleet Street, the storied home of the British press.

I quickly discovered that news is marked by fiefdoms. Words compete with visuals, immediacy opposes depth, journalistic endeavor confronts commercial opportunity. It struck me as obvious that all elements must act together to thrive.

Young and naive, I followed the work I saw needed to be done, pushing past the edges of my role. It was not long before I encountered resistance. What could an engineer know about storytelling? Journalism belonged exclusively to journalists.

To openly collaborate the way I wanted, I first had to create a space for it. Over time I gained the trust of supportive managers and talented colleagues to run experiments. Working with journalists, designers, and developers, we explored how to use technology to tell stories in new ways, from interactive to installations. Among the stories was a re-examination of the war in Iraq, and a look at how the financial crisis had touched lives everywhere.

Yet in recent years something larger has shifted. It struck me whilst competing in a news hackathon on London’s Old Street, home to hundreds of digital startups. My team had just won a prize with our concept for live news video with automated highlights, when one of the judges asked if our idea was only suitable for Facebook or Google, not a news organization. He was right. Facebook soon launched the feature.

I already knew more journalism, better journalism, would not be enough. Without abandoning what we do, I believed we could apply it beyond its current scope to become the connecting tissue of society once again. Yet now we are increasingly losing our capacity to innovate. All roads are leading to platforms.

Newsrooms are designed to describe the present. Yet the institutional structures that help us chronicle events as they unfold can also make us blinkered. We exploit opportunities within sight, but are much less good at looking around corners and beating new paths.

To respond, we must find the djinns in our newsrooms. Naturally curious, they roam free and wide, seeing broader patterns. Unafraid of what they do not know, they ask questions and are constantly learning. As outsiders, they are better at seeing blind spots and finding opportunities within them.

Able to transform themselves, they work fluidly across disciplines, finding partners both inside and beyond an organization’s boundaries. They experiment, pushing ideas in multiple directions to present alternatives. Importantly, they can hold the paradox between the present and future.

You are thinking shape-shifters are a fantasy, but they are already in your newsroom. I will tell you how to find them.

Though they work behind the scenes, you can spot them pushing against institutional walls. They reveal themselves with the strong sense of conviction they convey in everything they do. As they help others realize their potential, their sphere of influence is noticeable for being greater than their role.

What my grandmother did not tell me is that djinns cannot act alone. They only thrive with the talents of others in environments open to learning. Supported and nurtured, they may grant you a wish. Isolated or ignored, they will disappear into the darkness from whence they came.

Channeling the djinn demands acknowledging its existence—allowing for a malleable role which constantly shifts. It also requires creating a space for their work—a separate playground for disciplines to meet and explore radical ideas, free from established processes. Journalism needs to be bold now, more than ever.

Jassim Ahmad, a 2017 Nieman Fellow, works across disciplines as the head of multimedia innovation at Reuters in London.
The Nieman Foundation’s 80th anniversary celebration in October 2018 will include a dinner in Bates Hall at the Boston Public Library and a reunion of Nieman Fellows.

**SAVE THE DATE**

Next year the Nieman Foundation turns 80. Join us at Harvard Oct. 12–14, 2018 for an anniversary weekend and alumni reunion. We’ll discuss this historic moment with some of the brightest stars on campus; explore new ideas and innovations to strengthen journalism; and celebrate the work of extraordinary Niemans around the world who continue to “promote and elevate the standards of journalism.” Additional details will follow in the coming months.

**NiemanOnline**

**From the Archives**

In “Sharing Their Stories,” a feature that accompanied Anna Griffin’s “Where Are the Women?” in the Summer 2014 issue of Nieman Reports, women in news leadership—such as CNN Digital’s Meredith Artley, The Texas Tribune's Emily Ramshaw, and The Chicago Reporter's Susan Smith Richardson—explain how they got there, and how other female journalists can follow in their footsteps.

**Opinion: Ethics**

Columnist Issac Bailey, a 2014 Nieman Fellow, argues that the public would be better served if more outlets unmasked sources who use anonymity to push politically-motivated falsehoods.

**NiemanLab**

**Newsonomics**

Hearst, which is privately held, isn’t a major part of industry conversations about the future of newspapers. But—considering the newspaper chain’s profits have grown for the past five years, and it’s looking to buy more papers—that may be about to change, writes news industry analyst Ken Doctor.

**U.S. Press Freedom Tracker**

A new site established by the Freedom of the Press Foundation, pressfreedomtracker.us, intends to be the place to find an up-to-date status report on violations of press freedom. Peter Sterne, a former media reporter at Politico, is managing editor.

**America’s Gun Violence Epidemic**

Storyboard spotlights stellar literary journalism about the alarming prevalence of gun violence in the U.S., taking a closer look at narratives published in the Los Angeles Times, HuffPost's Highline, and Mother Jones.

**What Guides a Pulitzer Winner**

“Katherine Boo’s 15 Rules for Narrative Nonfiction” has received a lot of love on Twitter—for good reason. Among the investigative journalist’s guiding lights are such gems as “Memory sucks” and “I try never to forget that my ‘subjects’ are my co-investigators.”