

# MEDIA ETHICS RESOURCE LIBRARY

## News Journalism Case Studies

Most of the following cases are based on actual situations, written and adapted by Carrie Packwood Freeman, Tom Bivins, and Pete Peterson at the University of Oregon. We thank the many reporters, photographers and editors, many originally from Oregon newspapers, who shared their stories for your evaluation. We've edited their submissions somewhat and often changed names—mostly to simplify the facts and protect privacy.

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# I. HANDLING SENSITIVE TOPICS

## Covering Suicides.... Proceed with Caution

The topic of suicide is clearly very sensitive. Not only does publishing the information seem private, but it can have an unintended copycat effect that causes others to commit suicide. There does seem to be a trend that suicides increase after news coverage of a suicide.

You are a reporter covering the university beat at the popular weekly paper in a college town, and you just found out that a university freshman has been found dead in his dorm after slitting his wrists. His roommate was the one who found him. The deceased student was not on the football team nor otherwise involved in any campus groups. In fact, he seems not to have had many friends and not many people seem to be able to tell you much about him. You have found out that he was very studious, quiet, overweight, and came from a small town in the state. Is it safe to assume that social isolation made him vulnerable to suicidal tendencies? Did other students tease him too much? Did he get the idea for suicide from the media, video games, or his music collection? Had he sought counseling for depression? These are the Questions: that many people have on their minds regarding his case.

The daily paper, student paper, and TV stations did report that a student killed himself, so the community is already abuzz with the news of a suicide, but not many details were released from the family or university. The university has sprung into action and formed some support groups, however, and the VP for Student Affairs has just called you to see how you are going to handle the story since she knows many students read your paper. Your deadline is two days away.

### QUESTIONS:

1. What are the different options you have for addressing this issue in your paper...if you choose to cover it at all?
2. What angle seems most appropriate and how much space or prominence should you give to this issue?
3. What implications might your decision have on the many claimants in this case? Are your obligations higher with any of these parties in particular? Why?
4. What will you do moving forward regarding suicide stories? Should you suggest that your paper institute a policy? For example, how will you handle it if another student commits suicide in the next week and it seems like a “copycat”?

## Queer Eye for the News Guy

You are the Features Editor for the daily newspaper in Macon, Georgia, a medium-sized city in a fairly rural area several hours south of Atlanta. For your Father's Day issue, you are running a contest for kids to submit entries explaining why they think their father is the best dad. The top family gets featured in a big profile in the Father's Day issue.

You and your staff have gone through the stack of over 200 entries, and it is up to you all to vote on the winner. But one of the best entries is also your most controversial entry. An African American sister and brother explain how they had been bounced around foster homes after their mom died, and they had not thought they would ever have a happy home again until they were adopted a few years ago by a loving couple. The only controversial aspect is that the couple is gay. You had not anticipated having two gay dads as possible winners of your "best dad" contest. However, their story is very compelling, and the little girl wrote such an eloquent and touching story on behalf of her and her brother.

This prompts a heated conversation around the board room table as to whether or not you should choose this gay couple as the winner because it would probably upset many of your paper subscribers. After all, this is the "Bible Belt" and many people are conservative, plus you have a military base nearby. You invite your executive editor in for the discussion. He too is concerned that the newspaper will receive many complaints if they choose these gay dads as the "best dads" in Macon. But is it fair to avoid addressing the reality of gay parents who are also a part of your community, even if a minority?

The editor brings up the fact that they just published a story on a gay guy last week – the one who died of alcohol poisoning at the gay bar. However, several staffers around the table point out that that representation of the promiscuous gay male is stereotypical and negative. You all agree your paper does not do a good job counteracting that stereotype and including gays and lesbians in everyday, positive feature stories. However, due to the largely conservative nature of the Macon community, you aren't sure how your readers will react to a more inclusive stance on gay representations. How many subscriptions is it worth losing to be more progressive?

### QUESTIONS:

1. Who are your claimants in this case? In what ways are you ethically obligated to each?
2. Do you feel you should take the bold step of choosing the gay couple as the best dads? It seems to you as if they deserve it, but is it too soon for your readership? Would you be better off easing up to the gay parenting issue (maybe next year) by slowly incorporating more positive gay representations in other places over the coming year?
3. What are some other ways you could incorporate more gays and lesbians into the feature stories so the gay lifestyle gets a little more "normalized" and seems less out of place?
4. How do you handle lifestyles that are out of sync with the majority of your community? Your paper needs to make money to survive, so how far are you ethically obligated to "push" new values on them if it means your paper may take a financial hit? At what point do you back down and let the readers decide how progressive your paper is?

5. If you decide to address gay issues, does being balanced and objective mean that you should also publish some more stories about anti-gay or certain Christian conservative viewpoints on homosexuality (such as opposing gay marriage)?
6. If you decide to publish the gay dads as the winners of the best dad contest, should you “warn” your readers or somehow address it outside (or inside) the article to help counteract some of the complaints you anticipate by explaining your position?

## Dis-Abling Stories

In searching for feature stories, journalists like to cover heartwarming stories that tug at the heartstrings. Coverage of people with disabilities can do just that – especially if the person has overcome many obstacles or needs some extra help from the community. However, the last time your newspaper did a feature story, you got some unexpected negative feedback from disability groups.

The story was on a lady with M.S. who is in a wheelchair and yet was able to continue running her in-home business teaching piano lessons (which she started a decade ago before her M.S. became more debilitating). You did receive some positive feedback from some readers who felt the story was inspiring, but a few disabled groups and citizens felt your coverage was condescending and focused more on her disabilities than her abilities. Also, a few people objected to your use of the word “disability.” One person had suggested “differently-abled,” another had said “physically challenged” was preferred, and yet another said her disease should not have been highlighted as limiting at all.

As a features reporter, you are not sure how to proceed in the future when covering the disabled since it seems like a touchy subject. You and your editor decide to take a fresh approach for all sections of the paper moving forward. Should you stop proactively seeking stories highlighting how they have overcome obstacles and serve as an inspiration? If a disabled person is involved in a news event, should you leave out the disability in most cases? Isn't your coverage encouraging increased understanding for the disabled and support for non-profit groups that find cures? What is newsworthy regarding people with disabilities?

### QUESTIONS:

1. What will help you make your decision regarding the paper's position on covering people with disabilities? Who else might you need to consult or what research might you want to consider?
2. What is your overall goal regarding the impact of your news stories on the disabled? To whom are you obligated? Is there a solution that pleases everyone?
3. Disabilities are so varied. Will you have different policies for different types of disabilities – for example, children's issues, physical challenges, mental challenges, fatal diseases, accident victims, injured soldiers, etc.?
4. What is the best terminology to use when referring to someone's disability?
5. What decision do you and the managing editor make regarding what is “newsworthy” regarding the disabled? For example Under what circumstances will you mention disabilities (and to what extent) when the news involves people with disabilities? Under what circumstances would you proactively seek stories regarding disabled issues, and what angle would you take?

## Little Miss Quoting

In your feature story on the 25th anniversary party for the local homeless shelter, you cleaned up some of the quotes from shelter clients because of poor grammar. You wanted to make the quotes a little clearer and more eloquent so people don't stereotype the homeless as uneducated or unintelligent. However, since the event was also televised by the local TV news stations, the public could largely hear verbatim what you had touched up (since a lot of quotes were from speeches by homeless people at the podium). As a result, you ended up getting a few letters from the public, and one from a shelter employee, that criticized your choice to "sanitize" the quotes and make them uncharacteristic of how they really communicated.

This practice of "perfecting" quotes is also done for those who are non-native English speakers or those who have particular dialects, like black English, what some call "ebonics." For example, when an African American teenager, who was one of the judges for a high school talent show, described the winner's song by saying "Yo, that song be real dope. He ain't got no competition. Know what I'm sayin'?" you aren't sure whether to quote him directly or just simply paraphrase him. The reaction from the homeless shelter story has you unsure of whether cleaning up quotes on behalf of the source is the right thing to continue doing.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Is there anything wrong with you correcting the grammar in the quotes from the homeless people's speeches if you did not change the essence of what they said? Are you right that this change helps the image of the homeless people so readers do not stereotype all homeless people as "dumb" or ignorant?
2. How should you handle the quote from the teenager? Some in the black community support Ebonics as a legitimate cultural dialect, while other English speakers of all races may see it as an "incorrect" or uneducated way to speak since it is not the "King's English." Are you guilty of "white-washing" if you change the quote?
3. In cases where people deviate from standard English or have grammatical errors, would you be better off paraphrasing rather than using corrected direct quotes? Note that some feel paraphrasing is not as respectful to the source, if done too frequently, since it does not allow them to speak for themselves (especially if other sources are directly quoted in the article).

## Compassionate Coverage of a High Profile Death

Your small city has become a magnet for national reporters since the news broke that a local private in the army, Carolina Sanchez, had been executed two days ago, after briefly being held hostage while serving in Iraq during the war. Carolina was only 19 and joined the service in order to be able to have the army pay for college. She had hopes of becoming a doctor. Her parents, grandmother, and two younger brothers, who are of Mexican descent, live in a poor, largely Latino community. A host of reporters from around the nation have descended upon her street and are camped out around the Sanchez home, harassing them every time they leave (even though her mother is frequently in tears). As the local daily paper's reporter covering the military beat, you also want to talk with the Sanchez family, but you aren't sure how to break through all the clutter of reporters who are following them everywhere.

It's Sunday, and you and a photographer are outside of the church where the Sanchez family has gone to worship. To get away from the crowd of media, you and he go around back and sit down in the church garden to smoke a cigarette, since the service is not supposed to be over for another 30 minutes. To your surprise, the Sanchez family comes out a small side door that leads into the garden where you are sitting. The mother is crying and being comforted by her husband and eldest son. You and your photographer are the only reporters around (at least for the moment). What do you do?

### QUESTIONS:

1. Should your photographer get the highly marketable shot of the grieving family? But will that abrupt invasion of their privacy be worth the risk of causing them to flee and not talk to you? Or should you ask their permission to photograph them first?
2. Should your obligations to get the news for the public overshadow your personal concerns to be a good and caring neighbor? If you imagine that it was your sister who had been killed, does that change the way you approach the family?
3. Do you decide to address the family and introduce yourself? If so, what exactly do you say?
4. Are you attempting to get an interview right then...or set one up for later? ...or are you just trying to establish rapport?
5. Is there another angle on the story you could take that would not involve the family?
6. What is the best angle on this story to get to the heart of the issue?

## II. ISSUES IN PHOTOJOURNALISM

### **Cropping Photos for Aesthetics**

Your newspaper publishes an annual progress edition insert in magazine style that gets a new title and cover each year, though its contents are fairly similar year to year (history of the area, growth, features about longtime residents, etc.). You've taken the cover photo for the coming edition, a shot of the freshly rebuilt St. Mary's Church, which had nearly burned to the ground a few years earlier in one of the worst fires in the city's history. Your photo is gorgeous — the white, clean lines of the church shone in a fading afternoon sun, and flowering trees framed the composition.

However, in the photo, a power line that hangs over the street and cuts neatly through the top third of the photo, ostensibly marring its beauty. Nevertheless, your editor wants that shot for the cover. He asks you to use a photo software technique to “erase” the power line. His argument is that since the photo is not a photo in the news section, the standards are different, and removing the power line does nothing to compromise the integrity of the newspaper in this case.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Explain any ethical issues regarding running this photo without the power lines and which choice you would make.
2. Where do you think the newspaper should draw the line on photo manipulation in general and why?

## **Fair Photo? Whose Call?**

Your newspaper has done a pretty thorough news feature on an elderly man who is caring for his wife in a nursing home. She is suffering from Alzheimer's and may not even know her husband is visiting her two times a day (their home was within walking distance, so he made the trip frequently). You photograph the man spoon-feeding his wife something kind of messy like oatmeal, which spills over her lip, and the expression on her face is so blank that it just breaks your heart when you look at it. In fact, it seems like too much of an intrusion, and you do not want to run the photo for that reason.

One staff member suggests that you ask the man himself if he would feel his wife's privacy would be compromised if the newspaper prints the image.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Do you think that asking this source which photo he prefers sets a precedent that raises ethical issues?
2. Is involving the source in photo selection justified in the case above? Why or why not?
3. Under what circumstances, if any, can you justify involving sources (photo subjects) in the selection of photos your paper will run?

## Party Picture Problem

You're working on a story about a college student who recently died in a traffic accident en route to his campus. Friends have provided you with photos of the student to run with the story. The photo editor says that of all the submitted photos, the one that is the most flattering and clearest is a "party picture" showing the student and about eight others, apparently intoxicated. An unidentified but clearly visible student in the photo is holding a "bong," a device commonly used to smoke marijuana.

At the weekly news budget meeting, one staff member says it's not right to run a photo of someone who is not identified, is not even included in the story, and appears to be engaging in an illegal activity. A second staff member says the photo is needed because it shows the deceased student in a very honest way, "doing what he liked to do." A third colleague says it would be wrong to run the photo unless the student holding the bong is informed before publication.

### QUESTIONS:

What other options seem viable in this case?

What extenuating circumstances do you need to consider?

What constitutes unethical photo manipulation in this case?

What's the best course of action and why?

## **DUI and Disheveled**

You just got word that police have arrested and charged a high-ranking state liquor administrator for Driving Under the Influence, and she is in jail. You are writing a story on immediate deadline and have her police mugshot she looks like hell - all disheveled, scared, and clearly drunk. You don't have the exact details that would provide background context for the situation but plan to run a next-day story. You are wondering if it is ethical to run a photo along with this first story when it shows her in such a bad light.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. What are your obligations in this case?
2. How would you handle this story and why?

### III. CONFLICTS WITH THE EDITOR

#### Friends in High Places

It's election season. You don't usually cover the politics beat, but there are so many local seats open on the city council this year the city editor has asked that all help cover the campaigns. Driving home one evening, you notice an election sign for Burt Johnson, a candidate you've been covering. The sign appears to be posted in violation of campaign sign laws. You confirm this with the election officials the next morning and call Johnson's campaign manager for comment. His response is quite interesting. "Yeah, of course I know they're in violation of the law," the campaign manager scoffs. "Whaddya think we care or something?" You remind the man he is on the record and ask a few more Questions: concerning the motive behind the violation and Johnson's philosophy on following the law. You hang up the phone, thinking you've got the story of the year. But the city editor warns that the editor-in-chief of the paper is friends with Johnson and won't want to run the story. The next day the editorial board endorses Johnson, and you're told to give up on the story.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. What extenuating circumstances do you need to consider in this case?
2. What options do you have here? Which one is the most ethically justifiable?
3. Does that differ from the option that is the most realistic/pragmatic? Explain how to choose between viable options?

## Corporate Conflict of Interest

You are a reporter for the largest paper in the state, which is part of a larger chain of papers owned by American Electric corporation. You have been working for months on a story of a community fundraiser held on behalf of a local couple who is having financial troubles paying for medical bills. The lady, Mrs. Peterson, and her two-year old son, Eli, both have unusual neurological problems.

The Peterson family lives in Edenton, a very tight-knit, smaller rural community fifty miles outside the state Capitol. The main industry in Edenton is agriculture. Where most of the families used to be small farmers, they now largely work for a corporate hog farm that raises 100,000 hogs in a CAFO (confined animal feeding operation) and a nearby processing plant (slaughterhouse). The hog farm is a mixed blessing because most of the jobs are lower pay and in unpleasant working conditions. It is a far cry from the small time animal farming most of the residents were used to. Additionally, the lagoons of hog waste cause a stench in the air most days. Some of the neighbors at the benefit fundraiser had also shared with you some other odd health problems, and their suspicions that the town may be facing some kind of pollution problem, most likely caused by the hog CAFO.

For the last few months, you have been working with doctors and toxicologists investigating possible causes of the community health problems. One of the possible causes of the problem is a hormone that is fed to the hogs and released in their waste. It has been known to cause neurological problems in humans. When you investigate this hormone further, you find out it is manufactured by a subsidiary of American Electric, your newspaper's parent company. You take this information to your news editor.

She is concerned and wants to proceed with caution. She thinks if the hormone cannot be 100% proven to be the cause of the community's health issues, and no other media outlets know about it, then you should hold back on the story. She suggests you pursue leads on other toxins that could also be to blame, including lifestyle/nutrition issues of the residents. Shortly after, she tells you she has not been able to secure any more funds for the story, and you'll have to proceed with a severely limited budget.

You are quite disappointed because she seems to be backing down from a serious public health issue, and you get the impression your job security lies with your allegiance to American Electric, not with the residents of Edenton. You know it is hard to ever prove, with 100% assurance, a causal relationship for a medical disorder. If you wait for that, you may never get the proof, and in the meantime, more people in Edenton may get sick.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Who are the moral claimants in this story, and what is at stake for them? To which one are you most ethically obligated?
2. What do you think of each of the following four options?
  - You can proceed with the story about the hormone, but mention other causes as well. This would include getting statements from the hormone manufacturer, and possibly, General

Electric. You could leak the story to government health officials, forcing you and other news media to cover it (but giving up your exclusivity).

- You could broaden the focus of the story so that it generally blames the hog farm and its lagoons, but does not get specific about which particular chemicals are to blame.
  - Or you could wait for more targeted research results on the hormones before running the story, knowing that you cannot afford to hire many more science professionals to help.
3. Do you think it could benefit you to go over your news editor's head and approach the Executive Editor or Publisher about getting more money for this story and proceeding with the hormone angle?...although, these editors are even more closely tied with General Electric, so it doesn't guarantee a different response than your news editor's? Plus, it might jeopardize your working relationship with your immediate boss.
  4. This is the kind of story that wins reporters Pulitzer Prizes. Should you take the risk of getting fired by proceeding aggressively with the story and pushing for its publication, even if it is politically risky for your job? Perhaps your investigative tenacity will reward you in the future, even if it costs you your job right now. Is it worth it?
  5. This is a defining moment in your career to determine why you are a reporter and what it means to you. How do you proceed?

## IV. PRIVACY VERSUS “THE PUBLICS’ RIGHT TO KNOW”

### AIDS Anyone?

Tennis legend Arthur Ashe was the first black man to win Wimbledon and the U.S. Open. After his retirement from tennis, Ashe joined the struggle for human rights in his the U.S. and emerged as a leading critic of apartheid in South Africa. He wrote a highly regarded three-volume history of black athletes in the United States. By all accounts, he was generous with his time and gracious when dealing with the public.

On April 8, 1992, however, Arthur Ashe was faced with one of the most difficult decisions of his life. Unknown to all but a few, Ashe had contracted HIV, probably from a blood transfusion during a heart bypass operation in 1983. Ashe, an intensely private man, had managed to keep his condition a secret from everyone except his family a close friends. However, all that changed when a reporter from *USA Today* contacted Ashe in early April of 1992.

The reporter, acting on a tip from an anonymous source, called to confirm whether Ashe had AIDS or not. Realizing that his secret would now, very probably, become public knowledge, Ashe was faced with the dilemma of letting the media expose his private life, or taking the initiative and releasing the information himself. He asked *USA Today*’s sports editor to allow him 36 hours before the paper ran the story so that he could prepare a statement. The editor, Gene Polincinski replied that, “as a journalist, it was not my role to help him plan a press conference—and that it was inappropriate for me to withhold a news story that I could confirm.”<sup>1</sup>

During the subsequent press conference, put together literally on the spur of the moment in order to preempt the *USA Today* scoop, Ashe displayed both anger and dismay at the actions of the media. He chastised them for forcing him into “the unenviable position of having to lie” in order to protect his family’s privacy, or to go public with what he considered to be private information.<sup>2</sup> In a *Washington Post* article written by Ashe, he discussed how he felt about the media’s intrusion into his private affairs. “I wasn’t then, and I am not now, comfortable with being sacrificed for the sake of the ‘public’s right to know.’”

Although *USA Today* held the story in the U.S. pending Ashe’s confirmation, it released the story to its overseas edition after a talk with the former tennis star just prior to his press conference in which he admitted to being HIV positive.

After going public, Ashe became active in the fight against AIDS, forming a fundraising foundation and joining the boards of the Harvard AIDS Institute and the UCLA AIDS Institute.

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<sup>1</sup> Debra Gersh, “Unclear boundaries: was it news that former tennis pro Arthur Ashe has AIDS?”, *Editor and Publisher* 18 April 1992: 7–10.

<sup>2</sup> Howard G. Chua-Eoan, “The burden of truth,” *People Weekly*, 20 April 1992: 50–51.

He died of pneumonia just ten months after his public announcement. Just four days before he died, he had given a speech on AIDS, and was scheduled to appear at an AIDS forum in Hartford, Connecticut, the day he died. He was forced to cancel at the last minute, but sent a videotaped message in his stead.

#### QUESTION:

Read the following statements made by media people following the Arthur Ashe press conference. Try to figure out what theories they are basing their opinions on. Do you think their reasoning is sound? Why or why not?

- [Ashe] is exactly correct. Keeping quiet made sense. Privacy is precious, and once lost, may never be retrieved. So Arthur Ashe was careful to protect his terrible secret. Whose life was this, anyway? (Fred Bruning, *Macleans*)<sup>3</sup>
- Of course the fellow has a right to act in what he considers his own best interests. But no reporter or editor should feel obligated to assist in the suppression of what Ashe, or anyone else, views as confidential or inappropriate. Cruel as it may seem, the wishes of a stricken man cannot substitute for editorial judgment. The process is imperfect, and its justice notoriously rough, but the objective is clear. Personal concerns are secondary to the principles of a free press. (Fred Bruning, *Macleans*)
- We can lament the terrible turn of events that threaten the life of so fine a man as Arthur Ashe but we do not honor him—or the freedom he championed—by confusing sympathy with self-censorship. (Fred Bruning, *Macleans*)
- [T]he Press (in this case a reporter and an editor from *USA Today*) reached into the most private precinct of [Ashe's] life (inside his body itself) and forced him to reveal his disease to millions of strangers. Ashe and his wife Jeanne have a five-year-old daughter. The girl was entitled to privacy and to tenderness in how she would be told, and when. (Lance Morrow, *Time*)<sup>4</sup>
- There was no public need to know, or right to know. Everyone is not fair game to be dragged onstage for involuntary exposure. Does AIDS make Ashe, or anyone, public property? As Ashe said, he is neither a political candidate nor a businessman beholden to stockholders. That Arthur Ashe is a “public figure” whom people recognize as he walks down the street is precisely the best argument for any decent human being's not informing the whole world that the man has AIDS. (Lance Morrow, *Time*)
- If Ashe had had leukemia, would reporter and editor have published the story? Maybe, in one paragraph. But not if Ashe had asked them not to. AIDS made it different. Irresistible. Juicy gossip. (Lance Morrow, *Time*)
- If a star volunteers, out of vanity or some other need, to tell all, the story may be interesting, even helpful to others. Arthur Ashe did not volunteer. He did not invite the world in. A pattern of revelation that routinely puts the most intimate details on public display has nearly

<sup>3</sup> Fred Bruning, “How a private citizen lost his privacy rights” *Maclean's*, May 4, 1992, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Lance Morrow, “Fair game?” *Time*, April 20, 1992, 74.

obliterated an appreciation of both the right of privacy and the obligations of kindness. (Lance Morrow, *Time*)

- “It is a news story, absolutely. Unfortunately it is a story that’s bigger than the individual, even when the person is as great a person as Arthur Ashe. AIDS itself is a story. The reaction to this whole thing is the best proof possible. The fact that Arthur Ashe is stricken with AIDS is a tragedy. The fact that he lost a measure of his privacy is a tragedy.” (Paul McMasters, executive director of the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University quoted in an article by Debra Gersh, *Editor & Publisher*)<sup>5</sup>
- “[Ashe] deserves the same privacy considerations this newspaper routinely gives rape victims. Like them he, too, should not be twice victimized by being made to suffer the harsh glare of the public spotlight. To say he is a public figure and thus fair game for such intrusive news coverage ignores the fact that even celebrity rape victims are afforded a cloak of anonymity by this and most other newspapers.” (*USA Today* and Gannett News Service columnist DeWayne Wickham quoted in an article by Debra Gersh, *Editor & Publisher*)
- “This is a tough one. Ashe is no longer a performer. Had he chosen to keep his heart surgery secret, he deserved to have his request honored. He did elect to keep his present condition a secret. Somebody betrayed him. News of an ex-athlete’s fatal disease can’t simply be cataloged under the ‘public’s right to know.’” (Boston Globe columnist Dan Shaughnessy quoted in an article by Debra Gersh, *Editor & Publisher*)
- “When the news arrived at *USA Today*, the newspaper had no choice. The silent and generous conspiracy was a noble act of some loyal people, but there is no room for a newspaper in a conspiracy, generous or otherwise. The controversy itself makes you wonder how many other generous conspiracies are out there and how many newspapers are involved.”
- The public may not have a right to know, but it sure does want to know. It was a hell of a story. As insensitive as it sounds, that is what this game is all about.” (The Boston Herald’s Gerry Callahan quoted in an article by Debra Gersh, *Editor & Publisher*)
- “This story makes me queasy. Perhaps it is the disparity between the value of information conveyed and the magnitude of the pain inflicted.” (*New York Times* columnist Anna Quindlen, quoted in an article by Debra Gersh, *Editor & Publisher*)
- “In recent years, mass media have been sliding down a slippery slope in pursuit of the private lives of celebrities. These stories sell newspapers and pump up tv ratings, but they do little for public discourse.
- “Instead of investigating the private sphere regarding this or that celebrity with AIDS, mass media could be deploying investigative resources aimed at the public arena—the AIDS research effort, inadequacies in the health care system, the success of needle exchange programs, how homophobia has slowed the effort, etc.” (Jeff Cohen, executive director of the New York-based Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) quoted in an article by Debra Gersh, *Editor & Publisher*)

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<sup>5</sup> Gersh, 3.

- “We tell ourselves that we are serving the public; but the bloodthirstiness and competitiveness with which we pursue our quarries are evidence enough that we are in search of nothing more noble than headlines.
- “Unlike those among my colleagues and competitors who say that they have had difficulty forming clear conclusions about the treatment of Ashe, I have had no difficulty at all: Ashe was absolutely right to insist on his privacy and *USA Today* was absolutely wrong to violate it. No public issues were at stake. No journalistic ‘rights’ were threatened. (Jonathan Yardley of the *Washington Post* quoted in an article by Debra Gersh, *Editor & Publisher*)
- “No journalist likes to inflict pain. We do so from time to time, but we like to think that we have no choice. We balance the pain we inflict against the certainty that the public has a stake and has to be informed. When Arthur Ashe appeared before the cameras and announced he was HIV positive, anyone could see the pain. What was not so clear is why we had to know.” (Washington Post’s Richard Cohen quoted in an article by Debra Gersh, *Editor & Publisher*)

## The Mayor's Son

The long-time mayor of your city has taken a strong public stand against a proposed Housing Rights Ordinance. The ordinance would make it illegal to evict a person or to fail to renew a lease based solely on that person's sexual orientation. You discover that the mayor's son lives with another man in a rented house. The mayor's son makes no secret that he is gay, but he doesn't make an issue of it either. He doesn't speak to groups or participate in meetings, and has declined invitations to do so. He doesn't generally give interviews, but honestly answers about his sexuality when asked.

Your editor thinks this is an important angle to cover in a story you're developing on the ordinance. What do you think?

### QUESTION:

Is there a "greater good" argument to be made here? If so what is it? If not, why not?

## The Marriage License

At your small community newspaper, a woman calls and asks that you delete from your Vital Statistics section any reference to her marriage license application. You tell her that the newspaper – “A Newspaper of Record” – prints all legal notices and reports of births, deaths, and applications for divorce and marriage. But the woman says she's been stalked by her ex-husband, and if he learns that she's remarrying, he will go ape and might try to kill her.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Does your newspaper have an obligation to print all applications for marriage and divorce licenses?
2. Should it make an exception for some, and if so, under what circumstances? Does this woman's circumstance qualify?

## A Minor Criminal

You hear the police/EMP scanner chatter about a shooting in a house not far from the newspaper office. A teenage girl had been shot in the head, with her teenage brother as a witness, and the initial police reports indicate that it may be gang-related. The brother says a man with a gun broke into the house and shot the girl. You report these accounts but do not print the names of the girl or her brother.

A day later, the 13-year-old girl dies at the hospital, and police say the story told by her 14-year-old brother is starting to fall apart. In the next issue, you report the next version of the brother's story he and his sister were playing "Russian roulette" and she shot herself. Days later, the boy admits that he was showing off with the gun — believing it was unloaded — when it went off. Your paper has a general rule of not naming people arrested until they are charged, and so you do not name the boy or the deceased.

On the day the police do charge the boy, as an adult, with manslaughter, his mother calls you. She says she's lost one child and if you name the children in the next newspaper story you will make her only surviving child sound like a monster. She is civil, but in very deep pain, and believes that the newspaper will be adding to her pain if it publicizes her teenage children's names.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Who are the moral claimants in this case and what are your obligations to each?
2. Even though he was officially charged with the murder, should you make an exception in this case by not printing the boy's name? Explain.
3. Even though he is being charged as an adult, does the boy's status as a minor affect your decision whether to print his name?

## Anonymity for Rape Victims

A 21 year old woman was raped in her apartment Thursday night. Police have arrested an acquaintance of hers, 24 year old law student Colby Turner, although he claims the sex was consensual. It turns out the female victim was a former run-away from a neighboring town whose disappearance when she was 16 had been highly publicized in media around the state at the time (and was never resolved). Your investigation also reveals that she was arrested three years ago on prostitution charges in a nearby state. She is now an unmarried mother of a one year old son and works as a dancer at a local adult club and a waitress at a diner.

Your paper, like most, does not typically reveal the identity of rape victims, unless they participate in high profile prosecutions or wish their name to be revealed. However, this case seems unusual because you consider it newsworthy that a former “missing child” has been found (even under unfortunate circumstances), and her turbulent background does call into question her credibility when the alleged rapist claims her version of the story is incorrect. On the other hand, you feel she has had a troubled life and do not want to add to her troubles or exploit them. You talk to your friend who is a rape counselor, and she says it is much more common for rape to go unreported than it is for there to be false accusations. Most victims are too uncomfortable to want to share intimate details with the authorities and are afraid it makes them seem dirty on some level.

As you and your editor are debating whether or not to reveal her past and identity, you have just found out that the local TV news has revealed her identity as the former runaway.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Since the TV news has “let the cat out of the bag,” does that solve your dilemma about revealing her identity in your paper since most of the public may already know?
2. Should it matter that she is not seen as the ideal “innocent” rape victim since she has a sorted sexual past? That certainly does not justify a rape, but it would call her credibility into question with most of the public (unlike if she was a suburban soccer mom). Does the public have a right to know about her sexual promiscuity and troubled past in making judgments on the guilt or innocence of the accused law student, Colby, since your paper will publish his name?
3. Does she deserve protection from further stress due to her unhappy past and current situation as a struggling single mom? Is protecting this poor young woman from further stress more important than informing the public of all the details of the story?
4. This situation has a lot of depth and complexity. What are three possible ways you can approach this story (include some creative ones)? Is there a lesson to be learned here regarding parenting, troubled teens, or other social issues?
5. What did your editor and you decide to do? Describe how much you revealed about her identity and past as well as the story angle and prominence you gave it.

## Rape Trial Troubles

You learn of a police investigation of a gang-rape at a small Catholic college in your town. When the charges are filed against six male students, you write the story, naming them all – but follow your newspaper’s policy and do not name the female rape victim. Throughout the legal proceedings, you continue to name those accused but not the female victim. But when the case finally goes to trial, the woman refuses to testify and the judge dismisses the charges.

As you are writing the story, the woman calls you and asks if you intend to name her in the story. One of the staff members says you must print the woman’s name because she is no longer a “rape victim” and because of her actions, the newspaper has dragged the names of these six men through the mud while giving her the protection of anonymity.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Since she refuses to testify, should she now lose that protection?
2. What extenuating circumstances must be considered in this case?
3. Should the woman remain anonymous? What is your ethical rationale for your decision?

## **It's a Source's Prerogative to Change His Mind... or is it?**

Most of your sources are official and are used to talking to the press, such as government agency officials, politicians, police officers, CEO's, attorneys, public relations professionals, etc. It is actually harder to interview sources who are nonofficial – citizens who have special insight on a story – because they aren't used to dealing with the press and may not understand some of the unwritten rules of reporting.

For example, you were writing a Sunday cover story about a local doctor who was being sued by a group of five former patients who felt he had botched their gastric bypass surgery (which is a stapling of the stomach to reduce its size for weight loss purposes). Only two of the patients would talk to you regarding their stories – a man and a woman, who both agreed to be named. Both people provided good insight into the case (and the decision to have this radical surgery), but it was the candor of the man, Jerry, who really made the story – he provided more details, emotions, context, insight, and quotable quotes. In fact, during the interview with you, Jerry actually broke down and expressed how hard it has been for him as an obese person in society, and how crushed he was that this surgery had caused him more problems, rather than solving them. You gave him some tissues and almost started crying yourself out of sympathy.

On Friday, four days after the interview, you get a call from Jerry just as the copy editor is working up your front page story for Sunday's edition. Jerry is having second thoughts and doesn't want his story told. You reminded him that he had agreed upfront to be named and tell this story. He knows that, but he assumed he could change his mind before printing. He is suffering from clinical depression (which you weren't aware of), and he and his therapist feel he isn't really in a clear enough state of mind to have made that decision to share such personal information with the press. The fact that he broke down while you questioned him about his weight problem only made it worse as far as him revealing more than he had intended. He asks if you had included the part about him crying and his breakdown about his weight. You said you had included it, with much sensitivity, because you felt he really opened up his heart in a way the public could relate to. He was under the impression that they were off the record once he started crying. You explain it was the most important part of the story. He still wants out. You ask him what if you printed the story without his name. He still feels that some people in the community will know it is him and doesn't want any of his story revealed. He says the story will only cause him further embarrassment. You tell him you need to talk to your editor, and you'll call him right back.

As you discuss this with your editor, you express your concern for Jerry's personal privacy and sensitive state of mental and physical health, yet you know that if you delete all his details from your article, it simply won't make as compelling and rich of a story about this important health topic and unique, high-profile malpractice case. His interview was 3/4 of the story and he willingly shared it days ago.... Not to mention the article is finalized and being worked up as we speak. Jerry's last minute call has really left you in a lurch.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. What ethical obligations do you have to non-official sources who have openly and willingly shared their story for publication and then changed their mind afterwards? Their initial agreement is typically considered legal permission to publish, but what other things might need to be considered?
2. How might Jerry's particular case be an exception to the rule, if you feel exceptions should be made?
3. Does the late timing impact your decision? Would it have changed your decision if he had changed his mind the day after the interview, instead of four days later, right before publishing?
4. If you were to pull all of his information, what are your alternatives for covering this high profile malpractice case? ...how might you recover?
5. You feel your article was written with a lot of sensitivity and will really help the public understand the emotional burden of obesity and the potential dangers of the decision to have radical surgery to lose weight. Do concerns for Jerry's personal privacy and mental well-being outweigh the potential benefits of the public learning about this important and timely topic?
6. What do you decide to do, and why do you feel that is the right decision?
7. What about this situation, if anything, would change the way you approach interviewing "personal" sources when doing stories in the future?

## **To Name or Not to Name — Guilt by Association**

A pastor from a church in your small town was arrested in a nearby big city by the FBI as part of a broader investigation into child pornography. In small communities, people can be so easily identified – or misidentified – that if you decide not to specifically name one person to protect him or her until charges are filed, you may in fact be casting guilt on a group of people. In this case, if you identify the arrested man only as “a pastor” from this small town, you may be inadvertently implicating all four or five of the town’s ministers. So with the assurance from the local police that charges are “imminent,” you publish his name.

The problem is that charges were not filed in the next few days. You become increasingly concerned that the police may have misled (and perhaps used) you and that you may have made the wrong decision in naming the pastor. After three weeks, the police do charge him and at trial a jury finds him guilty.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Were you right in naming the pastor before he was officially charged in order to avoid implicating other pastors in this small town?
2. What ethical issues does this case raise?

## Too Personal to be News?

You are the education reporter in a mid-sized Oregon town. Sam, a 14-year-old boy at one of the local high schools is arrested after Dorothy, the mother of one of his buddies, reports that Sam has stolen numerous pairs of her underwear over the course of several years.

Dorothy has told police that she confronted Sam and his parents several months earlier, and they had promised to get their son counseling. But when Sam stole more underwear, Dorothy decided to report the theft. When the police search Sam's room, they find more than 600 pairs of underwear, stolen from a number of girls and women. It seems Sam was stealing from all his buddies' moms and sisters. This causes quite an uproar at the high school since Sam's parents are both employees of the school, as is Dorothy.

Your newspaper has a policy of withholding the names of minors, unless they're involved in a serious felony. But do you identify the school? Do you identify victims of the theft as teachers and/or coaches? Do you explain the relationships between people?

According to the old "news elements" list, you feel this story certainly qualifies as novel. It's kinky and involves an arrested teen. But does the situation merit the embarrassment and pain it will cause Sam and his family when he is clearly a troubled kid?

### QUESTIONS:

1. What special considerations must you consider in determining whether this situation is newsworthy?
2. Explain what you would do and why.

## Newsweek and the Death of a Story

On May 16, 1996, Admiral Jeremy Michael (Mike) Boorda, chief of U.S. naval operations committed suicide at his home at the Navy Yard in southeast Washington, D.C. Boorda had been at his high military post since being nominated by President Clinton in 1994. Apparently, he had chosen to commit suicide rather than face the press over a question of whether he had been wearing a combat citation in error, either intentionally or unintentionally. The decorations in question were two combat Vs (for “valor”) that the Navy says go only to “individuals who are exposed to personal hazard due to direct hostile action.” Boorda had, in fact, received two commendations for serving in combat areas during the Vietnam War first as weapons officer aboard the U.S.S. John R. Craig in 1965 and later as executive officer aboard the U.S.S. Brooke for 14 months from 1971 to 1973. However, neither of these citations indicated that Boorda was qualified for the combat V. In addition, the combat V’s were among the 13 awards and commendations that Boorda listed in the official resume he gave to the Senate Armed Services Committee in his 1994 confirmation hearings. Boorda signed the resume, stating that the information was “to the best of my knowledge, current, accurate and complete.” He could be seen wearing the V pins in photos as early as 1985. Yet when reporters began digging into his Navy records a year before his suicide, he stopped wearing them.

Mike Boorda had been in the Navy nearly all his adult life. He had enlisted at 17 (lying about his age) in order to escape a troubled family life. He was married at 18 and spent the next 40 years working his way from an enlisted man to the highest ranking officer in the Navy. Along the way, Boorda served two tours of duty in Vietnam, commanded various ships, held several Pentagon posts, and served as chief of NATO’s forces in Southern Europe in 1991. When he was appointed as Chief of Naval Operations in 1994, he took over a job rocked by scandal. His predecessor, Admiral Frank Kelso II, had to retire early in response to criticism of his handling of the 1991 Tailhook sex harassment episode.

About a year prior to Boorda’s suicide, the National Security News Service, a watchdog group that feeds tips to news organizations, began filing Freedom of Information Act requests for the medal citations of all the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. After discovering what seemed to be discrepancies in Boorda’s record, a correspondent for the service approached *Newsweek’s* contributing editor for military affairs, retired Colonel David Hackworth. Hackworth subsequently scheduled an appointment to meet with Boorda to talk about the allegations; however, when he was unable to attend the meeting, *Newsweek* sent two of its Washington bureau correspondents to cover the interview. About two hours prior to the meeting, a Navy spokesperson contacted *Newsweek* to discuss the interview. He was told about the allegations—information which he passed along to Boorda. Just prior to the meeting, Boorda declined a lunch that had been ordered for him, drove himself to his home, and shot himself in the chest just outside his house. The reporters were still waiting to meet with him at his office.

Following the suicide, many questioned the validity of pursuing such a small story, especially given the outcome. Others pointed out that Boorda’s life was not a simple one. His highly public position had increased the pressure he felt to see the Navy through its time of trouble. He was accused of being too political, and of acting out of a sense of public responsibility rather than out of loyalty to the Navy. He had even been publicly accused of disloyalty by a senior officer in a

recent speech. Obviously, his life was extremely complicated and involved many more worries than just the unearned decorations. However, in one of two suicide notes, Boorda alluded to the potential scandal and wondered whether people might not believe his error had been an honest mistake.

In several articles covering their investigation of Boorda, *Newsweek* called its actions “defensible.” In their words, “The suicide took place not only before any article appeared, but two full days before the reporting was complete. And the reporting that did take place was not duplicitous; Boorda was given plenty of time to respond or provide additional documents.” And, the magazine justified the newsworthiness of the story by citing the concern of many in the military over the significance of medals and the entitlement of those who earn them. At the same time, *Newsweek* editor Jonathan Alter wrote that this case is “a good reminder that even if reporters don’t really kill, what we write and say can have grave consequences. This shouldn’t make the press less aggressive in pursuing stories, just more thoughtful.”

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Was *Newsweek* on solid ethical grounds in pursuing this story? Consider the difference between investigating a story and actually publishing it.
2. Define in what ways you see this story as newsworthy or not.
3. To what degree should journalists be interested in the overall picture they are investigating and not just in the “story” they are hoping to write? Do you think that “backgrounding” would have helped *Newsweek* better understand Boorda’s frame of mind?
4. If you had been an editor at *Newsweek* prior to this incident, would you have handled this investigation any differently?
5. Set aside, for a moment, the fact of the suicide. If you had been investigating this case as a possible story, in what order of priority would place the various claimants and why?
6. Assume you are the editor of *Newsweek*. Write a letter to your readers explaining why you are going to run this story (assuming the suicide hasn’t taken place). Now, assuming the suicide has taken place, write a second letter explaining why you aren’t responsible for Boorda’s death.
7. Assume you report directly to the editor of *Newsweek*. Explain why you don’t think you should run the story of Boorda’s citation error (assuming the suicide hasn’t taken place).

## Court Log Drama in a Small Town

One of your jobs at the community newspaper is preparing the weekly feature called “Court Log” that reports municipal court charges and judgments over the past week. Local people want to know about significant cases — those of drug and DUI convictions — as well as the small stuff, such as traffic violations and petty larceny. The “Court Log” is one hazard of living in a small town. If you lived in a bigger city and were charged for shoplifting, hardly anyone would know, but in this town, everyone will find out, at least if the town judge fines you for petty larceny.

Today you are called to the front counter to meet an elderly man, Bill Riley, who is close to tears. He tells you he has never stolen anything in his life before he was caught taking a candy bar from a local store. He is really sorry and embarrassed and thinks his medicine impaired his judgment that day. The municipal court judge has fined him for petty larceny. Riley literally begs you to keep his name out of the “Court Log.” If printed, his name and reputation in the community will forever be tarnished. People still talk about the official at the town’s biggest company who was been convicted of petty larceny years ago.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Should you hold out Riley’s name?
2. Is reporting municipal court rulings an antiquated journalism tradition — an old practice that humiliates people for minor infractions?

## **Who Gets to Choose?**

In a story about abortion, a sophomore in a local high school admits to having had an abortion as a freshman. She is willing to go on the record, but you suspect it's in part because she wants to get back at her parents, with whom she does not get along. Should you print her name? Should you print the story? What caveats do you have for the reporters and editors working on this story?

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Use the Ethical Worksheet to decide what to do with this story. Claimants are especially important to this one. Make sure you list them all. Ask yourself what you think they would want you to do.

## An Official Affair

The grapevine brings you word that Brett Simmons, the local school superintendent, who is married, is involved in an affair with an unnamed female administrator on his staff. It seems like a salacious rumor. Your paper is not the National Enquirer, and you do not pursue it.

Months later, the female administrator is arrested for shoplifting, which is a story because she is a semi-prominent public official. You are the only reporter at the trial. In opening statements, the defense attorney says that the evidence will show that the woman was under extreme mental duress because a romantic affair with a male colleague has ended badly. Now the affair is a matter of public record.

On reflection, some other things become obvious to you. For example, it is a clear violation of employment standards and school district policy for the superintendent to be romantically involved with an administrator in his chain of command. In many companies and most government agencies, including the school district in question, this is an offense that usually results in dismissal.

Superintendent Simmons knows you have the information. Initially he does not return your call. When he finally does, he is beside himself, in tears, saying that publication of his name in the story will shatter his career and his marriage. Then the superintendent's 21-year-old son calls, begging you not to publish.

### QUESTIONS:

1. What are the extenuating circumstances and socio-political pressures surrounding this case?
2. Does the public's need to know about the affair outweigh the harm publicizing it will cause to both people and their families?
3. How would you handle this story and why?

## **Self Interest or Community Interest?**

Catherine, a local PR contact for a major company in town, tells you something during a lunch interview that she later asks you not to print. Her company has been hiding the fact that 10 years ago they dumped a small amount of a toxic chemical near a local reservoir, on land that the company owns. There is no evidence that the chemical has leaked into the groundwater or the reservoir. She says she believes the company executive she works for when he tells her it's being taken care of. She knows her comments were on the record, but she has since decided that they were ill-advised, possibly inflammatory, and might just cost her her job.

Catherine has been a loyal and important source of yours for many years, giving you many exclusives, and you have a good working relationship that is mutually beneficial. Additionally, this is the largest business in your mid-sized community. It employs over five percent of the adult population, tends to have a good reputation, and has been a mainstay in the local economy for over 20 years.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Who are the claimants in this case and what are your obligations to each?
2. Should you print Catherine's comments? Ethically justify your decision.

## **Deadline or Procedure: Running with a Story**

You are assigned to cover the school board meeting but the board decides to have a closed meeting to discuss the future of the high school principal. You sit in the hallway outside the closed meeting room during the meeting and you can hear the discussion. The board has decided to fire the high school principal. You ask several board members about it after the meeting but no one will confirm what you overheard. The deadline for the newspaper is midnight tonight. Do you use the information?

Use the Ethical Worksheet to work through your decision.

## V. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

### **Press Pass or Press Gift?**

Your newspaper has two reasons for declining free admission for events like plays, concerts and movies that its writers review. First, accepting free admission could influence or appear to influence a writer's commentary; and second, accepting admission would be taking a seat otherwise for sale and available to the public.

But when preparing to report on a school football game, the school athletic director gives you a "press pass," allowing free admission to the press box for athletics department staff, sports writers, broadcasters and photographers, and access to a modest lunch buffet.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Is there any ethical concern in your accepting this press pass? Why or why not?
2. How should you proceed?

## **Interactions with Sources**

Six months after being hired as the newspaper's government and public affairs reporter, you begin dating an old friend who is the public information officer for the sheriff's department.

Your editor confronts you, saying that fraternizing with a source compromises your objectivity. You respond by saying that in six months you have never interviewed the PIO once, but have simply used reports the PIO has sent to all the media. You also point out that the editor serves on several community committees and boards that include town officials, local leaders and business people – all potential sources the editor might have to use as sources, or whose actions and policies might be the focus of editorials.

Nevertheless, your editor says you must cease dating the PIO or resign your job.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Is the editor's stance ethically justifiable?
2. What options do you have? Explain which one you would take.

## The Appearance of Bias

Part of your reporting duties include working on the immigration coverage team, which includes a reporter, Gabriella, who speaks Spanish, has a lot of good contacts in the Latino community, and possesses a good breadth of knowledge on the subject of immigration. As her colleague, you notice early on that most of her stories tend to be somewhat one-sided — focusing on the plight of illegal immigrants, their working conditions, the long and hard path to citizenship for them, etc. Despite mentioning to Gabriella that some of her stories seem to lack balance on the complex issue of immigration, her reporting style continues. She defends her writing to you by saying that the immigration issue is a human rights issue, and not just a national security or legal issue. She argues that the stories of undocumented workers (or minorities in general, but especially the Latino community) are under-represented in the news, and by covering their perspective she is providing more balance in the paper overall, so she sees it as fair.

When Gabriella and you were talking privately over lunch one day, she confides that her husband came to the U.S. from Mexico in 1999, and his status was illegal until they got married a few years ago. But she asks that you not tell the newspaper editor or other employees about her personal life. This certainly gives you more perspective on her writing style, but you wonder how you should handle this situation moving forward.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Do the reporter's personal life and ideals represent a conflict of interest in this case?
2. Should you tell your editor of the possible conflict of interest? Why, or why not?

## We're Playing Our Song

The newspaper you work for is a major player in organizing a three-day music festival in the town it's located in every September. All profits from festival ticket sales are donated to the local chapter of the United Way, to be distributed to worthy charities throughout your community. The paper produces a special supplement containing the festival guide, for which it sells ads; the paper's name and logo are also omnipresent during the festival, on advertisements, programs, posters, etc. The paper's music writers are deeply involved in choosing bands for the festival, and then write the preview material for each band that appears in the festival supplement. Most of the bands are from the local area, and many are frequently written about in your paper.

The paper devotes a tremendous amount of editorial coverage to the festival both before and after it occurs, both in the supplementary festival guide and regular columns, as it is a very popular event in the community with high attendance. When the paper mentions the festival in its regular columns, the fact that the festival is the paper's baby is sometimes mentioned, as is the charity angle. After the festival, the paper typically devotes a full page or two of its regular music section to photos and reviews from the event.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think the paper's involvement with and handling of the festival seems appropriate?
2. Is there anyone you think may view this as a conflict of interest? If so, who and why?
3. Is there any single part of this activity that might be a conflict even if other parts are not?
4. If there are any conflicts, what would you do about them?

## **When is two a crowd?**

Your spouse is a paralegal working for the preeminent criminal lawyer in town. Your at-home private conversation often includes tidbits about what clients your spouse's boss is representing. As a couple, you often socialize with other paralegals and people within the legal system.

Because your newspaper has a small staff, most reporters are called upon at one time or another to "pick up" stories, and – sure enough – your editor asks you to quickly pick up a story in which your spouse's employer is the defendant's attorney. The deadline is just three hours away.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Do you think this situation poses an ethical issue?
2. How should it be handled and why exactly?

## **It's the Umpire's Call**

The main sports reporter at your small community paper regularly works (for pay) as an umpire at American Legion baseball games, and sees absolutely no conflict of interest – even when he officiates at a game, then turns around and reports on the game for the paper.

The reporter says when he files his story he is not invested in the play of either team, the fans or the outcome of the game. In fact, he says, as the umpire he understands all of the action and must be completely objective. “I’m the perfect person to write up the game,” he says.

### **QUESTION:**

Does this reporter have a conflict of interest? Explain.

## Is There a Personal vs. Professional Conflict?

You are the new education reporter, having been hired just six months ago. As a young African-American who is relatively new to the community, you are interested in joining the local chapter of the NAACP because that would be a straightforward way to find connections within the rather marginalized African-American community here in your state. But you are concerned that such a membership would affect your ability to impartially cover the local School District, which is struggling with issues of diversity and fairly regular allegations of racial discrimination. You don't want your editor to think you aren't committed to objectivity, yet your personal life is suffering as you feel fairly alienated since the black community in your new town is so much smaller than you are used to.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Is there a sufficient enough conflict of interest here to keep you from joining the NAACP, or is it justifiable?
2. Similarly, how do you feel about other times when a reporter's personal life may conflict with his/her professional life and if and when lines should be drawn. For example, should a newspaper seek out only non-Catholics to report on priest-abuse allegations within the Catholic church? Should only reporters who do not have children work on stories about child porn? Should a reporter who is Mexican-American not be assigned to cover immigration issues?

## **‘Tis the Season**

Each Christmas season, your newspaper, publishes a series of gift guides, special supplementary sections reviewing potential gifts from a wide variety of local retailers. In past years, your editor-in-chief has asked the editor responsible to make sure contributors to the guides visit all the stores that advertise in the sections. (Last Christmas, your special sections editor sent letters to advertising stores soliciting ideas instead of mandating that writers visit them.)

Writers have not been expected to write about these stores' products unless they rated inclusion on their merits. Products from stores that do not advertise have also been included each year. When asked about the practice, your special sections editor said he did not feel writers he worked with on the guides had been unduly influenced by scouting advertisers. The editor-and-chief said, "I think that it is pretty close to being inappropriate, but that it's still appropriate. We don't pay people who do Gift Guides a lot of money, and it would be easy enough for them to walk out of our offices, go across the street and find a gift there. This is, in part, an effort to make sure we've done the reporting."

Is there anything wrong with this?

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Look up at least three definitions of "conflict of interest." What, if anything, do they have in common?
2. Is there anyone you think my view this as a conflict of interest? If so, who and why?
3. Is there any single part of this activity that might be a conflict even if other parts are not?
4. If there are any conflicts, what would you do about them?

## VI. PUBLIC RELATIONS & ADVERTISING

### Relying on Press Releases

Your editor calls you into her office to discuss a small article she says you have “plagiarized.” She says you’ve used blocks of information from a recent press release, have simply rewritten the lead, added a short quotation, inserted a few transitions, and put your byline on the story.

You argue that press releases are the backbone of much of your paper’s community news and that you didn’t know you weren’t allowed to restructure them or put your name on your edited version. The editor agrees that the newspaper does use press release information somewhat directly sometimes but tells you it is for “briefs,” not for bylined articles.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. What ethical issues does this situation raise about press releases and news coverage at papers in general?
2. Is it fair to accuse the reporter of plagiarism in this case?
3. What is the best way to handle information from a press release? Does it matter if it is a minor or somewhat “trivial” story?

## The Advertorial

You are a news photographer at a twice-weekly paper in a small city. In addition to publishing the newspaper, your company also creates special inserts that everyone refers to as “advertorials” — sections such as “Night on the Town” and “Style,” that feature write-ups about businesses that buy advertising in the special publications. A lot of times, the management wants you to shoot the pictures for the advertorials, but doesn’t pay you for the work. Rather, it considers it part of your regular salary.

When those advertorial sections were created a few years ago, your news editor was initially responsible for assigning freelance writers for them and then laying them out. But after awhile, she convinced her superiors that these were not, and should not be, the concern of the news department. So the advertising department took over the publications. It uses a freelance editor (working from home) and freelance writers to generate the copy. The Creative Services department is in charge of the design and production.

As a news photographer, when you accept these assignments as part of your regular work flow, are you compromising your role as a photojournalist?

### QUESTIONS:

1. How should ethics be incorporated into staff meeting discussions around this issue?
2. Should the newspaper handle advertising photography and news photography separately? Explain.

## Public Relations-Fed Journalism

As a health reporter for a paper outside of Sacramento, you are planning the cover story for the next Health & Fitness section, which will appear on Sunday. You are unsure which stories should get the lead, when a press release comes across your desk promoting the dairy industry's new nationwide campaign supporting dairy as a weight loss tool. That seems intriguing to you because dairy is already a staple in most Americans' diet, and if it can help us lose weight, great! There is to be a big campaign announcement party in San Francisco tomorrow at noon, to which you are invited. With the Atkins high-protein diet fading, this seems like it could be the next big trend in dieting.

You and another reporter attend the dairy industry's campaign party for lunch the next day and enjoy mingling with the celebrity endorsers who have donned milk mustaches in past "Got Milk" ads. It made for wonderful photo opps. They had plenty of dairy dishes to sample and provided you with extensive press kits, complete with all the scientific data on the weight loss study, nutritionist comments, background on dairy's health benefits and other campaigns, and plenty of recipes for people to use on the new low fat dairy diet. They also had a charity raffle for a dollar which helps fund college scholarships for small dairy farmer's children. They gave out a lot of other milk-related prizes, and your press photographer actually won a free spa day at a Swedish spa in San Francisco that uses milk in their skin care line.

Since they just started a huge national ad campaign blitz for the dairy diet, it seems timely to get this new campaign in your Sunday section. To make the Sunday deadline, that means you need to write the story up today. You've got plenty of great visuals from the campaign party, but the only drawback is there is not time to investigate this much or get alternate viewpoints. You do think you could squeeze in a reaction comment from a local nutritionist and a doctor, if you can get a hold of those contacts today. They are usually pretty reliable.

However, when you get back to the office, a vegan staff member chides you for falling prey to the glitz of the dairy industry's PR campaign. She claims there is a lot of alternative medical evidence on the negative health effects of dairy, through an organization called Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM). But the main reason she says she has chosen not to eat dairy for the last five years is because of the way the cows are mistreated on factory farms. You disregard the animal welfare angle because it isn't relevant to a diet story, but she may have a point about the health risks – although that is news to you. Even if it doesn't help you lose weight, it seems a bit far-fetched to say dairy is unhealthy. After all, dairy has been a long time staple component of the USDA's food guide pyramid. You are skeptical because you think animal activists just form health front groups like PCRM to produce biased research on dairy's ill effects, which is a cover up for their real agenda of getting people to stop buying any animal products altogether.

In order to get the dairy diet story in Sunday's paper to be timely with the national launch of the diet info, you need to get to work on it now.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. What ethical issues does this situation raise?
2. Do your colleague's skeptical comments regarding the dairy industry seem legitimate enough to include as counter-evidence to balance out the story?
3. How and when will you choose to write this story, if at all? What will you take into consideration when writing it?

## Advertising Runs Headlong into News

You are the business reporter filling in on the copy desk. One of your duties is to put together the business section, and you chose a wire story regarding a Consumer Reports story about the trick to negotiating with a car dealer. You consider it valuable consumer information, and it goes on page two.

After the story ran, the local car dealers immediately cry foul, saying that the story suggests they are unethical and prey on unwary car buyers. In protest, they pull all their advertising, and tell the publisher they won't advertise again until the newspaper apologizes. But the publisher backs you up, saying the story was legitimate consumer information and points to all the other consumer-oriented business news you've written over the last year.

But the car dealers aren't convinced – and the boycott holds for six weeks, until finally, one by one, each dealer resumes advertising. The boycott has hurt the newspaper badly – losing about \$15,000, so that a sales employee on those accounts has lost half her pay during the boycott.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Was there another way you should have handled this situation, in hindsight? Did the publisher handle it correctly?
2. Does seeing the economic ramifications of choosing to publish a certain wire story change the way you approach news selection? Should it?

## Backfiring

Most newspapers take steps to avoid giving their advertisers special treatment. A business that advertises in the paper should not be treated better than a business that does not advertise. Sometimes, to ensure that it doesn't appear that an advertiser is getting undue attention, reporters leave that company out of stories altogether.

A large auto repair shop chain that buys a lot of advertising in your newspaper complains that when you prepare news stories, you never contact it for information about car safety, inspections, environmental controls, consumer issues or even about new products on the market. When you check the newspaper archives, it turns out that the complaint is legitimate. You have routinely used other smaller repair shops that do not advertise or advertise very little.

### QUESTIONS:

1. If a business buys advertising with your newspaper, does it automatically eliminate its chances to provide information or serve as an opinion source?
2. Are reporters right to favor small businesses over large chains as sources for stories?
3. What about favoring companies that do not advertise with the newspaper in an attempt to appear impartial? Explain.

## VIII: ECONOMIC PRESSURES

### Whose Newspaper is This Anyway?

A smoldering quarrel between the editorial staff and the owner of the Santa Barbara News-Press erupted into a four-alarm fire on July 6, 2006, when editor Jerry Roberts, five other top editors, a columnist and two reporters resigned from the daily newspaper in coastal Southern California. They said they could no longer work for owner Wendy McCaw because of a profound difference of opinion with her newsroom policies.

Since then, more than half of the 50 editorial staff and an estimated 60 newspaper employees have resigned or have been let go; several lawsuits have been filed; the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has been asked to rule on several issues, including a request by staff members to be represented by the Teamsters union; the actions of the nine employees have been honored by several journalism organizations; and McCaw, despite generally negative stories written by the national media and an uproar by the community, continues to run her daily newspaper as she pleases.

McCaw bought the News-Press in 2000 from the New York Times after receiving an estimated \$2.5 billion in a divorce settlement from Seattle cell phone magnate Craig McCaw. She had no journalism experience, but she hired several prominent journalists to run the news, including Roberts, who was a managing editor for the San Francisco Chronicle. Eventually, McCaw and her news staff became estranged over the traditional boundary that separates a newspaper's business interests from its editorial staff. The staff's contention that the owner repeatedly interfered with the news became a profanity-laced resurrection over two incidents.

4. Contrary to the paper's policy on reporting drunken driving dispositions, McCaw blocked publication of the fact that the paper's editorial page editor had been sentenced on a DUI charge after the paper had earlier reported his arrest;
5. After a reporter included the address of West Wing actor Rob Lowe's property, which was made public during a zoning hearing for the proposed construction of a new home, McCaw reprimanded those involved. She also revised company policy to say that the publisher's approval was necessary to publish any addresses.

McCaw has refused to be interviewed, but she said in statements and editorials that the resignations stemmed from violations of company policies and standards, not the owner's perceived "assault on the purity of journalism." Circulation has dropped 9.5 percent from 42,000 to 38,000 during a nine-month period ending March 31.

#### QUESTIONS:

4. Is it ethical for newsroom policies to reflect an owner's special interests?
5. What values, principles and ethics best define public interest journalism?
- 3 Why is "the wall" important for ethical journalism to flourish?
- 4 Do you think journalism is becoming more of a business and less of a profession?
5. Will an erosion of the journalism ethic eventually weaken the right of freedom of speech?

## Profits versus professional obligation

On March 19, 2001, Jay Harris, publisher of the San Jose *Mercury News* resigned. Harris' stated reason was that he felt that Knight Ridder (parent to the *Mercury News*) had put profit goals above fulfilling the public trust. In his resignation letter, Harris stated that the demand for higher profit margins would "necessitate deep and ill-advised staff and expense reductions at the *Mercury News* [that] . . . would poorly serve our readers, our advertisers and Knight Ridder shareholders."<sup>6</sup>

Earlier, executives of the *Mercury News* and Knight Ridder had met to discuss how to respond to the sharp decline in the newspaper's ad revenues and how best to achieve the company's goals for the year. According to Harris, what troubled him the most was that there was "virtually no discussion of the damage that would be done to the quality and aspirations of the *Mercury News* as a journalistic endeavor or to its ability to fulfill its responsibilities to the community."<sup>7</sup> The budget cuts proposed by management would have included newsroom layoffs—layoffs that Harris thought would severely damage the paper's ability to fulfill its obligation to the public it served.

Harris had argued that the *Mercury News* could achieve the near-term goals sought by management, but that those savings would be "more than offset by a long term diminution of the vitality and potential profitability of Knight Rider's Bay Area franchise."<sup>8</sup>

Knight Ridder CEO, Tony Ridder, had a different perspective and questioned Harris' framing of the issue.<sup>9</sup> According to Ridder, the effects of the bursting of the high-tech bubble in 2001 had strong repercussions throughout the entire economy, including, especially, media supported by advertising. Noting that the *Mercury News* specifically serves the "high-tech heartland," Ridder pointed out that the paper is directly subject to the ups and downs of the economic roller coaster of Silicon Valley. Ridder also suggested that the primary commitment of a publisher, such as Harris, should be to "the ongoing health of the underlying enterprise."

Ridder and Harris also differed on several details. According to Ridder, potential newsroom layoffs were not the reason for Harris' resignation. In fact, such layoffs, said Ridder, were contemplated by Harris himself prior to the executive meeting in March. Ridder also disagreed that the quality of news would suffer, even if the news staff were smaller.

News analyst John McManus backed Harris' position when he pointed out that as long as customers are "able to distinguish high low quality goods, enjoy choices, and those choices don't harm society... it may be reasonable—even a moral duty—for executives to maximize

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<sup>6</sup> Jack Hart, Nomination for the Payne Awards for Ethics in Journalism, April 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Jay Harris, "Remarks to the American Society of Newspaper Editors," April 6, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Tony Ridder, "Mercury News Will Remain Strong In Hard Times," Poynter.org, "Today in Journalism," April 11, 2001.

shareholder profits.”<sup>10</sup> However, he wonders what happens to society when all but a handful of daily newspapers are owned by monopolies and when the executives in charge “try to generate the largest possible audience at the lowest reporting cost?” He suggests that while shareholders will probably come out ahead in the short-term, “most of us will lose in the long run.”

Ultimately, according to Harris himself, the resignation was over a “fundamental disagreement over business strategy and an equally fundamental disagreement over whether the company’s values and priorities had been changing over the years.”

“My argument... is that a freedom, a resource so essential to our national democracy that it is protected in our Constitution should not be managed primarily according to the demands of the market or the dictates of a handful of large shareholders.”<sup>11</sup>

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Who do you see as the moral claimants in this case? List all of them.
2. In what ways is a publisher obligated to them? Use Ross’s duties of obligation to help you here.
3. How do you reconcile the tension between turning a legitimate profit and serving the public interest? Can a balance be struck? Who is hurt by leaning too far in either direction and what could you do to minimize that harm?
4. Given that, in this case, the publisher himself is obligated to the parent organization to turn a profit, what do you think Harris’ options were? List at least three alternatives.
5. Do you think Harris made the right decision in resigning? Why or why not?

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<sup>10</sup> John McMannus, “Does Wall Street Have to Trump Main Street,” [gradethenews.org](http://gradethenews.org), February, 13, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Harris, “Remarks to ASNE.”

## VII: OBJECTIVITY VERSUS SUBJECTIVITY

### Patriotism in the Newsroom

On September 17, 2001, Stacey Woelfel, KOMU TV8 news director notified staff via email of the station's policy regarding on air displays of symbols for any cause, including patriotism.

“Leave the ribbons at home when reporting or anchoring for KOMU News,” Woelfel’s e-mail said. “What you do on your own time is up to you, though I would urge you to consider the fact that you are always ‘on the clock’ in terms of being known as a reporter and a representative of the station.”

KOMU is owned by the University of Missouri and employs students as interns year round. KOMU is an “auxiliary enterprise” of the University and is funded solely by outside revenue; however, some faculty members who work at the station are funded by the University. The pressure, both economically and politically, mounted almost immediately. Some Republican state representatives said that they would be “evaluating far more carefully state funding that goes to the school of journalism.”

Columbia Public Schools Board of Education member, Don Schoengarth, in a Letter to the Editor stated,

“What kind of reporters are we training at the journalism school? Is the goal to produce a bunch of androids with no feelings or independent thoughts, who simply smile and read the teleprompter? If our news media remain neutral, we are providing a great moral victory for bin Laden.”

The e-mails that Woelfel received from legislators and the public on the newsrooms policy ranged from scolding to belligerent. Rep. Rod Jetton of the 156<sup>th</sup> district said,

“I will ask you to PLEASE USE COMMON SENSE. This is not a political dilemma or an ethical one. What our country is facing right now is a test of our survival. This is war and there are evil opponents out there who hate Americans. There will be a winner and a loser. Good people will die!!!”

Tammy Sachse, a member of the public had this to say,

“The media staff is responsible for reporting unbiased news, however that should be only unbiased as it relates to the internal workings of the United States. Outside of that, the news media should be very pro US. This lack of support is part of the decay of our nation’s unity that initiated these attacks.”

Many of the e-mails were far more menacing; they used foul language and thinly veiled threats directed toward Woelfel. At least two advertisers also removed their spots from KOMU.

Woelfel had adhered to this policy for more than 20 years. He had defended the policy as a matter of journalistic ethics. The faculty at the Missouri School of Journalism voted in early October to defend Woelfel's decision and show their support for the controversial policy. The Curators of the University made the opposite decision, determining that students and employees were allowed to display patriotic symbols. Woelfel stayed consistent with the original policy and did not make any changes despite being at odds with the University.

Ultimately, the State Legislature decided to withhold some \$50 thousand from the University because of Woelfel's decision.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Do you believe that Woelfel's decision was correct? Why or why not?
2. Are there any circumstances under which it might be acceptable for journalists to show bias? If there are, why would it be acceptable?
3. Put these levels of obligation in the order you believe they should go for working journalists: human being, citizen, professional.

## Citizen Health Emergencies – Who, When, Why and How Many?

With the rising cost of health care and the number of people who are uninsured, there will always be individuals in the community who need financial assistance or community support for medical emergencies. For example, a 12 year old girl in Texas was diagnosed with leukemia and was in need of a bone marrow transplant. While her parents did have insurance, they had not been able to find a donor match and were working with the local blood bank to try to get the community to come and give blood to see if anyone was a match. The local TV news picked up the story and soon it was being covered by many news outlets in the entire state. Thanks to the coverage, the blood drive had an overwhelming response, and a match was eventually found so she could have the transplant. The little girl also received financial support for extra medical expenses and many gifts from local merchants. It certainly seemed as if the news coverage had played an important role in helping this family avoid a tragedy, and it made a heartwarming story with a happy ending.

Meanwhile, your local paper starts to receive an increasing number of pleas from other citizens who have health emergencies and also need help. This created a dilemma for the news staff. Do you cover them all to be fair? Do you pick only the most unique case that will make the most emotional story? Do you choose the neediest person? Do you choose child patients over adult patients? Do you choose the most well-known, deserving or accomplished family? Or do you have a policy that you don't cover individual health cases at all because there it is too hard to be fair?

### QUESTIONS:

1. If you ran a newspaper, what general policy, if any, would you institute for covering individual health emergencies? What would the ethical rationale be for your decision?
2. Explain the possible implications of this policy, such as how all parties will be affected. Is there a creative yet realistic way you can make it a win/win for everyone (or somehow compensate some “negatively” affected parties), and if so, is this the best course of action?
3. Describe a future situation, if any, when you think it would be justified for you to bend the rules on this policy and why?

## IX: DEFINING A JOURNALIST

### Rights for writers

Vanessa Leggett was released from the Federal Detention Center in Houston on January 4, 2002 after 168 days of incarceration. Leggett was jailed because she refused to turn over her notes for a true-crime book that she was in the process of writing. Leggett spent more time in jail than any other journalist in US history.

Leggett, who lectures at a local Houston college, is a writer. She was working on a book on the death of a Houston woman, Doris Angleton, who was found shot to death in April 1997. Angleton's millionaire bookie husband Robert and his brother Roger were charged in the case. The brother committed suicide in jail in February 1998. A state court jury acquitted the husband, and a federal investigation of his dead brother soon followed.

Leggett became interested in the case early on. She was already a criminologist specializing in domestic homicide and had decided to write a book on the Angleton case. The day before Roger Angleton committed suicide, Leggett interviewed him in jail. He left a note admitting his own guilt and exonerating his brother, the murdered woman's husband.

Prior to Robert Angleton's trial, Leggett turned over to local authorities the information she had gathered in her interview with Roger. This information suggested that, despite the suicide note, Robert Angleton had asked his brother to murder Doris. The evidence was not used in the trial and Leggett was not asked to testify. Robert Angleton was acquitted. It turned out that he had been an informant for the Houston police and the FBI.

Subsequently, the FBI asked Leggett to become a paid informant. She refused. They also asked her to delay the publication of her book. She refused. The FBI responded with a subpoena demanding that she turn over every note she had concerning her book in progress, which would have prevented her from continuing her work on the book. She defied the subpoena and was subsequently jailed for contempt of court. Texas has no shield laws protecting journalists or their sources.

The essence of the argument for jailing Leggett was this: The prosecution said that Leggett was not a journalist. She only had one published article in an obscure FBI journal. She did not make her living as a journalist. She also did not have a contract for the publishing of her proposed book.

Leggett's defenders said that she is considered a journalist because she meets the government's own test. In its panel decision of August 17, the court said that it would consider whether the person "(1) is engaged in investigative reporting; (2) is gathering news; and (3) possesses the intent at the inception of the news gathering process to disseminate the news to the public." According to these criteria, her defenders say, Leggett is a journalist because she was in the process of gathering news for her book.

Leggett was ultimately released because the grand jury before which she was ordered to testify had completed its term, which meant there was no longer any way for the witness to comply with the subpoena. She could be subpoenaed again if another grand jury is convened to deal with the case or if Robert Angleton is ever indicted.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Write down your personal definition of what you think a journalist is.
2. Are there any categories of writers you would exempt from your definition? If so, why?
3. According to your definition, do you think Vanessa Leggett should be considered a journalist? Why or why not?
4. Do you think journalists and their sources should be protected from prosecution? Why or why not?
5. Other professionals, such as physicians, have to carry insurance to protect them from law suits, for example. How are journalists similarly protected? Do you think they should be?
6. To what extent, if any, do you think a journalist is obligated like the rest of us to aid in criminal investigations?

## The Imperfect Martyr?

Blogger Josh Wolf was released from federal prison on April 3 after spending more than seven months behind bars for refusing to appear before a grand jury that sought his testimony and video of a San Francisco anarchist demonstration. Wolf was released after a compromise was reached whereas the self-proclaimed anarchist and freelance journalist surrendered the video and the grand jury subpoena was withdrawn.

During a July 2005 anti-G8 protest, the 24-year-old Wolf filmed a San Francisco police officer being struck, and fireworks and a mattress placed under the officer's blocked vehicle. Three protesters were arrested and Wolf's video included parts of the incident. The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force became involved after prosecutors said arson had been committed and that trying to burn a police car constituted a federal crime because the city's police received federal funding. The move also allowed prosecutors to avoid California's shield law since there is no federal shield law.

Wolf had offered to release his video last year because he claimed it had been shown extensively online and on television, and because he didn't think there was any criminal evidence on it. The federal judge who sent him to prison declined to view it. Wolf refused to comply because he believed prosecutors were trying to obtain names and identities of people in the protest. There were three central issues in the dispute:

1. Can journalists refuse grand jury subpoenas, and if so, under what circumstances?
2. Did Wolf meet the legal definition of a journalist or was he just an activist filming?
3. Did the government have standing or was it simply dodging the state law?

Wolf repeatedly lost in federal courts and the established media had a tendency to disown him. He received support, however, from the independent media, the ACLU, National Defense Lawyers and the International Press Institute for his involvement in a First Amendment issue.

Wolf's 226 days in a federal prison surpassed the 168 days spent in jail by Texas true-crime author Vanessa Leggett in 2001. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 134 journalists were imprisoned during the first 11 months of 2006, nine more than in 2005. Forty-nine of them were considered Internet journalists.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Should the definition of a journalist be widened considering the dramatic increase in the influence of bloggers and Internet news?
2. Is the Internet an important news element, and should it receive the same protection?
3. Why should journalists and their sources be protected from prosecution?
4. Is it wrong for journalists not to aid in criminal investigations while protecting their sources?

## X: WHO'S GREATER GOOD?

### Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?

It isn't easy to know how to approach certain stories, especially when it isn't clear which side is right or wrong (perhaps it is a bit of both). How does a journalist know how to characterize certain radical social movements – are they “freedom fighters” or “terrorists”? After the attacks on 9/11, the word “terrorist” seems to be used on a daily basis in the national news. It takes on a more heated meaning since so many U.S. lives were lost and the United States is fighting what they call “a war on terror” in the Middle East.

All groups labeled “terrorists,” are not in the Middle East, however. The FBI has designated many organizations within the United States as domestic terrorists. One such group is the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) which is a group of anonymous individuals who break into animal facilities, such as research labs, fur farms, or industrial farms and release or take animals because they believe the animals are being enslaved and exploited in these facilities. They also often videotape the conditions before they destroy equipment and vandalize the place with animal rights messages. However, unlike most “terrorists,” ALF has never physically harmed a living being (human or otherwise) in any of its actions.

You have just been assigned to a story at the state university in your city, where ALF has broken into the genetics laboratory on campus and stolen two cows, four goats, and a pig who were being used in cloning research to develop genetically modified meat. While not much damage was done, the group did leave an anonymous note admitting their actions and explaining their rationale. Additionally, photos of the animals and their conditions at the lab are available through a national anti-vivisection group (NAVS) who is speaking for ALF but claims not to have been an accomplice in the rescue. The visuals show the animals in barren, sterile windowless stalls, looking bored but unharmed. Others show ALF members with ski masks leading the animals to safety. There are also close-up shots of the animals' faces, which you are sure would evoke emotional responses from readers, if published.

You are uncertain how to proceed with the story beyond the obvious facts about the break-in and theft. You can't speak with ALF members directly, but you can speak with NAVS (on the one side) and the Dean of the Life Sciences Department at the University (on the other side). There is also a local animal rights group on campus who is currently being investigated by the police to ensure they were not involved. While the student group claims no direct involvement or knowledge of the break-in, they are very supportive of the ALF action because “living beings should not be genetically manipulated just to make meat taste better and cheaper.” The student environmental group is also in support of the ALF rescue because they are opposed to genetic modification of foods in general. Needless to say, the scientific community is up in arms over their rights to use animals for research.

While breaking and entering and theft are certainly illegal, you feel the story is not cut and dry as far as who is right and who is wrong. You think back to Harriet Tubman working illegally on the Underground Railroad to free enslaved people – she was labeled a “criminal” back then, but now

she is known as a hero. Does that analogy apply to this situation with non-human victims? Considering changing ethical norms regarding exploitation of beings, should you refer to the ALF action as a “rescue” or a “theft”? Should you characterize the ALF activists using derogatory terms like “terrorists” or “criminals” or using more positive terms like “freedom fighters” or “animal protectors”? How does that change how you might characterize the scientists at the university – are they simply “scientists” and “professors,” or are they “vivisectors” and “animal exploiters” funded by agribusiness? Is there a way to report this story completely objectively, and if so, would that be doing justice to its complexity? While you don’t want to encourage criminal behavior, you also do not want to ignore a legitimate social debate over GMO foods and animal rights (which has largely been ignored by your paper up to now).

**QUESTIONS:**

1. Are there more sides to this story than just animal activists and scientists? What other sources might you draw upon?
2. What kind of story(s) do you decide to publish? Describe the angle, length, prominence, sources, and choice of visuals. Why did you choose this option?
3. How would you resolve the debate over how to characterize each party? What terms would you use for activists and scientists? Is this a rescue or a theft?
4. Who are the affected parties in this decision (human and non-human), and how will they be positively or negatively impacted by your decision?
5. How does this affect how you will handle animal rights issues in the future? If you proactively covered animal rights issues on a regular basis, might that discourage radical or illegal actions from being the main way the activists have to get their issues covered?

## Cover Hate Groups or Censor Them?

The Aryan Nations is coming to town next weekend for a meeting and a protest rally, and they have just sent your paper a press packet. They state that U.S. immigration policies are their main topic. As the news editor, you are wondering how to handle the event, if at all. Certainly you are not obligated to cover all non-profit organization meetings or demonstrations that occur in town, unless they seem important, unique, altruistic, timely, interesting, or popular. For example, your paper always provides a lot of coverage for the March of Dimes and the Breast Cancer walkathons because they receive much support from big wigs in the community, and everyone can get behind their charitable goals. However, you do not provide as much coverage to more controversial or “marginalized” groups, such as environmental activists, nuclear disarmament groups, or anti-abortion groups because they are less popular, less widely supported, and more radical.

Race is such a sensitive topic, and the paper tries to cover it in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony among races. When the local NAACP or other ethnic groups have events, you try to be supportive and cover them to try to make up for a history of these topics going unheard in decades past. The Aryan Nations is a legitimate group, however unfortunate, and they predict their rally will have several hundred people there (not to mention the protestors). So you feel like you must cover it to some degree because the size and controversy makes it newsworthy. You could choose to slam them and totally denounce everything they stand for by favoring an anti-racist standpoint in the way you construct stories. Would that be violating your journalistic obligations to objectivity and balance, though? Should you use this as an opportunity to explore the controversial topic of race on a much deeper level (from both sides), or should you just downplay the Aryan Nation and give them a very small announcement before and after the event, buried on page 20?

### QUESTIONS:

1. What other options do you want to consider for how to cover this story (before, during, and after the Aryan Nation visit)?
2. What parties will be affected by your coverage, and in what ways? Are you ethically more obligated to certain parties? If so, which ones and why?
3. Should journalistic objectivity play a role in this situation, or are there some times when it is okay to be biased towards the “good guys”? Consider that for many years during slavery and segregation, pro-racism was the stance that was more supported and seemed “right” according to social norms and those in power. If objectivity changes with social norms, then is there really any such thing as “objectivity”?
4. What is your decision on the best way to cover this issue, now and moving forward? Consider the angle, amount of space, number of stories, placement, and visuals you would choose.
5. In what way does your decision change how you might cover other controversial or “radical” groups moving forward?

## When to Hold a Story

As a business beat reporter, for three years you've covered the official discussions about a local hospital's possible relocation from its site on the east side of the river to another city on the more heavily populated west side. It wants to build a larger campus and compete nose-to-nose with the dominant regional hospital in the area. Uprooting the small hospital from its 50-year presence on the east side of the river is a highly controversial topic generating constant TV, radio and newspaper coverage. Talk shows and letters to the editor criticize the hospital, planning agencies, and real estate developers because such a move has health care and economic consequences for both communities.

You've cultivated several confidential sources in the business and medical communities and have kept the community up to date on the issue, often publishing accurate reports before officials and leaders know or learn of the facts. When you contact one source he surprises you, naming the property that the hospital has just decided to buy for its relocation site — a location that you know will surprise local leaders and readers. But you have always had a "not for attribution" agreement with this source, as well as a verbal contract to not publish any information he provides until you get confirmation from the hospital corporation.

You phone the hospital's CEO. She is aghast that you know about the new site. Although she won't confirm the information, she says, "A deal is nearly complete, but if you publish the story now, it will jeopardize the negotiations and the deal will certainly fall through." She asks you to wait — possibly three to four weeks.

You are certain that if you share the information with your editors they will demand to know the identity of your source and may insist on publishing immediately, regardless of the CEO's apprehensions. "That's our job, to publish the news," they will likely say. Part of their reason to publish immediately is that other newspapers and broadcast stations will likely obtain the same information and release it immediately, scooping you and your paper. But you have given your word and will refuse to disclose your source's identity. You know that if you publish the story now, and the business deal falls through that's taken three year to reach, you will feel personally responsible.

The hospital CEO makes you this offer Sit on the story until the deal is complete. In exchange, she promises an exclusive interview so that you will have one full day's advance notice to publish the story before your competitors learn of the decision.

### QUESTIONS:

What do you do? Justify your action in ethical terms, considering moral claimants and weighing your obligations to each.

## An Important Look Back

In 2006, two North Carolina newspapers, the Charlotte Observer and The News & Observer of Raleigh, published a 16-page special section that detailed the 1898 Wilmington race riot and the influence the event had on the segregationist South that was a product of it.

The section was a byproduct of the state's 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission, which issued a report earlier in 2006 calling on newspapers that played roles in the riot—principally the Raleigh and Charlotte papers—to acknowledge their complicity and publicize it. The papers, in an effort to ensure that the report was unbiased, hired Timothy Tyson, a visiting professor at Duke University, to write “The Ghosts of 1898.”

The papers admittedly were instrumental in instigating a white supremacy campaign that led to driving blacks from power and a subsequent purge of elected officials that is now considered to be the only successful coup d'état in U.S. history. The riot in Wilmington, then the state's largest city, led to the death of an estimated 300 blacks and another 1,000 being forced to leave the city.

Tyson believes that the event's legacy was the birth of the Jim Crow culture, termination of black voting rights and the beginning of a one-party political system that paralyzed the South for more than half a century until the civil rights movement eventually led to segregation's demise.

Because the healing continues, publication of the section was controversial for both races. Interviews of community members before and after the section's publication indicated, not surprisingly, a definite split among the races about the section. Whites had a tendency to say racism was the norm 100 years ago and should be put in context because such actions would not be acceptable today. The victims of that racism, however, were not so forgiving.

The newspapers believe the mere telling of the story was important because most people—of both races—knew very little about the riot, primarily because authors of textbooks chose to avoid writing about the event and its aftermath. It also could be argued that the papers' current managers wanted to print the section in an effort to separate their current attitudes toward race from the men who published the papers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think less of the papers because they initiated the project only after a state commission suggested that they should own up to their own checkered past?
2. The papers chose not to discuss reparations for the victims of the riot, something that the commission encouraged the state to address. Should they have?
3. Do you think newspapers should take on more of these types of projects?

## Secret or Not?

The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times received considerable criticism after both newspapers published a story on June 23, 2006, that revealed a U.S. government program to access an international banking database. The Bush administration had asked the papers not to run the story because disclosure would weaken the country's war on terror.

The story, which also ran in The Wall Street Journal, detailed a CIA program that had been initiated a few weeks after the 9/11 attacks. It allows the government to gain access—through a subpoena process—to a vast international financial records database, known as Swift, in order to trace banking transactions of people suspected of ties to al-Qaeda. It is used to transmit instructions about bank transfers, not the actual transfers.

The administration said the decision to run the story would compromise an effort that has been instrumental in disrupting the financing of al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. The government's primary concerns were that disclosure would cause international banking executives to withdraw support and cause terrorists to change their behavior. It also argued that the program had the support of Congress and the international banking community.

The newspapers countered in editorials and op-ed pieces published after the story had appeared that they had carefully weighed the national security issue with the public's right to know before deciding to publish. They concluded that the story did not pose a threat to lives or thwart terrorism inquiries, and that the public interest outweighed the potential cost to the counterterrorism efforts.

They said that while the general public may not have known about the program, it was no longer a secret. Their investigations indicated that hundreds, if not thousands, of people were aware of it. They added that the program's oversight was minimal even though it had been operating for more than five years after initially being touted as an urgent but temporary measure.

Other media offered various opinions about the story, comparing it to stories that generally revealed questionable government programs and actions that were initiated for national security purposes, including Abu Ghraib, the CIA secret prisons in Europe and the NSA wiretapping story. Some questioned the value of the story since it discovered no illegalities, there was some oversight and the invasion of privacy seemed to be less of a problem than in the NSA story.

### QUESTIONS:

1. When at war, should civil liberties be less important than national security?
2. Under what circumstances should the government be allowed to censor the press?
3. Do you trust the government to look out for your best interests? Or the media?
4. Do you think the media allows the government to use it in too many instances?

## To Air or Not to Err?

The Voice of America (VOA) is an international multimedia broadcasting service funded by the U.S. Government that broadcasts over 1,000 hours of news, informational, educational, and cultural programs every week to an audience of some 94 million worldwide. VOA programs are produced and broadcast in English and 52 other languages through radio, satellite television, and the Internet.

The first VOA broadcast originated from New York City on February 24, 1942, just 79 days after the United States entered World War II. It was established to bring uncensored news to countries closed to the free flow of information by the war. Speaking in German, announcer William Harlan Hale told his listeners, “Here speaks a voice from America. Every day at this time we will bring you the news of the war. The news may be good. The news may be bad. We shall tell you the truth.”

Originally under the jurisdiction of the State Department, the VOA got its own charter from Congress in 1976 and is now overseen by an appointed board of governors with State Department representation.

On September 25, 2001, just two weeks after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C., the Voice of America aired an exclusive interview with Mullah Mohammed Omar, the head of the Taliban and the protector of Osama bin Laden.

The decision of VOA’s then Acting Director, Myrna Whitworth, and Andre de Nesnera, News Director, to broadcast this interview was stridently opposed by the National Security Council and senior State Department officials, including Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher denounced VOA and defended the Department’s position in a briefing on September 24th.

Shortly after the Omar interview was aired, Whitworth was replaced by a new VOA Director named by the Bush administration. William Safire, the noted *New York Times* columnist, devoted several derisive op-ed pieces to VOA, referring to Whitworth as a “seat-warming bureaucrat” unable to control de Nesnera, her News Director. An earlier Safire column concerning a related, but different, story involving VOA’s coverage of post-September 11th terrorism was scornfully entitled “Equal Time for Hitler.”

According to de Nesnera, “As veteran VOA journalists, it has always been our mission to follow VOA’s charter: that our news be ‘accurate, objective and comprehensive.’ As Edward R. Murrow, head of our then parent organization USIA [United States Information Agency] once said: ‘The measure of our success will be the degree to which we are believed.’ It was, and remains, our conviction that in order to be credible, VOA must report all news objectively and fairly or we risk becoming merely a propaganda tool of the State Department. More importantly, we fail our worldwide audience of more than 90 million listeners, many of whom rely on us as their sole source of objective news.”

In a September 24<sup>th</sup> memo—excerpts of which were subsequently reprinted in numerous news articles in the U.S. and abroad—de Nesnera wrote to his staff that “it takes a long time to build up credibility and an instant to lose it.”

On September 20<sup>th</sup> 2001, Taliban officials contacted Spozmai Maiwandi then chief of VOA’s Pashto service, informing her that Mullah Omar was willing to talk to the Voice of America. She conducted the interview along with Ed Warner, a senior News Division correspondent. This was a worldwide exclusive, even more remarkable given the Taliban’s persecution of women in Afghanistan. Given the political significance of the interview, Acting Director Whitworth followed protocol and, as a courtesy, informed the NSC and the State Department of its existence. She was subsequently told, on Friday September 21<sup>st</sup>, that VOA could not use it.

Whitworth and de Nesnera decided that the interview would be used, but should be balanced with an interview with the exiled King of Afghanistan, living in Rome. A correspondent was dispatched to the Italian capital to pursue this over the weekend. On Monday September 24<sup>th</sup>, following an unsuccessful attempt to speak with the King, Whitworth and de Nesnera decided to use portions of the Mullah Omar interview along with excerpts of President Bush’s address to Congress, excerpts of an interview of Georgetown University Islamic expert, John Esposito, and remarks by a spokesman for the Northern Alliance opposing the Taliban. Warner wrote the final piece which was aired on Tuesday, September 25<sup>th</sup>.

**QUESTIONS:**

1. What are the arguments you see in favor of running the Mullah Omar piece? What are the arguments against running it?
2. How does the running of the interview contribute or not contribute to exploring the “truth?”
3. Given that the VOA is a government organization and is paid for with taxes, do you see its obligation as a news service the same as that of privately funded media? Why?
4. Who are the moral claimants in this situation and why are you obligated to them?
5. Discuss the issue of balance in reporting and explain whether you think the interview either added balance or was needed at all.
6. What do you think the role of the media should be during national crisis? Do you think limitations should be put on the media during times of war? If so, what types and why?

## The Terrorist Manifesto

You are the editor of the *Mountain Times*, a daily newspaper in Aimes, Colorado, a town of 130 thousand people. Aimes is also home to Colorado Union College, a school of 10 thousand students. The college is known for its top-flight liberal arts program and its high scholastic achievements.

Despite its relatively small size, Aimes has been the victim of two mail bombings over the past 18 months. In both cases, college professors were injured—neither seriously. The bomber has not been caught and the local authorities as well as the FBI have no serious leads.

Yesterday, you received in the mail a letter from an anonymous person claiming to be the bomber. Enclosed in the letter was a lengthy “manifesto” outlining the bomber’s personal philosophy and his reasons for sending explosives to the two professors. Apparently, his/her goal is total anarchy, an overthrow of the government at all levels, and a move to a society of totally independent “city states.” The two professor were targeted as symbols of the existing social order (they are a political scientist and a business professor). The bombs, he /she claims, were not intended to kill—a claim seemingly supported by the fact that neither of the victims was seriously injured. However, the bomber now insists that his/her political philosophy be printed by the local newspaper in its entirety or he/she will soon be sending out mail bombs designed to do more than just injure. The tone of the threat clearly indicates that he/she is willing to take a life in order to be heard.

You have contacted both the local police and the FBI. The letter is now in the hands of the FBI who tell you that, so far, no finger prints, DNA, or any other identifying features have been lifted from the paper or envelope. The FBI is urging you to run the “manifesto” in hopes that the bomber will further identify him- herself in some way as a response to the publication.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think that running this “manifesto” compromises your autonomy as a media professional? Why or why not?
2. To what extent do you think the news media should cooperate with law-enforcement authorities? If they do, what principles, other than autonomy, might they compromise?
3. Give an example of a situation, other than this one, in which cooperation might be an acceptable option.
4. What would you do in this situation and why?

## **“No Girls Allowed”**

The local Community Club is a hub of town activity, but in its 77-year history, it has never had a woman member. The club promotes community projects and social activities and also has political influence. Knowing that some women would like to join the club, a reporter for the newspaper wants to interview club officers and find out why no women have ever been admitted as members. The superintendent of schools, a past president of the club, asks the editors to postpone covering the story until after the town votes on a school referendum two months away. He is afraid a controversial story about the club could cause some people to vote against the referendum in retribution.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Should the editors agree to delay coverage?
2. How can they justify their decision?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of delaying coverage?
4. What risks do editors take if they go ahead with the story?

## XI: ELECTRONIC MEDIA

### Digital Editing I

Fearless Frank, intrepid radio reporter, is doing a story on the use of organic animal feed at the Boneless Chicken Ranch. While he was at the ranch, Frank stood in the chicken house and recorded himself narrating the opening of the story (“Here at the Boneless Chicken Ranch, they’ve decided to switch to organic chicken feed”), with the chickens clucking the background. Unfortunately, when he got back to the radio station, he found that the sound of dozens of clucking chickens completely drowned out his narration. Luckily, Frank had about 5 minutes of nat sound on the same recording, so he re-recorded the narration in the studio and overdubbed it on top of the nat sound track. Frank didn’t alter the text of his narration at all.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Did Fearless Frank mislead his listeners? How and why, or why not? (Be sure to refer to the ethical principles we’ve covered in class in your response.)
2. If Frank acted ethically, what should he say to critics who say he was unethical?
3. If Frank acted unethically, what should he have done differently?

## Digital Editing 2

A recent documentary produced by your investigative unit has revealed that a major US mining company, Big Bore Resources, used dubious employment practices in its overseas ventures. The documentary revealed that in its largest South American mine, Big Bore contracted out the hiring of local laborers to a local contractor. That contractor has been charged, but never convicted of using slave labor in many of its dealings. In your documentary, your reporter interviewed the president of Big Bore who denied knowledge of the hiring practices of the local contractor. In fact, said the president, " Big Bore is second to none when it comes to its employees". Two days after the documentary airs (and gets a lot of praiseworthy notice in the papers), you gets a letter from the lawyers representing Big Bore, the noted firm of Sue, Grabbit & Run. They claim that the President of Big Bore was misquoted, and that in fact he said that "we have had concerns about some of the contractors, but Big Bore is second to none when it comes to its employees." The lawyers say they have a recording of the original interview and that your editing o(the interview portrayed their president in a bad light and they want to know what ,response you have to their claim.

### QUESTIONS:

1. What rules do you have about the nature of an edit?
2. What are the dangers inherent in digital editing that are different from analog?
3. Are there circumstances when an interview should be unedited or minimally edited?
4. What gUidelines should be used for 'cleaning up' the grammar and syntax of sources, especially public officials?

## **Censorship or Good Taste?**

Fearless Frank is reporting live from Coos Bay, Oregon in the aftermath of a massive tsunami. The scene is chaos – flooded streets, downed power lines, panicked citizens searching desperately for friends and loved ones. As Frank describes the scene, a distraught mother comes up behind him and screams “Help us! Help us! Won’t somebody fucking help us?!?!” More people rally to Frank’s microphone, shouting cries for help laced with obscenities. Back at the station, board operator Sensible Sarah is concerned that the profanity may be a threat to the station’s broadcast license. Using the station’s profanity delay, Sarah “dumps” all the offending words, rendering the coverage choppy and hard to follow.

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Should Frank have terminated his live feed? Why or why not?
2. Should Sarah have used the delay system? Why or why not?

## Online News

As the head of Online News at your network, MidAmerica Public Radio, you have raised the profile of your site. The number of monthly hits is now in the millions, almost doubled from a year ago. MAPR has also been very successful in using the online presence to fundraise, promote and link to related sales opportunities. It is becoming, in effect, a cash cow. Recently the head of Corporate Outreach has wondered whether there is a way in which the site could be used for more promotional issues - especially about profiling your most popular host, Palisade Tiller. Tiller's weekly show is what really defines the network and audience research has shown that listeners want more of him. His program is lavishly underwritten by a number of major corporations and it would be good, suggests the head of Corporate Outreach if you could acknowledge this in your usual, subtle public radio way.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Is Online News different from the rest of the network? If it is, how?
2. Are there any legitimate commercial possibilities that would not impinge on the online journalism?
3. What limits, if any should be part of the site?
4. Should your online journalism compete with your news service, enhance it or reflect it?
5. Should there be limits to your company's corporate presence on the website?
6. Should your reporters contribute 'blogs' (individual weblogs) to the site? If so, should these be edited by someone else before being linked to the site?

## Call-Ins

On your local call-in show, "Chatting With Charlie," you have had a series of city council candidates on the program prior to Election Day. It's three days before the election and you have booked your last guest, Ms. Bundlejoy Cosysweet from the Good Vibes Party. The candidate has strong support in the progressive community. Your program goes on at 2 p.m. and this morning, your news department ran a story, which originated on the Internet, that reportedly linked Ms. Cosysweet to the Symbionese Liberation Army back in the 1960s. In fact there are rampant rumors that Ms. Cosysweet was a sorority sister of Patty Hearst. If a rumor becomes widely reported, does public radio have any journalistic or legal obligations in reporting what appears to be common knowledge?

### QUESTIONS:

1. How should hosts and producers handle rumors and information that cannot be immediately verified when introduced live on the air during call-ins?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of call screening?
3. How should public radio call-ins handle unpopular ideas and opinion?
4. What's the value of "open phones" call-ins, in contrast to programs in which the host or producer sets the topic?

## Balance

It is February 2004 and the campaign season has begun. The Republican campaign is clear: the President will go for a second term. The Democratic field is more crowded as is the range of "third party" candidates. Because of the ongoing tensions in the Middle East, one of those "third party" candidates is looking surprisingly strong in early polls because of his anti-immigrant platform. You are getting a lot of email from listeners and advocates who want to hear more about this party. But you are concerned that reporting might legitimate their ideas which many in your news department say they find personally distasteful. Do you report the contenders differently in the early days compared to later in the year?

### QUESTIONS:

1. What role should the polls play in determining your coverage?
2. Should public radio have a different role in national elections compared to other news media? Nationally? Locally?
3. Does public radio have an obligation to report on political movements that are in opposition to the values of public radio?
4. Are there circumstances when balance would be found in more than two opinions?
5. How do "experts" help or hinder balance?
6. In what cases should third-party candidates be included in broadcast debates?

## Funding Conflicts

You are the news director at your station, and your general manager says that he has obtained a large source of funding for your science and environmental coverage. The source is a public advocacy group called GreenState that has helped the public schools in the state with high quality science material. In fact, the programs are considered a model for public education. While the funding comes from a state body, there is a long tradition of "arm's length" relationships between the grantor and the grantees. GreenState is headed by a highly respected public figure. Your GM is delighted especially because your reporter will have access to audio archives at the state capitol and will be in the group's offices, adjacent to the State Capitol. This will work out well, says the GM because your newsroom has won a number of awards for its hard hitting environmental reporting, especially concerning the way the State has mismanaged a number of high profile logging and mining contracts.

### QUESTIONS:

1. What the benefits of this kind of relationship?
2. What are the downsides?
3. What must be done to insure the arm's length relationship is maintained?
4. What are the roles and relationships between GreenState and your station?
5. What would need to be done to establish a mutually beneficial relationship?
6. What are the warning signs that this relationship is not mutually beneficial?
7. What guidelines do you have for reporting on your funders, especially reporting on your university licensee?

## Conflicts of Interest

Your senior political reporter has a regular spot on a nationally televised political talk show every Sunday morning. He has been encouraged by that program to express his own opinions. He has been careful about doing so in the past. But last Sunday in a particularly emotional debate about abortion, he revealed that not only is he strongly opposed to abortion but he participated along with his parish in a large demonstration on the National Mall. In speaking with your reporter on Monday, he has informed you that 1) he has a right to his opinion under the 1st amendment and 2) he does not believe that having a strong opinion makes him an unprofessional reporter. It is true that you can find no instance where his reporting on this subject appears tainted by his opinions.

### QUESTIONS:

1. What are the boundaries between journalism and personal beliefs?
2. Under what circumstances would you reassign or remove a reporter?
3. Can you limit the outside activities of an employer?
4. Can you ask your employee to inform you of any possible conflicts of interest?
5. Does the reputation of your news organization trump the right of expression?
6. Should journalists give speeches at events sponsored by interest groups?
7. Does it make a difference if the journalist is not paid for the speech?