

DEPARTMENT of MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

MC71116A

Asking the Right
Questions

Term : Autumn 2011

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ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS – Research in Practice**AUTUMN 2011****MC71116A WEDNESDAYS 11.00 A.M. to 1.00 P.M. in Screen 1, (MRB)****Media Research Building Compulsory core course)**

This course aims to equip students with the critical, analytical and practical skills to research and construct stories for public consumption. This involves three elements: *the procedural* – asking the right questions of whom, when and where; *the political* – knowing the organisational context in which the story has emerged, the constructs in which it will be seen, and the ways in which it will be perceived; and *the personal* – knowing what you can or cannot bring to the story, and managing the human factors that will enhance or obscure your story.

The lectures in the first half of term concentrate on the British system, governmental and local, and in particular on the many different opportunities now available to online researchers. The second half of term concentrates on specialist territories that require particular understanding and research skills, from investigative journalism and statistics to politics and the law. In week 1 you will be assigned a subject brief – a 'beat' – a research report on which must be undertaken, written up and uploaded online on Learn.Gold by the end of Week 5 (**Friday 4th November**). In Week 7, you will be set a further research task that will be deliverable before the beginning of the Spring Term (**Friday 6th January**). Each of these amounts to 50% of this course assessment.

Outcomes:

By the end of this lecture series you should:

- Understand the British political system, both national and local, and how to access and interrogate its representatives
- Have a working knowledge of research resources online and elsewhere, knowing how to access and validate them while recognising unreliable sources
- Know how to understand complexity in issues as diverse as fraud & statistics, and have the competence to render them comprehensible to a lay audience
- Have evolved a healthy scepticism about 'official sources' and know how to interpret press statements, public pronouncements and the latest figures

1. Sources and Systems**(5th October)****PETER LEE-WRIGHT**

- The evolution of a political press and broadcast industry and their relations with established methods of government information and regulation.
- Recognising the way stories are spun and how they play for the different interests and how to unpick them for the audience.
- The development of research processes, areas of expertise and specialist knowledge.
- Negotiating and managing essential access to places and people, and building contacts.
- ALLOCATION OF TEAMS & BRIEFS FOR THE BEAT REPORT EXERCISE.

KEY TEXT: Morrison, James (2011) *Essential Public Affairs for Journalists* (2nd ed.) Oxford University Press

and accompanying website <http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/9780199592005/>

ALSO SEE: Goldacre, Ben (2009) *Bad Science* London: Fourth Estate

Kampfner, John (2010) *Freedom For Sale: How We Made Money and Lost Our Liberty* Pocket Books

Philo, Greg & Berry, Mike (2011) *More Bad News from Israel* Pluto Press

Walsh, Declan (2011) *Insh'Allah Nation: A Journey through Modern Pakistan* Bodley Head

2. Interrogating the Political Agenda	(12th October)
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PETER LEE-WRIGHT

- How our systems of government operate, set the agenda, with what objective, and how best to approach them?
- Dealing with local and national government offices, corporations & press officers, and establishing credibility.
- Understanding the political mind and politicians' problematic dependence upon the media
- The role of the political correspondent: Keeping in with government while staying impartial and managing political contacts across the parties

VISITING SPEAKER: TBA

TEXTS: Adams, Sally & Hicks, Wynfors (2009) *Interviewing for Journalists* (2nd ed.) Routledge
Edwards, David & Cromwell, David (2009) *Newspeak in the 21st Century* Pluto Press
Fogg, Christine (2005) *Release the Hounds: A Guide to Research for Journalists and Writers* Allen & Unwin
Franklin, Bob & Carlson, Matt (Eds.) (2010) *Journalists, Sources, and Credibility: New Perspectives* Routledge

3. Online Research for Journalists	(19th October)
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MURRAY DICK

- Celebrity Safari – how to track down the elusive talent
- Searching the Invisible Web – the online tools available for all
- Search strategies for the Web – using metadata creatively
- Contributor finding – members of the public, experts and academics: how to find and validate the right people for your journalistic needs
- Functional sources – from archive to music, free feeds to wire services, fact checking to sound effects, the cornucopia of online resources

TEXTS: Ibbotson, Trevor & Rudin, Richard (2002) *An Introduction to Journalism: Essential Techniques and Background Knowledge* Focal Press
Löffelholz, Martin & Weaver, David (Eds.), (2008) *Global Journalism Research: Theories, Methods, Findings, Future* Blackwell Publishing

4. Freedom of Information	(26th October)
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TIM CROOK

- The principles and operation of the Freedom of Information Act
- Its applications and limitations: how to use it and where it does not work
- Some success stories – including the Westminster expenses scandal

TEXTS: Crook, Tim (2011) *Crook's Media Law: Analysing Key Cases: Main Elements of UK and US Media Law, Practice, Theory and International Perspectives* Kultura
Morrison, James (2011) op.cit. pp 575-96

5. Economics for Beginners

(2nd November)

PETER LEE-WRIGHT

- Tracking the intricacies of business and banking
- Maintaining sources and contacts without compromise
- Presenting figures and complexity to a lay audience

VISITING SPEAKER: Paul Mason, Economics Editor, BBC Newsnight TBC

TEXTS: Mason, Paul (2010) *Meltdown: The End of the Age of Greed* London: Verso

Tett, Gillian (2009) *Fool's Gold: How Unrestrained Greed Corrupted a Dream, Shattered Global Markets and Unleashed a Catastrophe* London: Little, Brown

Parker, R. (1997) *Journalism & Economics: The Tangled Webs of Profession...* See:

http://www.hks.harvard.edu/presspol/publications/papers/discussion_papers/d25_parker.pdf

MONITORING WEEK – NO LECTURE ON WEDNESDAY 9TH NOVEMBER

6. Foreign Reporting: Impartiality in the Middle East

(16th November)

PETER LEE-WRIGHT

- Acquiring the skills and diplomacy required for working as a foreign correspondent
- The problems of reporting where both sides regard impartiality as opposition and where one side has vastly superior forces and news management skills
- Reporting for news networks predisposed to one narrative, with an audience less interested in the complexity of foreign affairs

VISITING SPEAKER: SIMON McGREGOR-WOOD, former ABC Middle East Bureau Chief

TEXTS: Philo, Greg & Berry, Mike (2011) *More Bad News from Israel* London: Pluto Press

<http://www.worldpress.org/Mideast/2248.cfm>

<http://www.mererhetoric.com/blog/media-bias/anti-israel-journalism/>

7. Investigation and Information

(23rd November)

PETER LEE-WRIGHT

- The principles and practices of investigative journalism
- The conception of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, trust-funded in the American fashion to do work uneconomic for strapped news organisations.
- Examples of stories that have resulted, from NHS whistle-blowers to the Zac Goldsmith electoral expenses row.
- How it compares in practice to US constitutional rights & EU ways of work.

VISITING SPEAKER: GAVIN MACFADYEN, Director of Centre for Investigative Journalism and co-founder, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism

TEXT: John Mair, Richard Lance Keeble (2011) *Investigative Journalism; Dead or Alive?* Abramis

Also See: <http://onlinejournalismblog.com/2011/08/23/has-investigative-journalism-found-its-feet-online-part-1/>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2011/07/investigative_journalism_in_th.html

<http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/>

8. Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics

(30th November)

PETER LEE-WRIGHT

- The evolving role of datajournalism, mining the realms of newly available Government data and assessing Wikileaks
- Where news stories are based upon "new research findings" of a statistical kind - percentages, polls and projections – how to assess figures & findings
- Use and abuse - how to identify the selective distortion of statistical information and its conflation of non-comparable indicators
- The issues where partial presentation indicates a partisan stance, often on politically volatile subjects like crime and immigration

VISITING SPEAKER: **SIMON ROGERS**, Editor, *Guardian Datablog & Datastore*, 'Statistical Journalist of the Year' 2010 TBC

See: <http://journalistsresource.org/reference/research/statistics-for-journalists/>
<http://www.straightstatistics.org/article/journalism-under-influence>

9. Security Issues

(7th December)

TIM CROOK

- Managing the tricky balance between freedom of information and security
- The system of voluntary agreement to suppress stories subject to a Defence Advisory Notices (D-notices)
- How to work with the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces

VISITING SPEAKER: **AIR MARSHALL VALLANCE**, *Secretary of the D-Notice Committee (TBC)*

See: [http://www.powerbase.info/index.php/Defence_Advisory_\(DA\)_Notice_System](http://www.powerbase.info/index.php/Defence_Advisory_(DA)_Notice_System)
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-14572768>

10. Reporting Poverty & Distress

(14th December)

PETER LEE-WRIGHT

- How to approach the reporting of disasters and poverty, evading the news tendency to 'tragedy tourism'.
- Framing pictures and stories that respect and empower subjects rather than endorse their victimhood.
- Dealing with violence; protecting colleagues and sources.
- What is the bottom line for journalism and where is it going?.

TEXTS: Coté, William & Simpson, Roger (2000) *Covering Violence: A guide to ethical reporting about victims and trauma* New York: Columbia University Press

McLaughlin, Greg (2002) *The War Correspondent* Pluto Press

Seaton, Jean (2005) *Carnage and the Media: The Making and Breaking of News About Violence* Allen Lane

NB Lectures liable to change at short notice due to availability of speakers