

McGill

SYMPOSIUM ON JOURNALISTIC COURAGE



October 8 and 9, 2013

Grady  College

The McGill program is funded by the McGill Lecture Endowment.

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SYMPOSIUM ON JOURNALISTIC COURAGE

Excerpts from five group discussions:

- Pitfalls and land mines: Making our way through conflict reporting
- Eyewitness to terror: The trauma of the Boston Marathon and the courageous battle to recover
- The sports writer's challenge: Taking on the beloved institution
- Haunted by Ghost Factories: Digging into dirt and big data
- The Hazelwood Decision at 25

Note: This report was written by Carolyn Crist

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Photos by Shanda Crowe and
Sarah Freeman, unless noted

Welcome

John Greenman: On behalf of my colleagues in the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, welcome to the McGill Symposium.

The McGill Symposium, now in its sixth year, is an outgrowth of the McGill Lecture.

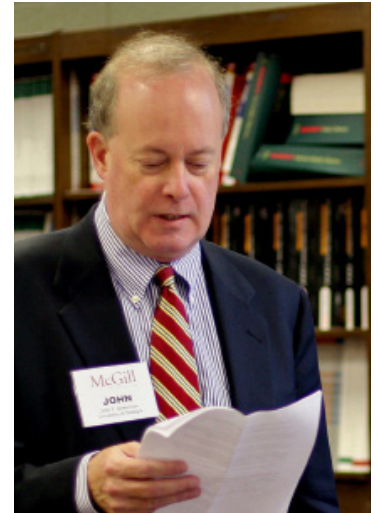
For more than 30 years, the McGill Lecture has brought significant figures in journalism to the University of Georgia to help us honor Ralph McGill's courage as an editor.

The McGill Symposium brings together students, faculty and leading journalists to consider what journalistic courage means and how it is exemplified by reporters and editors.

Today, 12 McGill Fellows – undergraduate and graduate students selected by a faculty committee for their strengths in academic achievement, practical experience and leadership – join nine McGill Visiting Journalists for a six-hour discussion.

Topics will include:

- Pitfalls and land mines: Making our way through conflict reporting
- Eyewitness to terror: The trauma of the Boston Marathon and the courageous battle to recover
- The sports writer's challenge: Taking on the beloved institution
- Haunted by Ghost Factories: Digging into dirt and big data"



John F. Greenman,
McGill Symposium Co-Director



McGill Symposium Co-Director
Diane Murray

- The Hazelwood Decision at 25

Today will be a success if the journalists, faculty and students engage one another rigorously. We hope, by day's end, to answer a question posted by Melissa Ludtke in Nieman Reports. Melissa asked: What does courage look like in the practice of journalism?

Pitfalls and land mines: Making our way through conflict reporting

McGill Visiting Journalists:

Dorothy Parvaz, special projects editor, Al Jazeera, who also is the 2013 recipient of the McGill Medal in Journalistic Courage

Sherif Mansour, Middle East and North Africa area director, Committee to Protect Journalists

Moderator:

Lisa Schnellinger, senior project consultant, UPINext/Pakistan

No story is worth your life. Or is there one?

After spending 19 days in an Iranian detention center, Dorothy Parvaz still thinks some stories are worth risking her life. As she sees it, these stories are unsafe for everyone. If she doesn't take it, then the risk transfers to the reporter who does take the assignment.

"People's stories are not being heard," she said. "Whether that's covering an oppressed population or getting an important piece of nuanced information to clarify a story."



McGill Visiting Journalist Sherif Mansour
and Moderator Lisa Schnellinger

It's not about ego, she added. Reporters must constantly recalculate their situations and safety while on assignment.

"There can't be just two sides — pro and against — a situation, so how could I not go tell the other stories?" she said. "But remember, you can't report from behind bars."

On the other hand, Sherif Mansour thinks no story is worth a life. After talking to friends and families of more than 1,000 journalists who have been killed since 1992, Mansour believes some stories carry too high of a risk. But he's here to help mitigate those risks.

"Most of those killed weren't in a crossfire situation," he said. "They covered corruption cases, and they were killed premeditatedly."

In particular, Mansour is worried about freelance and new media journalists who don't have a professional organization to lobby on their behalf. Without a company's resources, these reporters often don't have the finances to invest in safe hotel rooms, communications, or legal help if jailed.

The danger often falls to those doing the reporting, Lisa Schnellinger added. Though she lived in Afghanistan for two years to help reporters start their own media enterprises, she never felt like she was risking her life.

"They were the ones out there on the front lines, and I was compelled to stand by my colleagues," she said. "They were the ones who had to make that decision day in and day out to risk their lives to report."

Some editors want body counts and the daily news update, Fellow Tia Lecorchick commented. How can a reporter cover what's important or add context? Give the editor something better, Schnellinger said.

"You may still have to get the body count," she said. "But if it's interesting and compelling, you can often persuade the editor to look at another story as well."

Sometimes the story that matters isn't the one that bleeds, Mansour said. A reporter must find these stories and send them to editors.

"People are interested in stories about the treasures that are being destroyed, such as mosques," he said. "They're not covered much. We must be courageous and insistent on showing it."

Multimedia and graphics give great avenues for context. Parvaz uses links to past stories, boxes to explain numbers, and brief analyses to give background. She can't explain a leader's biography or the conflict's history in each story, but she likes to include multiple points of entry for readers.

"They were the ones who had to make the decision day in and day out to risk their lives to report."

—Dorothy Parvaz

"Give background information in a conversational vernacular," she said. "Put your arm around someone and tell them what happened today."

Fellow Meredith Dean wondered if speaking the native language of the country helps to tell stories — and keep journalists out of jail. Absolutely, Parvaz said.



Fellow Shanda Crowe, McGill
Visiting Journalist Sherif Mansour,
Moderator Lisa Schnellinger and
Fellow Megan Ernst

"Cultural [literacy] is equally as important," she added. "Understanding the culture in Iran and knowing how to communicate that helped to humanize me to my interrogator."

Parvaz could show her interrogator that she saw him as a human as well, and she often asked him questions about himself. She also noted the importance of "digitally preparing" for international reporting by ensuring that all social media profiles and published stories accurately show who you are.

"It was my task every day to convince him that I was not a spy and that I should not be charged," she said. "It's now as much of a digital forensic search as verbal exchange."

Fellow Lindsey Cook asked about the stigma associated with female reporters taking dangerous assignments overseas. Parvaz agreed that she is frustrated by the ongoing double standard between the genders.

"I hate the perception that female foreign correspondents are a circus act," she said. "Men can go get shot at and are seen as rock stars. When something happened to me, they asked if I really wanted to go back again."

Parvaz would like to see a more open conversation about the realities of foreign correspondence, including the threats, cultural conflicts, and sexual assaults of both genders. Fellow Jodi Murphy asked how newsrooms should combat the romantic perception of foreign reporting.

"It's up to the reporter to be hard-nosed about it and realize that security comes first," Parvaz said. "Many newsroom managers these days don't have reporting experience and don't realize what they're asking you to do."

That's particularly true for freelance workers who don't have company resources.

"Value your work," Parvaz said. "Some people will always write it for cheaper, but you must know your needs and negotiate."

Mansour also believes it's important to discourage reporters from traveling to truly dangerous areas. When conflict escalated in Syria, many news organizations decided not to send reporters.

"When journalists are being kidnapped, there's a point when we should enforce a limit and encourage no coverage," he said. "But then the big question is whether that gives the regime a way out. We want everyone to be safe, but we don't want the bad guys to go free."

Fellow Jeffrey McNair wondered about the number of journalist deaths increasing each year, with 40 cases reported so far this year and 78 cases reported in 2012 — the largest since the Committee to Protect Journalists started in 1992. Mansour said this is likely because the number of journalists has increased and more people are reporting deaths to the organization.

"The definition has grown to include bloggers, fixers and translators who help journalists, and TV crews," he said. "We also see more people who are using media as a tool to conduct activism and blur the lines of journalism."

Those reporters tend to take more risks and report controversial stories. Governments are also realizing that information is a source of power, and the way to stop

free speech is to go after the ones who are spreading information, Mansour said. The committee is partnering with organizations such as UNESCO to encourage government accountability and openness.

"It's difficult to create change if one organization is fighting," he said. "Now we work with policymakers to raise the price for governments not conceding or delivering food or legal services to imprisoned journalists."

Despite the threat, journalists will continue to report in their countries, Parvaz said. Though Iran gave no accountability for treatment of journalists when she was growing up, she was determined to report.



Grady College Dean Charles Davis, McGill Medal recipient Dorothy Parvaz and McGill co-director John Greenman

"You just go into it with an anticipation of being arrested," she said. "You retain the services of an attorney to represent you and keep low expectations."

It's this drive to serve the community that keeps her going.

"It's as simple as connecting the dots on any given story," Parvaz said. "You have to be willing to have doors slammed in your face, be called names and bear witness to gruesome things."

Eyewitness to terror: The trauma of the Boston Marathon and the courageous battle to recover

McGill Visiting Journalist:

John Tlumacki, photographer, The Boston Globe

Moderator:

Mark E. Johnson, senior lecturer, University of Georgia

When the first bomb exploded yards away from John Tlumacki during the 2013 Boston Marathon, he ran toward the destruction and shot more than 500 frames. He didn't realize until he returned to the Boston Globe newsroom what he captured.

One of Tlumacki's first images was the iconic news photograph that ran on the cover of Sports Illustrated. A runner is on the ground, and three police officers are turning in three different directions to respond to the explosion. Another image captured the second bomb exploding just two blocks from the finish line.

"Everything you learn takes place in one second," Tlumacki said. "Do you run forward or backward in this moment?"

He ran forward. At the barricades where the injured had fallen, Tlumacki captured heroic moments of spectators helping each other. Kevin Corcoran comforted his wife Celeste, who lost her legs. Next to them, two men held together the femoral artery of their daughter, Sydney Corcoran.

Tlumacki took photographs for less than 15 minutes and turned to leave. A police officer asked him to use dignity while shooting.

"I had that going through my head, as well as the possibility of another explosion," he said. "It's something you never prepare to see or do."



Moderator Mark Johnson and McGill Visiting Journalist John Tlumacki

Once he transmitted photos on his nearby laptop, Tlumacki called his wife to say he was safe and drove to the newsroom. Only then did he realize he had blood on his sneakers. He was shaken while he removed them but immediately sat and began reviewing the frames, ultimately turning in 30 that afternoon.

"I became emotional and involved in a good way once I began to comprehend everything," he said. "It was difficult to sleep at night at first. I couldn't get the images out of my head."



One of the many images that John Tlumacki photographed following the Boston Marathon bombing

But Tlumacki didn't back away from the event aftermath. He took every interview opportunity to talk about his experience.

"I felt it was important for people to know what it's like to be a photojournalist," he said. "That's been my ongoing journey."

Since April, Tlumacki has documented the recovery of several spectators who were injured and the reunion with those who helped save them, particularly the Corcoran family. When he first met Celeste in a Boston hospital, she said she knew he would have put down his camera to help her.

"It meant so much to me for someone to say that," he said. "I told her I was sorry I had to take her photo that day and made the commitment to document her recovery."

It has been an emotional ride. After weeks of difficult rehab and a tearful return home, Sydney achieved her goal of attending senior prom and Celeste tried several pairs of prosthetic legs. Tlumacki documented the tense moment when Kevin and Celeste crossed Boylston Street near the explosion for the first time. He was also there when Kevin came home from a tough day at work and began crying. Tlumacki felt like a part of the family and an intrusion at the same time.

"It was an honor to be able to do this," he said. "It was therapy for me. I felt guilty when I left people laying in the street, and this was a way to give back."

"You are getting paid to do a job and be the eyes of the readers around the world," Tlumacki said. "When I realized I was the only photographer near the explosion, I knew I wasn't just representing the Boston Globe but the world."

—John Tlumacki

Though Tlumacki will continue to document the family's story through the holidays, he'll never forget a pivotal moment in his own emotional recovery — when Celeste asked to see

the photos of herself on the sidewalk. She and Sydney poured through the frames in awe, noting the blood on the ground and the placement of their limbs.

"I never thought in my lifetime that a family would invite me into their lives and be thankful to see what their legs looked like," he said. "I don't know if it goes beyond the boundaries of journalism to be able to hug them now, but it's just incredible to me."

On the day of the marathon, Grady College professor Mark Johnson remembered his own childhood days at the event and nine years shooting photographs for the Associated Press. After the explosions, he frantically searched the photo credits for his friends' names

and hoped they were safe. He saw Tlumacki's name and realized he was closest to the scene and the one who captured the most important visual images that day. He asked Tlumacki what it was like to be in that moment.

"You are getting paid to do a job and be the eyes of the readers around the world," Tlumacki said. "When I realized I was the only photographer near the explosion, I knew I wasn't just representing the Boston Globe but the world. That drove me further into the scene."

Tlumacki was on the scene because he stayed more than two hours after the first runners crossed the finish line. In addition to photographing the elite runners, Tlumacki likes to capture the event as a whole — the people who run in costumes and tuxedos, the families who raise money, the every-day runners who do cartwheels as they cross.

"When you think it's over, it's not over," he said. "I could have left an hour earlier, but I would have missed everything."

That's why he tells students and fellow photojournalists to know their cameras and always be ready.

"You can't hesitate. You have to react with the camera," he said. "You must trust yourself and know how you're going to react."



McGill Visiting Journalist John Tlumacki

As the hundreds of nurses, police officers and spectators immediately began to help others following the explosion, Tlumacki never doubted his decision to document the scene.

"This was the most important contribution I could make," he said. "If there were more photographers or if there weren't as many EMTs, things may have been different."

Fellow Nick Watson wondered how Tlumacki felt about his photographs being edited in other publications. The New York Daily News replaced Celeste's legs, and others removed blood.

"That was reality. Don't run the picture if you have to doctor it," Tlumacki said. "Several victims who were upset

"Emotions are so important. Without them, your photos don't have emotion and you can't tell the story."

—John Tlumacki

at first called me later and apologized. The photos helped to raise money for them and brought awareness to the reality of terrorism."

Fellow Tia Lecorchick asked how emotions help or hinder his work and how Tlumacki channels emotions into better journalism.

"Emotions are so important," he said. "Without them, your photos don't have emotion and you can't tell the story."

Though photographers tend to hide behind their cameras, it's sometimes necessary to become a part of the background in the story, he said.

"I've learned that the best coping strategy for me right now is to hug people," he said. "Whether that's the Corcoran family or the police officers I photographed, they're part of my life in a strange way."

Fellow Ana Porras asked if the event has caused him to cover events differently. Since the marathon, Tlumacki has struggled to photograph other events on Boylston Street and has been shocked by cannons or guns shot off at softball and baseball games. But he tries to remember the positive moments since the marathon. When President Barack Obama visited Boston after the explosions, he spoke at a church and talked about the police officers in Tlumacki's photo.

"He talked about the things I saw and shot," he said. "It's a connection I've never felt before."

Fellow Jodi Murphy asked how Tlumacki continues to handle the memories and whether he allows himself to revisit the photos. After the first time he reviewed and turned in 30 frames, Tlumacki has spoken about his photos during news interviews and with families who were affected, such as the Corcorans.

"It's easier now to go through them," he said. "Someday I will go through them again, but for now, they're there."

The sports writer's challenge: Taking on the beloved institution

McGill Visiting Journalist:

Sara Ganim, reporter, CNN, Atlanta

Moderator:

Vicki Michaelis, professor, University of Georgia

Sara Ganim never aimed to win the Pulitzer Prize at age 24. She simply followed a news tip.

After graduation from Penn State University in 2008, she took a job as crime reporter at the Centre Daily Times in Pennsylvania, where she interned during college. When she was holding down the cops beat one night around 10:30, she received a phone call from someone who said Jerry Sandusky had been accused of molesting a boy. She didn't recognize the name at first and searched online. When she realized he was a retired football coach and a charity owner, she started to follow leads.

Six weeks later, the same person called back and told her the accusation wasn't true and that she should stop investigating. But when Ganim attended a fundraiser for Sandusky's charity, she realized he wasn't there and the charity's board members gave two different reasons for his absence. Something didn't add up.

Ganim began knocking on more doors with questions, still approaching the tip as a crime story.

"I kept chipping away at it in my free time for months," she said. "I was never able to track it down on my own."

Then Ganim joined The Patriot-News in Harrisburg, where the editors gave her time to report and the lawyers offered advice daily. By the end of March 2011, the lawyers gave her the green light.

"The day it ran, Sandusky put out a statement that the facts were correct but that he was not guilty," she said. "We had a big moment of relief then."

The first story of the grand jury investigation ran in March, but the world didn't pay attention until November, Michaelis commented.

"I was a young reporter from a small newspaper, and most of the reporting was anonymous," Ganim explained. "My theory is that no one wanted to believe Sandusky could possibly be guilty, so they didn't report it."

Fellow Nick Watson asked if Ganim was worried about losing access to sources as she continued to pursue the story.



Moderator Vicki Michaelis and McGill
Visiting Journalist Sara Ganim

"Many times you get one chance to impress sources and write a balanced story. That's your first impression."

—Sara Ganim

"That was an adjustment for me," she said. "As a court reporter, I was used to an open court and open documents."

Although she received plenty of hate mail, Ganim remained a credentialed press member. She often listened to other reporters talk in the press box during football season and followed the rumors.

"Some sports reporters came up to me later and thanked me for doing the story," she said. "They didn't want to be the person writing about child molestation. They wanted to write about the game."

Fellow Jodi Murphy asked how her reporting changed once the country began to follow the story and other reporters searched for answers. With a two-year head start on other news organizations, Ganim often ignored daily news reports and instead tried to find the stories that other organizations weren't covering. As events unfolded quickly with firings, resignations, and formal statements, Ganim kept in touch with her editors to talk about next steps.

"It goes back to working for people who really get it," she said. "It's easy to fall into the trap of everyone running in one direction, and instead they focused on what was not so obvious."

Years later, she still receives hate mail. Though she had thick skin as a crime reporter, Ganim had to adjust to the extremist views in the sports world.

"The thing about this story is we might not ever know the end," she said. "People don't like unknowns, and they fill in the blanks when they can't get the answers."

Fellow Ben Bolton asked how developing sources as a crime reporter helped her to follow the initial tip. Ganim often made lists of names and added more, even if they might have no obvious relation to the story.

"Sometimes I would drive to someone's house and sit there, thinking about why I shouldn't talk to them," she said. "But then they would know everything."

Being a young reporter at a small newspaper helped as well. She could often get more from sources because she didn't walk up to their homes with "a microphone, a suit and hair gel."

"Many times, you get one chance to impress sources and write a balanced story," Ganim said. "That's your first impression."

In addition, Ganim kept subject experts on speed dial to ask for advice and context. She often talked to a prosecutor, defense attorney, and judge to ensure the pieces connected.

"You can't be afraid to say you need help and detailed explanations," she said. "Ask a lot of questions. Then ask more."

Bolton asked if Penn State administrators put up walls to stop her. Officials weren't as creative as you'd think, she said. They simply denied the accusations and claimed they never read her stories.

"They live in a bubble and an isolated world, where they can pat each other on the back and feel happy," she said. "All of the sudden, the world was looking at them, and their bubble wasn't OK."

Fellow Alicia Smith asked how the victims and families responded after the stories. For the most part, victims were grateful and thanked Ganim for telling a story that nobody investigated for years.

"One mom said she wished I hadn't been in middle school in the 90s, when this happened," she said. "Their responses have been the most rewarding part."

Plus, Ganim won a Pulitzer. She thought another publication would win that year and was shocked by the announcement.

"People say this is the biggest story I'll ever get and ask where I'll go from here," she said with a laugh. "So that's a challenge now. I have to set some goals for myself."

Now Ganim is in a transition phase. As a CNN reporter, she's learning her way around television and working at a national level. Sometimes she misses print and the routine of a local beat reporter.

"I'm jealous that print is going through this transition, and people get to redefine what newspaper organizations are," she said. "I feel like I wanted to be part of that."

"It's not about the masthead and the paycheck. You need to work for people who are going to help you grow."

—Sara Ganim

Fellow Lindsey Cook asked what students can do now to prepare for a journalism career, whether in print or in television. Ganim recommends a diverse set of skills — video, social media, and website management.

"Become a mobile newsroom. Do everything with your phone," she said. "For many years, that's all I ever needed while reporting."

Ganim noted that the best first jobs are in small weeklies or dailies where young reporters can try different skills and beats in the newsroom. Editors are important, too.

"It's not all about the masthead and the paycheck," she said. "You need to work for people who are going to help you grow."

Since her Penn State investigation, Ganim has seen a few changes related to sports programs and how the public discusses sexual harassment. About three



Moderator Vicki Michaelis and McGill
Visiting Journalist Sara Ganim

months after her series, 12 states changed laws. The conversation has started, and she hopes it'll keep going.

"Many people are asking what they need to know as a parent, educator or official," she said. "It's great to see how much has changed so far, but will the big business and institution of college sports ever change completely?"

Ganim still doesn't think of herself as a sports journalist, and for the most part, she continues to see news reporters break major stories on the sports beats. In her opinion, sports staffers tend to stick to the games and maintain their relationships in the press boxes.

"I think it's a shame because sports stories involve lots of money, lots of drama and lots of attention," she said. "What more could you ask for?"

Haunted by Ghost Factories: Digging into dirt and big data

McGill Visiting Journalist:

Alison Young, reporter, USA Today, Arlington, Va.

Moderator:

Patricia Thomas, professor, University of Georgia



Moderator Patricia Thomas and McGill Visiting Journalist Alison Young

For months, Alison Young stood in strangers' yards in the sweltering heat, testing soil for lead. Time and time again, she had sad news to tell parents — their children shouldn't be playing in the yard.

That's when Young knew all of her reporting was worth it. She could help families learn about their properties and make informed decisions about their health.

"It's really about little kids playing in the dirt, the most natural thing," she said. "You take these lead numbers and relate them to people."

Young's stories about old smelting factories and the lead residue they leave behind were years in the making. She first learned about smelters during her first job at a small daily newspaper, but she applied her knowledge at a national outlet much later.

"Ghost Factories is probably one of the most insane and wonderful and terrifying projects in my career," she said. "It's an example of how stories stick with your heart and deep in your soul. Hold onto your ideas and look for a way to tell them."

Young sees journalism as a calling and investigative reporting as a passion. It's the best way to hold agencies and organizations accountable and help people with few resources who are often ignored.

"Reporting will break your heart in many ways, when you're seeing pain or telling stories about poverty and child abuse," she said. "But it will also feed your soul more than anything I could think of doing."

Professor Patricia Thomas asked what it takes to be a reporter, especially an investigative one who sniffs out controversy and data.

"I've learned that all reporters should be investigative reporters, not stenographers, as many health and science writers are," Young said. "It means asking hard questions and always wondering, 'Why, why, why?'"

Young worked on the Ghost Factories story full-time for two years. She followed the studies of a PhD student who searched for old smelting factories and tested soil samples in Baltimore and Philadelphia. Published in the American Journal of Public Health about a decade ago, the study noted that high lead levels could be a lurking public health issue and should be addressed with urgency.

At the time, Young was an editor at the Detroit Free Press, and she led a team that investigated lead levels in Michigan soil. When she moved to Atlanta, she searched again. She later brought the idea to USA Today and decided to look at all 463 sites across the country.

That's when the work began. Young dug into library archives to study print directories and Sanborn fire insurance maps from 1930-1960 to locate where the factory buildings were in each city.

"It was interesting to see how a smelter turned into a potato chip factory and then something else," she said. "This is when archival research and working with old paper directories and maps is valuable. Not everything is online."

"You are not fully prepared for the first time you tell a mom that her child has been playing in hazardous dirt. And he had just been diagnosed with developmental disabilities. She was stunned."

—Alison Young

Young and colleagues learned how to operate a \$40,000 X-ray analyzer to test soil. They took two months to visit 21 sites in 13 states to take 1,000 soil samples. It was physically grueling. She didn't expect to battle a pinched nerve, fire ants, wasps and pit bulls, but she was fascinated by the data pouring into her computer.



McGill Visiting Journalist Alison Young and Fellow Nick Watson

"Talk about instant data," she said. "We could inform people while in their yards and educate them about the dangers."

Young carried literature from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention with her to give families. On the first day, she informed the first family that their soil tested above hazardous standards.

"You're not fully prepared for the first time you tell a mom that her child has been playing in hazardous dirt," she said. "And he had just been diagnosed with developmental disabilities. She was stunned."

Young also took photographs to document the areas she tested. She didn't realize unit later how much this would help her storytelling.

"Everyone who is a parent can relate to the images," she said. "Especially when the tested area is under a baseball bat, next to a child's tricycle, or under a jungle gym."

Young noted the importance of knowing various skills as a reporter. While reporting on her own, Young managed data, shot videos and photos, and wrote narratives.

"I can't say enough about learning everything," she said. "Sometimes you'll get a better story when you can capture raw reaction in various forms."

Fellow Jeffrey McNair asked how she handled the data and reported it in a way for readers to understand. The key is figuring out what the numbers mean, Young said.

"We tried to keep numbers out of the story and instead say 'elevated levels' or 'hazardous levels,'" she said. "We did put numbers in interactive databases online, where readers could go deep and find out what's going on in their neighborhoods."

Fellow Tia Lecorchick noticed that the story focused on families and their stories but wondered how Young reached out these families. Young faced several legal hurdles when it came to developing consent forms, finding a soil science advisor for the project, and deciding how to inform families about their yards. Young presented her research openly, and although many families didn't want to talk, she found several who did.

"The ones who did talk were outraged," she said. "They didn't want this to happen to anyone else."

McNair asked how to report on the accountability of businesses that closed 30-100 years ago. To Young, the most disturbing aspect was learning that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency knew about many of the sites 10 years ago and recommended action, but few states did anything. Even the states that did conduct testing didn't often implement cleanup efforts or warn the residents, she added.

"To me, that's what families are so upset about," she said. "Maybe they wouldn't have chosen to live in that



McGill Visiting Journalist Alison Young

house or allow their children to play in the dirt."

As Young reported the story, she asked the same questions: Who could have made a difference? Did they? If not, what is the excuse and does that excuse stand?

In the beginning, Young approached the EPA and openly explained her story while requesting documents. As old reports popped up and soil tests showed hazardous levels, she approached the agency again for interviews. A few weeks before publication, Young was granted one interview with one expert and explained the story piece by piece to verify facts. Nothing was incorrect.

"I'm a big believer about being transparent about what I'm working on. I also don't believe in ambush interviews. It serves the readers best if we give complete and accurate information from all sides."

—Alison Young

"I'm a big believer in being transparent about what I'm working on," she said. "I also don't believe in ambush interviews. It serves the readers best if we give complete and accurate information from all sides."

Fellow Ana Porras asked how difficult it was for Young to explain the scientific and technical information in easy-to-understand terms. Before writing the series, Young read tons of books and asked tons of questions.

"At some point, you start to absorb everything you read," she said. "I also kept experts on hand who were great minds in their areas of research."

Thomas noticed a coherent arc in many of Young's stories and asked if she keeps a running theme in mind.

"Risk. Danger. Failure. Accountability," Young said. "Who should have protected these people and didn't?"

The Hazelwood Decision at 25

McGill Visiting Journalists:

Frank D. LoMonte, executive director, Student Press Law Center, Washington, D.C.

Karl Etters, reporter, Tallahassee Democrat

Moderator:

Kent Middleton, professor, University of Georgia

For young reporters to exhibit journalistic courage in their first jobs, they must practice in college and even high school. But for campus media to effectively serve their public service responsibilities, they need press freedom.

It's been 25 years since the landmark case *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* limited press freedom on school campuses, and advocates of student press rights are still wary today.

"Public documents should be readily available, and every state should have some baseline level of transparency," Frank LoMonte said. "It's outlandish and audacious. No lobbyist should be able to say that we don't need public scrutiny."

The pendulum is swinging back from the 1970s and 1980s, when open records and meetings laws were created. Now agencies are ignoring information requests, and news organizations don't have the patience or financial resources to sue.

"It's a frightening time when public officials are openly defiant of public accountability," LoMonte said. "Even worse than direct censorship is blocking access to a story."



McGill Visiting Journalist Frank LoMonte, Moderator Kent Middleton, McGill Visiting Journalist Karl Etters

"Public documents should be readily available, and every state should have some baseline level of transparency."

– Frank LoMonte

That applies at all levels of press freedom, but in particular, the state of the college press is a “tale of two cities,” LoMonte said. In some states such as Georgia, where open records laws are strong and college newspapers such as the University of Georgia’s Red & Black have been historically aggressive, student press has “never been better,” he said. But press rights advocates are worried about second tier schools.

“Smaller institutions don’t have the same robust level of respect,” he said. “At those, we do find an increasing desire for image consciousness and institutions that want to crack down on and intimidate their journalists.”

Collegiate journalism being produced in classroom labs is threatened even more. In the past, only the professor saw a student’s story and graded it. But now, many class stories are posted on blogs and read by larger audiences.

“That’s where Hazelwood alarms us because curricular speech is not protected,” LoMonte said. “It’s a nightmare scenario, but I’m sure it’s coming: A student gets a hold of a great story, and the non-tenured professor must censor it or lose his job.”

As former editor of the Florida A&M University student newspaper, Karl Etters saw censorship come from the administration. When a new dean took office, she suspended the paper and forced editors to reapply for their jobs.



McGill Fellows with McGill Visiting Journalist Frank LoMonte, Moderator Kent Middleton, McGill Visiting Journalist Karl Etters

“It was scary because we were being judged for a hazing story written a year and a half before,” he said. “It didn’t seem right. We had nothing to do with the original story.”

Etters and others created a new site called Ink and Fangs to continue reporting. The dean and other administrators told them it would ruin their careers to continue publishing on the site.

“She said we would be seen as troublemakers and would never be hired,” he said. “But I asked for advice, and we received tons of support across the country. We didn’t do anything wrong, so we decided to not be afraid.”

It helped that Etters was respectful and continued to publish good journalism, Kent Middleton commented.

“That’s an issue the Supreme Court must take up very soon. Can schools assert censorship over what students write on personal blogs and social media when using their own time, money and resources?”

—Frank LoMonte

“It wasn’t anything personal with the dean,” Etters agreed. “We tried to be respectful and show we could work with people but still publish.”

Fellow Jodi Murphy asked if this outlet allowed more students to post opinions off campus and if administrators

could legally regulate the site. That’s what worries LoMonte for the future.

“That’s an issue the Supreme Court must take up very soon,” he said. “Can schools assert censorship over what students write on personal blogs and social media when using their own time, money, and resources?”

LoMonte described a case in Minnesota last year, in which a University of Minnesota student studying

mortuary science wrote jokes on her Facebook account about the cadavers she was studying. Although her friends understood the jokes, a classmate reported her comments as disrespectful. Police interviewed the student and determined that no crime occurred, but the university opened a disciplinary case against her,



McGill Visiting Journalist Karl Etters

saying the speech was unprofessional and inappropriate. The state's courts said speech that violates professional conduct can be punishable by suspension or expulsion. However, the girl died six days later from a neurological condition, and the case couldn't be moved to the Supreme Court.

"For years, I was able to tell students with confidence that if they used their own time, money, and resources, they were fine," LoMonte said. "I no longer feel confident saying that, and it concerns me."

Fellow Meredith Dean asked what today's taboo topics are in scholastic journalism. LoMonte has seen similar subjects pop up in the past 40 years — homosexuality, pregnancy and anything that questions school policies.

"That last one is what the First Amendment is supposed to be about," he said. "You have a right to question and challenge your government and school policies."

Fellow Kelsi Eccles asked when it's a good idea to cross censorship limitations to get the story out to the

public. Etters thinks that happens when the story can help a large group of people. At his college publication, students reported on an institutional issue of hazing in many student organizations.

"People were getting hurt and going to the hospital," he said. "It was a public safety issue at that point."

Fellow Jeffrey McNair asked how Etters took on a large institution, particularly if blocked from gaining vital information.

"I asked for help, especially from people outside of the university," Etters said. "You can only go so far sometimes. Ask people outside of that bubble for advice."

LoMonte noted that barriers often involve telling the incremental story. If student journalists can only find part of the story, they should report it — as well as the barriers — and doors will often open.

"Float what you have and hope it draws out the rest," he said. "Sometimes that small bit encourages the whistleblower to come forward."

Grady College Dean Charles Davis added that student journalists should regularly exercise their rights by using public records and asking for documents.

"If you push the lever daily, officials get used to the requests and it's less problematic in the future when you need," he said. "I can't stress that enough. It has made a huge difference at several institutions."

LoMonte is also pushing for more anti-Hazelwood cases, which gives more legal protection and press freedom to high school students and the adviser. Because the U.S. Constitution represents a minimum amount of rights, these anti-Hazelwood cases could give additional freedom.

"We have chosen to refrain from reaching the Hazelwood line," he said. "The Supreme Court sets the floor, but we can choose to live above that floor in state statutes."

Most of all, educators must promote media literacy at young ages, and scholastic journalists must stand up for their publications and use press freedom.

Participants

McGill Fellows

Ben Bolton, senior, Digital and Broadcast Journalism
Lindsey Cook, senior, Journalism
Shanda Crowe, senior, Journalism
Meredith Dean, senior, Digital and Broadcast Journalism
Kelsi Eccles, senior, Journalism
Megan Ernst, senior, Journalism
Tia Lynn Lecorchick, senior, Journalism
Jodi Murphy, graduate student, Health and Medical journalism
Alfred Jeffrey McNair, senior, Digital and Broadcast Journalism
Ana Porras, senior, Mass Media Arts
Alicia Smith, graduate student, Health and Medical Journalism
Nicholas Watson, senior, Journalism

McGill Visiting Journalists

Karl Etters, reporter, Tallahassee Democrat
Sara Ganim, reporter, CNN
Frank D. LoMonte, executive director, Student Press Law Center
Sherif Mansour, Middle East and North Africa program coordinator, Committee to Protect Journalists
Dorothy Parvaz, special projects editor, Al Jazeera, 2013 recipient of the McGill Medal in Journalistic Courage
John Tlumacki, photographer, Boston Globe
Alison Young, reporter, USA Today

Moderators

Mark E. Johnson, senior lecturer, University of Georgia
Vicki Michaelis, professor, University of Georgia
Kent Middleton, professor, University of Georgia
Lisa Schnellinger, senior project consultant, UPINext/Pakistan
Patricia Thomas, professor, University of Georgia

Contact us

For more information about the McGill Lecture and Symposium:

John F. Greenman
706.542.1081
jgreenma@uga.edu

Diane Murray
706.542.5038
murrayd@uga.edu

The McGill program is on the Web at
www.grady.uga.edu/mcgill