May 1995

Uplink

A newsletter for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting

Uplink update

It's like the old Groucho Marx joke: Math is so easy a 12 year old can do it.

Quick. Get me a 12 year old.

The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* did just that. In February, the newspaper recounted how Carrie Coughlin used statistics to figure out the home court advantage in Big Eight basketball. And she checked for significance.

For journalists, statistics are one more way to better cover stories.

"Computer-assisted reporting gives greater access to greater volumes of information," Philip Meyer said. "That means there is a greater capacity for making mistakes. By learning how to use statistics, we reduce the risk of getting it wrong."

In this issue, Uplink offers stories so you get it right.

Meanwhile, in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, Nora Paul trolls the Internet for militia groups. Uplink also updates government access to electronic records.

Inside

Reporters tell how statistics nailed big stories

Crunch Those Numbers

By Gwen Carleton
NICAR staff

When hospital officials told *The New York Times* that babies were dying because of unusually sick mothers, reporter Josh Barbanel knew what to do.

He ran a regression. And like many reporters who work with statistics, he found a story: babies born in New York's public hospitals are significantly more likely to die than those born in private hospitals — even when the babies are born healthy.

Statistics have always been a powerful tools in the hands of knowledgeable journalists. Now, as more news organizations invest in computers and statistical software, number crunching is more important.

Statistics-savvy journalists are proving that statistics can mean more accurate, incisive reporting. In recent months, Minneapolis' WCCO-TV found mistakes in a state report on unwed mothers. The *Raleigh News & Observer* showed the link between ex-convicts who keep commiting crimes and drug or alcohol abuse. In December 1993, *U.S. News & World Report* proved that black students were more likely to be relegated to special education programs.

Proving the point

The New York Times published "Mismanaged Care: How Public Hospitals Fail" on March 5-7. The story did not need statistics to get into the paper, Barbanel said. Reporters Dean Baquet and Jane Fritsch had already uncovered scores of horror stories.

"But (the story had been) argued through anecdotes. Someone who didn't believe unnamed sources could dispute it," he said. The numbers made it harder to dismiss.

Barbanel's analysis showed the infant mortality rates were significantly different even after accounting for such variables as prenatal care, the mothers' health and the babies' health. The numbers also allowed the newspaper to question the causes.

Barbanel and others have discovered that a careful analysis can quiet contro-

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When an apple isn't an orange

By Andrew Lehren
NICAR staff

So you can figure out percentages, and recall some math taught in school.

Philip Meyer, a founder of computer-assisted reporting and author of *The New Precision Journalism*, believes there is much more reporters can do with numbers to improve their stories. In a recent Uplink interview, the Pulitzer Prize winner listed several tips:

• Avoid apples-and-oranges comparisons. Among the most common, he said, "is any story where there is a dollar comparison over time." In other words, a newspaper may have cost only a few cents at the turn of the century. But before you get misty eyed about the good old days, don't forget to figure for inflation. Report-

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Uplink
May 1995
Volume 7, Number 5
A newsletter for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting

Uplink is published every month by the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, P.O. Box 838 Columbia, MO 65205. (314) 882-0684. Subscription price is $35 (U.S.) annually, $50 outside the United States. Postmaster: Please send address changes to NICAR. Send e-mail to nicar@muccmail.missouri.edu.

NICAR is a joint effort of Investigative Reporters and Editors and the University of Missouri School of Journalism. NICAR services include hands-on newsroom training on computer-assisted reporting, special academic and advanced training in data analysis. NICAR is supported by a grant from The Freedom Forum intended to help the institute deliver its services nationwide to news organizations and associations.

Wiring Washington

Access tight for electronic records

By David H. Morrissey
Colorado State University

President Clinton issued Freedom of Information Act guidelines in 1993 that he said would expand public access to federal computerized data.

A year later, Congress initiated on-line access to thousands of federal documents by passing the General Printing Office Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act.

Both actions were responses to the fact that — within five years — 75 percent of Washington's vast storehouse of documents will be created, stored and disseminated electronically.

Without electronic access, the public will have little ability to check what Washington does. A key question now is: How much access do we have?

The answer halfway through the Clinton administration is clearly "not enough."

Clinton policies

The Clinton FOIA policy is the first by a president to specifically mention the public's right to electronic records. The president encouraged agencies "to enhance public access through the use of electronic information systems."

Clinton's policy also limits when the Justice Department can defend agencies withholding documents requested under FOIA. Prior to this, Reagan/Bush FOIA guidelines established in 1981 required the Justice Department to defend agencies if there was "a substantial legal basis" for secrecy. In effect, agencies were told "when in doubt, deny requests."

Clinton changed that. He requires agencies to cite specific "foreseeable harm" before the Justice Department will defend them, a policy often called, "When in doubt, release."

Unless this new standard is overturned by a new president, Clinton's policy should eventually increase public access to electronic records.

In addition, the president ordered in 1993 a review of the security classification system. A draft executive order from this review expands national security information releasable under the FOIA — expanding electronic access in the process — and overturns a Reagan-era executive order encouraging secrecy.

On April 17, the order was issued, and it expands the amount of information available.

Congress, meanwhile, has twice recently attempted to address electronic records. In 1994, the House killed a Senate bill that would define FOIA-releasable records to include "computer programs, machine readable materials, and computerized, digitized, and electronic information..."

The bill, which may be reintroduced, would require agencies to make reasonable efforts to create or modify computer programs to retrieve records; create computer programs to separate disclosable from non-disclosable information; and provide information in formats specified by requesters.

Meanwhile, in 1994, Congress did pass the GPO Access Act. The GPO now provides on-line access to several thousand government documents.

While useful, the act remains fundamentally flawed. Congress left agencies in control of what records will be available electronically -- not the requesters. The measure covers only some of Washington's electronic information. No agency is required to release electronic records; their compliance is voluntary.

Few real changes

Despite the president's call for openness, and congressional encouragement, few agencies are rushing into the electronic future. I surveyed 70 federal agencies after the Clinton FOIA policy was announced, and found not one had changed policies to make access to electronic records easier. Some called the president's policy too vague. Others claimed they already practiced maximum disclosure and saw no need to change policies.

Detailed presidential or congressional action may increase public access to Washington's information. Passing the FOIA demonstrated this change. But as responses from the 70 agencies suggest, broad policy statements produce only minimal agency change. Many electronic records remain difficult to obtain. The agencies — not the public — still set most policies guiding release of electronic federal records.

Dr. Morrissey teaches in the Department of Technical Journalism at Colorado State University. He regularly monitors the information policies of federal agencies. Send e-mail to dmorrissey@vines.colostate.edu

The long fight for electronic records

You may have a friend in Pa.

By Bob Warner
Philadelphia Daily News

Whatever's happening in Washington, the information revolution is slower in some state capitals.

It took 18 months, a lawsuit, and a new Pennsylvania governor for the Philadelphia Daily News to secure an electronic list of 82,034 state employees -- the same information that's been available to the public for years on microfiche at the state library in Harrisburg.

Former Gov. Robert P. Casey refused to provide a computer tape of the state payroll, with no explanation beyond saying he was satisfied with the old arrangements. The Daily News sued in Commonwealth Court and Casey stalled. He left office in January. His successor, Gov. Tom Ridge, settled the case by turning over the computer tape three weeks after taking office.

Pennsylvania reporters remain hampered by a 1957 public records law that doesn't mention computers, requiring only that public officials establish "reasonable rules" for providing copies of public documents. The *Allentown Morning Call*'s Jack Kraft and David Washburn recently reported on the trouble this has meant for local governments, citizen groups and journalists throughout the state.

Ridge said during his 1994 campaign that if a government document is considered public when it's on paper, then the same information should be accessible to the public in electronic formats, technology permitting. State legislator Stewart Greenleaf has sponsored legislation to that effect. But to become law, it needs approval from a state Senate that still denies the public even paper copies of Senate payroll and expense records.

Bob Warner can be reached at (215) 854-5885 or send e-mail to bwarner@omni.voicenet.com.

From the NICAR library

NICAR offers a number of federal government databases. Here is a list of our growing collection:

- Federal Elections Commission contributions data, including donations by individuals and political action committees.
- Federal Aviation Administration data, including airplane maintenance work documented in the service difficulty report, pilot licenses and grades, and aircraft registration.
- Home Mortgage Disclosure Act records, for tracking who gets loans and who gets turned down, and finding redlining patterns.
- Federal procurement data, 1992-1994, includes breakdowns by agency.
- Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms gun dealer records.
- National Bridge Inventory System data, includes inspection grades.
- FBI Uniform Crime Reports, a detailed compilation of crime data that includes statistical breakdowns of individual murders.
- Social Security death records, by name and social security number, going back to 1937.
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration violation data includes worker accidents and exposures to hazardous chemicals by companies.
- U.S. Department of Transportation truck accident and census data. It includes accidents by company and road.
- U.S. Small Business Administration loan guarantees, 1989-1994. This includes the name of the business, address, amount covered by the SBA, and status, including whether the loan went bad.
- U.S. Small Business Administration disaster loan guarantees, 1989-1994. This includes individuals and businesses, the amount covered by the SBA, and the status, including whether the loan went bad.

NICAR also offers inexpensive data transfer for journalists, and houses an expanding library of state databases. NICAR is also constantly adding up-to-date data.

Call NICAR for up-to-date prices and more information at (314) 882-0684, or send e-mail to nicar@muccmail.missouri.edu.

Get Computer trainining:

• Virginia Press Association NICAR will conduct training June 1-3 in Richmond, Va. Call Deb Roberts, (804) 550-2361.

• California AP NICAR and the Associated Press will conduct training June 19-21 in the Los Angeles area and Sacramento. Call the AP's Daniel Day, (415) 621-7432.

• NICAR Bootcamp NICAR's weeldong intensive training seminar, Aug. 6-11, Columbia, Mo. Call NICAR, (314) 882-0684, or send e-mail to nicar@muccmail.missouri.edu.

Yogi Berra might say 90 percent of journalism is half mental

Slice percents right

By Jennifer LaFleur
NICAR Staff

So you went into journalism to avoid math?

For the more nerdy, mathematical formulas may come as naturally as slipping on a pocket protector each morning; however, to those just starting in computer-assisted reporting, math can be intimidating.

I'm not suggesting that to do computer-assisted reporting you have to have an immediate grasp of differential equations, but whether you're looking at hard copy reports from a government agency or analyzing data in a spreadsheet, you should be familiar with three key formulas: percent change, percent of total and per capita.

Percent of total

This one is easy to get turned around. The rule is: the amount divided by the total (amount/total). For example, if Bob owns 10 animals and two of those animals are cats, 2 divided by 10 (2/10) or 20 percent of his animals are cats.

Percent change

You're dealing with two years' worth of data and want to figure percent change from one year to the next. Take the difference of the two years divided by the amount from the earlier year. Say we're looking at 1993-1994 data. The difference: 2,567 - 2,345 = 222. Now: 222/2,345 = 0.09.

Per capita

Looking at occurrences by city or county or state can be interesting. But remember to keep things on common ground. I can't compare raw numbers if the "bases" are different. That means if I'm looking at the number of murders by city in the United States, Los Angeles and New York probably will come out on top, but only because they have more people. A more useful measure would be per capita murders. In this case, per capita murders would be the number of murders divided by population.

Sometimes these measures will be adjusted a little if the number of occurrences is low. Crime statistics, for example often are reported per 100,000 or per 10,000 people. These measures are used because (hopefully) the number of murders in a city is fairly low compared to the number of people. The per capita measure might be 0.0005 — yikes! By looking at the figure per 100,000 people, it becomes easier to read: 50 murders per 100,000 people.

When you're trying to figure if persons per household is households divided by population or population divided by households. Do one simple thing: turn your per into a division sign. This means that persons PER households becomes persons/households or population/households. If that doesn't work, trying narrowing the field to a few items: for example if I have two houses and 10 people, how many persons per household is that? Of course, it's five a house.

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Here are some books to help reporters work better with numbers:

- **Cohn, Victor.** ***News & Numbers.*** **1989. Iowa State University Press.**
- **Crossen, Cynthia.** ***Tainted Truth: The Manipulation of Fact in America.*** **1994. Simon & Schuster.**
- **Meyer, Philip.** ***The New Precision Journalism.*** **1991. Indiana University Press.**
- ***The Economist Numbers Guide: The Essentials of Business Numeracy.*** **1993. Penguin Books.**
- **Paulos, John Allen.** ***Innumeracy: Mathematical Illiteracy And Its Consequences.*** **1988. Hill and Wang.**

Continued from page one:

Meyer's tips

ers can do that getting the Consumer Price Index issued by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

• Watch out for "lurking variables." Journalists often write about how one thing correlates with another. Meyer believes they should always check for other variables, and see what happens when those other variables are held constant.

For example, he cited stories that rank states based on Standard Achievement Test scores. The problem is that, in some places, a smaller percentage of students take the SAT scores — the college-bound who, overall, post better scores. Elsewhere, a larger percentage of students take the test. By using a simple regression, reporters could adjust for differences.

• Show a scatterplot. No math here. This kind of graphic is good for showing relationships. Say you are reporting about how a natural disaster reaped heavier damage in neighborhoods built during a certain period. Peg the vertical (y) axis to the year constructed; the horizontal (x) axis to percent destroyed. Then plot each block on the graph. The scatterplot marks each bit of data effectively. Newspapers don't use scatter blocks enough, Meyer said.

• The chi-square test. What are the odds that something happened by coincidence? The chi-square test is a quick way to find out. A variety of books describe the chi-square test, including Meyer's *The New Precision Journalism.*

Continued from page one:

Crunch those numbers

versy and convince skeptics. It could also prevent costly missteps.

When WCCO-TV in Minneapolis got a state report on unwed mothers, reporter Alan Cox double checked the numbers with regression analyses.

The state suggested poor mothers have more out-of-wedlock births. Cox said, "I couldn't find the correlation, and chose to weed that out of my story."

Cox said he often runs rudimentary regression analyses to decide how — or whether — to report a story. The CBS affiliate also uses them for election returns and exit polls.

"It's very helpful to have some understanding of sampling techniques," he said. "I think by having statistical training in that area, you avoid going out on a limb on election night."

In television, it's hard to convey numbers. Cox recommends using graphs. And, he said, viewers have been enthusiastic.

"We get e-mails: Where did you get those numbers?" he said. "I think there's a hunger out there, though maybe not an overwhelming one."

Going back in jail

Sampling techniques are good for more than just interpreting polls. For a recent story about why ex-convicts keep going back to prison, Jon Schmid, assistant database editor with the *Raleigh News & Observer*, picked a random sample.

"We found who had come back to prison — about 200 people — and we wanted to find out why," he said. Schmid worked with a reporter who believed people got back into trouble because of severe drinking or drug problems.

Because he did not have time to background all 200 prisoners, Schmid selected a small sample. He and the reporter checked those prisoners thoroughly. They found many were indeed sent back to prison for drug and alcohol-related crimes.

"I buy into the statistical theory that using a random sample, you can draw an inference," Schmid said. "I dont think we could have done that story based on anecdotal evidence."

Schmid rarely works with correlations and other high-end statistics because he works mostly with data based on observations. That makes it difficult to establish cause and effect. But he frequently uses what he calls "exploratory statistics" — like cross tabs and graphs — to look for trends and unusual occurrences.

"They help you to look at data, to go beyond making a list," he said. "The tools are a compass that lets me see through the fog of data."

Cross-tabs at work

Sarah Cohen, a *St. Petersburg Times* business reporter, also is a fan of cross tabs: those tables that test two or more variables at once.

"They work out well," she said. "They are easier to show to editors because you can see immediately how to tell the story to people."

Cohen, a former government economist, cautioned that some statistical methods may be better than others.

"My sense is that people out there can do (high-end statistics) better than we can," she said. "I've used these tools for a long time, and I never saw an economics study you couldn't fight with. Why should we get in on that in newspapers?"

On the other hand, professional statisticians are not interested in countless topics, Cohen said. These areas are full of opportunities for journalists, and often require only simpler statistical processes.

Instead of ranking schools based on just one measure, for example, education writers can create an index. Then they can take test scores, spending per pupil, teacher salaries and drop-out rates into account. Journalists can do this quickly, and improve stories significantly.

"These are tools that help you sort through a huge number of different combinations of things," she said. "Indexes, cross tabs — (tools) where its clear what you're talking about when you're finished."

Schmid agrees that some analyses are better done on deadline than others.

"Cross tabs are really straight forward," he said. "(But) when you get into real stats, like taking a sample and so forth, you have to be really careful. It's based on some really strict assumptions."

Cohen recommends that journalists get comfortable with statistics through skepticism and practice.

"One thing we're not doing well is being as skeptical of numbers as we are of words," she said. "We need to remember we're not very skeptical and think some more."

Gwen Carleton can be reached at (314) 882-0684, or send e-mail to c618652@mizzou1.missouri.edu

Cool math tip:

Each year a dollar loses value. Here's how to adjust for inflation. Just look at the percent change in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from one year to the next. Adjust the earlier year's sum "up" to reflect them in current dollars. It's a simple multiplication: percent change (expressed in decimal form, not percent) times the older dollar amount. Add that to the older figure. Keep in mind that CPI varies regionally, so use the CPI for your area. The CPI for most areas is available on the Internet at gopher://hopi.bls.gov:70/00hopiftp.dev/special.requests/cpi

IRE's Annual Conference

Find cyber sources on the beat

By Rosemary Armao
IRE executive director

The program is firming up for IRE's 20th annual National Conference set for the Intercontinental Hotel in Miami June 8-11. Here's the program for the Optional Day, June 8, which is dedicated to "CAR on the Beat."

In addition to the panels listed below, we'll be offering an advanced seminar on statistics with Precision Journalism guru Philip Meyer and Steve Doig of the *Miami Herald* instructing, a souped-up computer demo room and an Internet Lab.

E-mail us at jourire@muccmail.missouri.edu if you'd like to see the entire preliminary schedule. Be sure to sign up for this major journalism event.

IRE's conference at-a-glance:

The June 8 program is divided into three tracks that will run simultaneously:

• An introduction to computer-assisted reporting.

• Computer-assisted reporting

THURSDAY, JUNE 8

9 a.m.-noon

Statistics Seminar, Philip Meyer, *The New Precision Journalism*, and Steve Doig, *Miami Herald*

9-10:25 a.m.

• Car on the City Hall Beat
Moderator, Rose Ciotta, *Buffalo News*
David Migoya, *Detroit Free Press*

• CAR, Quick and Easy
NICAR Staff

• Access: What You're Entitled To and How to Get It
Moderator, Shawn McIntosh, *Dallas Morning News*
Barbara Peterson, *First Amendment Foundation*
Bob Warner, *Philadelphia Daily News*

10:30-11:55 a.m.

• Car on the Education Beat
Moderator, Nora Paul, *Poynter Institute*
George Jordan, *Newsday*
Neil Mara, *Charlotte Observer*

• Getting Started
David Milliron, *Gannett News Service*

• Introduction to the Internet
Beth Marchak, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*
Dan Keating, *Miami Herald*

1:45-3:10 p.m.

• Car on the Courts Beat
Moderator, Steve Doig, *Miami Herald*
Nancy Stancill, *Charlotte Observer*
Michelle Quigley, *Palm Beach Post*

• Powering Up, Plugging In
Nora Paul, *Poynter Institute*

• Polling: How to Write Survey Questions and Build on what Pollsters Provide
Jennifer LaFleur, NICAR
John Brennan, *Los Angeles Times*

3:15-4:40 p.m.

• Car on the Crime Beat
Jeff Kummer, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*
Mike Berens, *Columbus Dispatch*
Nora Paul, *Poynter Institute*

• Introduction to Spreadsheets
Rich Gordon, *Miami Herald*
Sarah Cohen, *St. Petersburg Times*

• Florida Government: Electronic records
Bob Port, *Associated Press*
Scott Anderson, *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*
Barbara Peterson, *First Amendment Foundation*

4:45-6 p.m.

• Car on the Politics Beat
Bob Warner, *Philadelphia Daily News*
Jackie Duobinis, *National Library on Money & Politics*

• Introduction to Databases
Shawn McIntosh, *Dallas Morning News*
Richard Mullins, University of Missouri

• Visualizing Information: Mapping, Charts and Graphics
Ted Mellnik, *Charlotte Observer*
Jennifer LaFleur, NICAR

Internet demo room

In addition, look for the room with multiple hookups to the Internet staffed with experts. Find out how to better use this exciting research and communications tool.

For more information and to register, call IRE at (314) 882-2042.

On the Internet

When hate builds a bomb

By Nora Paul

When breaking news hits — and rarely does a story hit harder than the bombing in Oklahoma — the Internet can be your link to the latest news, and the most esoteric background materials.

Almost immediately, newspapers, radio and television stations around the country created sites with information about the bombing, the survivors, and the victims. A sampling:

Media organizations

The *Edmond* (Okla.) *Evening Sun* had just started a web site. Soon after the bombing, the paper posted letters to the editor and a photo album. http://www.icon.net/sun/index.html

KBIA Radio News (from University of Missouri) started a special report about the bombing containing audio files of Clinton's and Reno's statements. It offers a comprehensive list of other sources on the bombing and its aftermath. http://www.missouri.edu/~jschool/kbia/bombing/index.html

KOCO-TV in Oklahoma City posted pictures from the blast site, and has been keeping the community informed with food bank, and Red Cross services available for victims. http://www.ionet.net/koco/index.html

The *Raleigh News & Observer* has been constantly updating its Oklahoma City bombing report with photos and news stories. Its list of links is invaluable. http://www.nando.net/newsroom/nt/bbextra.html

Time Warner's Pathfinder service leads the pack of news magazines. http://www.pathfinder.com/

Government agencies

When it comes to covering what should be done in emergencies, several agencies offer useful information:

The Federal Bureau of Investigation web site describes the government's reward for information about the bombing. It is also the best site for background information on the continuing Unabomber attacks. http://naic.nasa.gov/fbi/

Also, the Oklahoma State Government Information Server for official state and local reports. http://www.oklaosf.state.ok.us/

(For more information on Internet sources for disaster coverage, including the American Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Agency and Emergency Preparedness Information eXchange , see Nora Paul's Uplink article in the March 1995 edition.)

Stalking militia groups

When the suspect was caught, and his links to radical anti-government militias were discovered, finding background and information on the militia groups became a research priority. Here's where the Internet could help:

Militia Groups by State: State listing of militia groups, with contact names, addresses, e-mail, and bbs numbers when available. http://www.io.com/user/sdragon/docs/dir3.1

The Stormfront White Nationalist Resource page includes various tracts (including comments on the Oklahoma City bombing, how the Bible fits with ideology, and works by David Duke), plus links to the Aryan News Agency and a list of like-minded radio shows, including those on AM, FM and shortwave. http:/204.181.176.4/stormfront/.

Patriot Web's Militia Files: This ftp site includes commentary, directories and profiles on prominent members like Linda Thompson.http://www.tezcat.com/patriot/Militia/

The ftp site (http://www.tezcat.com/patriot/) "Patriot" includes directories of files on topics such as Waco / Weaver, Patriotic Justice journals, historical files, and a timeline of individual rights "violations" throughout American History. This site provides great (although, obviously, biased) background on the issues that militia groups feel they are dealing with. Another collection of links is at http://www.primenet.com/~lion/data01.html.

They Fight the Right lists groups that provide research about right-wing organizations, cults, and hate groups. It's compiled by Political Research Associates. There are some organizations which may be useful in locating background information on militias. This is a wonderful resource with contact information and other details. The Terrorism Handbook (which includes a recipe for ammonium nitrite fuel oil bombs) is often pulled from lists almost as soon as its posted. (It is, however, still available in the newsgroup zer.t-netz.pyrotechnik). http://www.qrd.org/qrd/.html/ftr/theyfigh.html

News Groups to keep an eye on:
misc.activism.militia
us.events.ok-explosion
talk.politics.guns
alt.politics.org.batf
Be careful out there.

If you have suggestions for this column, email Nora Paul at npaul@poynter.org. Visit the Poynter Institute's website at http://www.nando.net/prof/poynter/home.html. It features Paul's Hot News/Hot Research in the Poynter Institute's library section. It takes news stories and links you to some good sources for information to cover that story. To go directly to the page: http://www.nando.net/prof/poynter/hrintro.html

Nora Paul is a former Miami Herald librarian now at the Poynter Institute. She is the author of Computer Assisted Research, available from the Poynter Institute and NICAR.

Bits, Bytes and Barks

Not every college offers CAR knowledge

Despite advances in newsrooms, many university journalism programs have not yet introduced computer-assisted reporting. In a 1993 survey, less than a third taught on-line searching, and even fewer dealt with databases.

Kevin Lee, an assistant communications professor at West Virginia Wesleyan College, conducted a blind survey of more than a dozen experts, asking how to change the situation. The participants included Elliot Jaspin at *Cox Newspapers*; Penny Loeb at *U.S. News & World Report*; Steve Ross at Columbia University; and Shawn McIntosh, *Dallas Morning News*.

The results are that schools would enhance their reputations, and students would be better journalists, if more universities taught computer-assisted reporting. The hurdles include getting and maintaining good equipment, resistance from school officials, and a lack of qualified teachers.

Internet in a beat

Preston P. Forman, a reporter for the *Standard-Times* of New Bedford, Mass., recounted two instances where the Internet helped his small newspaper get the story in a hurry.

When a television station license was sold, he needed to find someone at the Federal Communications Commission — an agency he had never covered. He went to http://www.fcc.gov, found the agency's internal phone directory, and got the right official quickly.

Another time, there was a dispute over the lack of accessibility at town buildings for the disabled. He went to http://www.usdoj.gov, and, a few clicks later, got details on what the Americans with Disabilities Act means for municipalities.

Arizona TV station seeks CAR reporter

KPNX-TV of Phoenix, Ariz., is seeking a reporter with at least three years experience, including work in computer-assisted reporting.

More information is available from Jeanine L'Ecuyer, assistant news director, KPNX-TV, P.O. Box 711, Phoenix, Az. 85001; (602) 257-6630.

Join NICAR on the Internet

Don't forget to keep up with NICAR on the Internet. Subscribe to our listserve, and join as reporters talk about how to do the job better. E-mail to listserv@mizzou1.missouri.edu. In the message, on the first line, write: subscribe nicar-l your name.

To join Investigative Reporters and Editors on the Internet, the instructions are the same except, on first line, write: subscribe ire-l your name.

Don't bank on it

The *Wall Street Journal* recently used computer-assisted reporting to show that big banks — despite ads to the contrary — don't lend that much to small businesses.

The newspaper studied bank filings (known as call reports) to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. The computer helped the paper sift through almost 12,000 reports, and help compare small business deals versus overall company loans.

The newspaper contrasted the numbers with the banks' advertising claims. It also described how small business owners face a tough time getting loans, and how analysts believe the decline of local banking means tougher times ahead.

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