

Conference 2004: Columbia Journalism School Race Project

Columbia Journalism School's Race Project: Report on Bonita Bigham's trip to New York and Syracuse, June 2004.

By Bonita Bigham, Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki.

DAY ONE – June 10 (US time)

“Let's Do It Better” Workshop, *Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, 116 Broadway Manhattan, New York*

Welcome – Arlene Morgan, director CU Graduate School of Journalism

Arlene welcomed all the participants and presenters and gave the history of the “Let's Do It Better” programme. This is the sixth year of the conference and associated awards, born out of a desire by Arlene, and other colleagues at Columbia to provide a forum for news media personnel to discuss and debate issues surrounding the reporting of race and ethnicity in the news media in America .

During the year preceding each conference, journalists are invited to submit work done in the previous two years which exemplifies robust, fair and balanced reporting of racial stories. A panel of journalism educators and industry professionals then judge the submissions and choose the honourees for that year's conference.

Arlene explained the workshop format, acknowledged the Ford Foundation's sponsorship of the event, and opened the floor for participants to introduce themselves. About 40 news media people were in attendance, journalists and media executives representing newspapers and television stations across America . I was the only international participant present. A variety of ethnicities were represented including African American, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Japanese, Chinese, White American and of course Maori (me).

(For a more comprehensive description of the Let's Do It Better workshop, see www.jrn.columbia.edu/events/race/index.html.)

Speaker – Linda Wallace, columnist and diversity consultant

Linda spoke about her experiences as a young African American journalist, and the lessons she has learned over her career. One that stands out for Linda is a story she wrote early in her career about a group of youth who had been causing trouble in a poor neighbourhood. She met some of these kids and discovered they were bored and frustrated, and so changed the angle of her story to reporting what the kids had to say and how many of them had untapped talents – the cause of their frustration and trouble-making.

Linda said it made her realise that she would “never talk about kids' limitations without talking about their strengths,” and she realised that's what happened more often than not in news reporting. “If we lack the skills (to report in a fair and balanced way), how do we go about measuring others and the world?”

Research plainly indicates that reporters have bias, despite the ideal notion of reporting objectively, and that bias is generally a result of the influence of an individual's cultural

background. "Culture influences the way way we look at circumstances. We draw upon our own values etc to interpret the story for our readers."

Linda spoke about the "filters and lenses" through which we see, hear and interpret the information we get for stories, through which we "build the world." Filters come from a variety of factors within our cultural contexts such as race, age, religion, gender, family status etc. Our challenge as news media practitioners is to recognize and manage the effects of those filters on the stories we tell.

"Without diversity you can't have excellence and will lack the perspective needed to put the world into an appropriate context."

Comments from the floor:

"You deal with people how they are, not where you think they should be."

"We need to identify people in newsrooms who are cultural leaders – including White people."

"Sometimes we apply different standards to different communities."

Main points for my consideration:

Identify and manage my own filters

Re-examine strategies for teaching Bicultural Reporting module to be more responsive to students' filters.

"Alice Coles of Bayview" – 60 Minutes, correspondent Ed Bradley.

This story for television is about a woman called Alice Coles from a small Virginian town called Bayview, where the community pulled itself out of squalor and poverty, following Alice to rally against a prison being built in their town, and eventually take control of the affairs and upgrade of their community.

The population of 100 people are mostly descendants of slaves. The houses they lived in were little more than ramshackle huts, most without power or running water. Death by fire in the sub-standard homes was a regular occurrence, with children being the majority of the victims. After defeating the prison plan, Alice and other community members founded a committee to educate themselves about getting help to raise their standard of living, and therefore their prospects and self esteem.

Alice spearheaded the acquisition of \$US10 million raised through state and federal grants to buy nearby land to develop and construct a new community and give some residents new homes - some having running water for the first time in their lives.

Ed was asked if he thought the fact he is African American had any bearing on the outcome of the piece. "I don't go looking for a Black story, I'm just looking for a good story. I'm a journalist who happens to be Black, not a black journalist." He commented that the fact the community was African American was only relevant in the reference to its historical roots, which gave the viewer some perspective of time the community has existed and tied in the continuing struggle of the community to overcome its history.

Comments from the floor:

“These people were not trying to run away from their roots, they were trying to dig them deeper.”

“Alice is an inspiration, and her story told superbly.”

Main points for my consideration:

Affirmation that story selection should always be based on news worthiness, not pursued just because they have a racial element.

Story on video resource – use for teaching.

Race, Murder, Justice - Phoebe Zerwick, The Winston-Salem Journal.

Phoebe was recognised with the Paul Tobenkin Memorial Award for her eight-part investigation on the wrongful murder conviction of Darryl Hunt. The Journal's series, which helped gain the release of Hunt and the subsequent arrest of Willard Brown for the 20-year-old murder of Deborah Sykes, "epitomizes the best that journalism has to offer," according to the judges who chose this piece for the award.

In 1984, Deborah Sykes was on her way to work as a newspaper editor when she was raped and murdered. Darryl Hunt spent 19 years in prison convicted of her murder, despite DNA evidence produced 10 years ago which proved he was not the rapist. The argument which kept him imprisoned was that if he didn't actually commit the rape, he was still involved in her murder.

Phoebe was released from her normal newsroom duties to investigate the case, which had caused clearly delineated lines within the community about Hunt's innocence or guilt. She said the issue was clearly racial and much of her investigation revealed the institutional and public racism that led to Hunt's wrongful conviction, unsuccessful appeals and disbelief on his eventual exoneration.

She said the work had provided many challenges, personally and professionally, because of the racial element, but she did not feel that being her being white had any particular impact on the way she investigated, researched and wrote the story. Then there was the challenge of presenting the information to the readership in a way they would want to read and absorb, especially difficult in an area which had been inundated with stories about the case during the past two decades.

She also said many people make the mistake of thinking they have done a good job when reporting on issues of race and ethnicity. "There's a huge difference between fairness and balance. We can do a balanced job but is it fair?"

(For the full series written by Phoebe Zerwick, see [Murder, Race, Justice: The State vs. Daryl Hunt](#))

Comments from the floor:

“An amazing story, an amazing outcome, an amazing effort to tell the truth.”

“Congratulations on the best investigative journalism I've seen for years.”

Main points for my consideration:

Importance of proper resourcing to achieve desired results.

Story on internet, in workshop compilation book resource – use for teaching.

Somali Immigration Series - Lisa Gardner and Kevyn Fowler, WMTW, Portland , Maine
This was a year-long television news series on the impact of Somali immigration on Lewiston-Auburn Twin Cities in Maine . Lisa and Kevyn covered the supposed issues surrounding the increasing Somali community, highlighted by an official letter to them from the local Mayor asking them to “slow down” the immigration, despite the fact there were only about 1000 Somalis in the city.

The Mayor's letter also inferred that the Somali community needed to work better with civic services which now had to deal with them. He was initially available to be interviewed, but subsequently went to ground and was always unavailable. The reporter (Lisa) and cameraman (Kevyn) found people who had opinions and perpetuated myths about the immigrants, including employment, business, welfare and accommodation issues.

An interesting approach they used in the stories was to utilise graphics which said “Myth”, then a shot of local people verbalizing the rumours, then someone presenting the facts refuting the myth.

Both Kevyn and Lisa said it was extremely difficult to access people within the community, many of whom were distrustful of them and avoided the camera. This was evident in the piece which utilised some footage many times in the same story.

Comments from the floor:

“New groups always get blamed for the problems that existed beforehand, like housing, jobs, schools and social services.”

“If it's difficult to access the adults, high school kids are often a great, uninhibited source of information.”

Main points for my consideration:

Develop strategies to break down barriers effectively.

Educate myself more on protocols of other cultures

Story on video resource – use for teaching.

A Grim Gamble - Michael Riley, The Denver Post

Mike's feature explored the risk taken by Mexicans who attempt to illegally cross the southern border into the United States and the ultimate cost many end up paying for their dreams of a better life.

He said his ability to speak Spanish was vital to the depth and accuracy of information he gathered from those who had crossed successfully and the families of those who did not successfully make the journey.

Mike said relying on an interpreter would never have allowed him to build the trust and relationships he had with his subjects. It also gave him access to the inner workings of the brutal business of the “Coyotes,” the guides who charge huge amounts of money to lead people through the desert, often to their deaths.

He was able to examine all aspects of the illegal crossing – where people try to cross, how they prepare themselves (or in most cases how they are ill-prepared), what their motivation is, what challenges they face in the desert, what is expected of those who fall ill within a group and what's expected of the others, what agencies are set up to assist those crossing, what happens to the bodies of those who don't make it and are found, the vigilantes who use the crossers for target practice, the federal policies and deportation, and the heartwrenching reaction of families who find out their loves ones are dead. “It's a story everyone knows exists, but one not many can comprehend,” he said.

Comments from the floor:

“Why are Hispanic people trying to enter the United States at risk of their lives always referred to as ‘illegal’ when others like the Somalis we just saw are ‘refugees?’”

“Prefer to refer use the term ‘undocumented’ rather than ‘illegal.’”

Main points for my consideration:

Familiarise with immigration policies in Aotearoa

Research stories involving illegal immigration in Aotearoa

Story in workshop compilation book resource – use for teaching.

Conference dinner

Held at Columbia University , conference honourees presented with framed certificates. Veteran broadcaster Carole Simpson and journalist Elizabeth Llorente are recognised with career achievement awards.

DAY TWO – June 11

Let's Do It Better” Workshop, *Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, 116 Broadway, Manhattan, New York*

Arlene Morgan

Recap on previous day's content.

Portfolio of Daily Stories From the New York Boroughs - Managing Editor Peter Landis, New York 1 News

Peter spoke about the diverse immigrant communities in New York , serviced by 277 newsletters or newspapers, 75 of which are based in Queens . He said many of these publications go out nationally to disseminate information to other immigrants throughout the country.

NY1 ran a series of stories highlighting some of these papers, their staff, their circulations, the challenges they face and their triumphs. He spoke about his desire to see news reporting move away from stereotyping people and making assumptions about ethnicity.

“Why do things like Police reports have descriptions like ‘Latino’ when talking about a suspect? Why says?” Peter said New York has been seen as a place where ethnic groups can be seen politically, ethically, economically and ethnically. “That means we need ethnically diverse newsroom staff.”

NY1 has a sister station which broadcasts in Spanish, utilising many of the same stories and sources as NY1, but also many of their own stories specific to the Spanish-speaking community. Resources are sometimes stretched, so often reporters will help each other out by asking for comment on camera in both languages.

Comments from the floor:

“I had no idea there were so many publications in this city, Queens looks like the heart of news in New York .”

“I agree with the use of stereotyping. You never see ‘the white suspect’ anywhere.”

Main points for my consideration:

Familiarise with ethnic publications in Aotearoa

Make contact with ethnic publications, acquire copies

Stories on video resource – use for teaching.

Soul Food – Gregory A Patterson, The Star-Tribune, Minneapolis

Greg wrote this story based on his own personal experiences in the first person narrative which breaks all the traditional rules of journalism. But judges said it worked in this piece which informs, entertains and educates the reader about the world of Soul Food, the style of cooking evolved from a history of slavery and poverty.

Greg said he initially struggled with the personal aspect, finding it difficult to become subjective and write about his own family, but he found it easier after he broke the story down into the following themes – Africa , privation and oppression, salvation and survival but also wanting it to be non-threatening to the reader.

He said he ultimately just stuck with what he knew – history, culture and family. He said the story produced “nice notes” from readers, a positive response from his mother and core subject, and feedback that it assisted to show “ America the Diverse.” He included some of his mother's recipes in the story, another unusual feature.

Comments from the floor:

“The food sounds delicious!”

“Congratulations on integrating your personal life into your professional one without adversely affecting either.”

Main points for my consideration:

Expand story ideas to incorporate kai – accessing, harvesting, preparing, cooking and eating.

Story in workshop compilation book resource – use for teaching.

The Shadow Workers of Las Vegas - Correspondent Chris Bury, ABC, Nightline

Unfortunately there was no one available from ABC or Nightline to speak directly about this story, which looked at the hidden world of the domestic workforce in Las Vegas. The city's population has doubled every decade over the past 30 years, with an estimated 500 people arriving every month.

There is a huge number of immigrant workers who perform the work that keeps Las Vegas ticking over, many of them illegally staying in the country. About 50% of the Culinary Workers Union members were born outside the United States and Latinos make up about 25% of the city's population.

A source in the story said “Las Vegas wouldn't cope without them.” The immigrant community fulfill most rudimentary and poorly-paid jobs, many of them settling for work requiring no specialized skill or education, to make a living however they can. This situation has been officially recognised by the Mexican government which has opened a consulate in the city to assist the immigrants to fulfill their immigration requirements.

Another source says the immigrant workers are “all but invisible, but indispensable to the city that is growing in leaps and bounds.”

Comments from the floor:

“The reporter seemed quite detached, a bit disinterested.”

“It would have been far more effective to have more comment from the immigrants than from city civil servants.”

Main points for my consideration:

Is this the same situation in our cities?

Stories on video resource – use for teaching.

The New Face of Wine Service: Diversity Increasing Among Nation's Sommeliers - Carolyn Jung, The San Jose Mercury News

Carolyn capitalized on her love and good knowledge of wine to capture this story about the changing face of Sommeliers in the wine industry around the world. There are a growing number of young, knowledgeable, highly qualified people from ethnic backgrounds not normally associated with wine, or in some cases not even with alcohol, who are marking their mark on the profession.

This includes one whose mother does not know what his job is, and whose sister no longer talks to him because of their religious background. Carolyn talked about the subjects' passion for their work, which has become their lives, and the varied ways they each came into the industry.

“Diversity in food is not always about the food, it's also about the people and their passions.”

Comments from the floor:

“Race is about how we live, regardless of what shape that takes.”

Main points for my consideration:

Expand story ideas to incorporate kai and drink – Maori Sommeliers?

Story in workshop compilation book resource – use for teaching.

A Portfolio of Work - Angie Chuang, The Oregonian

Angie's round, or “beat” as it is referred to in the United States, is demographics. She said this allows for a broad interpretation covering many issues and aspects of her community's news events.

Angie offered practical tips for developing rounds and finding good stories. These include; looking for complexities, expecting surprises, avoiding stereotypes, looking for dichotomies, having a sense of humour, using the subject's sense of humour, not writing the story before the nutgraf, presenting unusual stories creatively, being a true observer, using sensory aspects to collect information and most importantly to follow up, follow up, follow up.

Angie's portfolio of work included stories about; a post-Vietnam war refugee's personal journey, Afghani brothers reconnecting with their homeland as they go to rebuild the war-decimated country, an Iraqi refugee who fought with the US army in Iraq and his worries about his family still over there, and a Vietnamese former prostitute who is trying to go provide other options for the women who still sell sex in her home country. “These are lives we deal with, not just articles or stories,” said Angie.

Comments from the floor:

“Your work is inspiring, enthralling and very human.”

“Thank you for reminding us that we deal with real people, not just the words about the people.”

Main points for my consideration:

Use tips for teaching.

Portfolio in workshop compilation book resource – use for teaching.

DAY THREE – June 12

Let's Do It Better” Workshop, *Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, 116 Broadway, Manhattan, New York*

Arlene Morgan

Recap on previous day's content.

The Boy Monk - Anh Do, Teri Sforza, Cindy Yamanaka, The Orange County Register

This was a wonderful television documentary about Donald Pham, a 12 year old American Vietnamese boy from California who becomes a Buddhist monk in Nepal. It chronicles his transition from a typical American child who loves baseball and Disneyland to a studious acolyte learning the ancient ways of Buddhism under the guidance of some of the religion's highest holy men.

The story also featured in the Orange County Register in California, written by a journalist and photographically documented by a photographer. The reporting team of Anh Do, herself Vietnamese, Teri Sforza, a white woman, and Cindy Yamanaka who is Japanese spent two weeks at the all male monastery following the life of the now 15 year old young man.

They spoke of the challenge actually breaking through the beauracracy to get to Nepal, a two-year mission. When Ahn first attempted to get the story, Don was receptive to being interviewed, but as time went by she said he changed his mind and she had to work really hard to ensure they got the opportunity. He was still hesitant even after they arrived, and always wanted one of his fellow monks with him every time he was interviewed.

The reporting team spoke of the challenge of being women in a totally male religious environment, maintaining their focus without being overly intrusive into Don's life. Cindy spoke about the way she decided to shoot the story, looking to capture images which represented emotions.

Comments from the floor:

"What a fantatic story, told so respectfully and honestly."

"You have captured the essence of this child's journey."

Main points for my consideration:

Use tips for teaching.

Documentary on DVD and feature article acquired – use for teaching.

American Apartheid – Nancy Denton, California Newsreel

A four-part series of stories for television which chronicle the racist policies that prevented African Americans from accessing the same financial opportunities to buy homes in America in the middle of last century, leading to the establishment of ghetto communities in most American cities across the country.

Areas of new suburbs were specifically sold under whites-only policies, and African Americans were either refused mortgages or given them under harsher conditions than their white counterparts. Parts of the towns and cities were colour-coded, with mortgage risk assessed on the part of town an applicant lived in, not on an individual's ability to service the mortgage.

Less than 2% of mortgages went to African American home owners, and in one community, a white suburb built a wall to separate them from their black neighbours, thereby increasing their mortgage validity.

Nancy said the public reaction to the stories was huge, people had no idea these policies existed at a federal level and there was now a better understanding of the social conditions, which has led to the lower socio-economic status of people of colour in America. "If you have the opportunity to create wealth, you can pass on wealth."

Comments from the floor:

"What a wake-up call."

"The facts are presented in a way that educates and informs, not blames and berates."

Main points for my consideration:

Look for similar legislation in Aotearoa.

Story on video resource – use for teaching.

For a Moment, Family – Karen Thomas, The Dallas Morning News

A group of Chinese orphans were brought to America for important surgery and Karen wrote about Shen You, a child with particularly significant deformities. Shen was 10 years old, but was the size of a two year old and because he had been in an orphanage all he was still very childlike in his psychological and emotional development.

Shen and his caregiver/translator stayed with an American couple with a young child while he underwent the surgical processes he needed to correct his problems. The boy and the family became very attached to each other, as did Karen. Shen's caregiver was eager to return to China as the boy had become a "brat."

She spoke about the language difficulties and the challenge of representing the child in a respectful way, one which did not condescend and patronise him. When she initially heard about the group's visit, she investigated several story angles to look for "what was special," and Shen was it.

Karen is The Dallas Morning News' family writer and says being African American means feels somewhat of a duty to serve her community. "Sometimes I feel obligated to use who I am to get stories in the paper that would not normally appear. I feel very passionate about that."

Comments from the floor:

"You maintained the boy's dignity while telling his story."

Main points for my consideration:

Highlight cultural inclusion as an insight to story opportunities.

Story in workshop compilation book resource – use for teaching.

An Immigrant's Story – Ralph De La Cruz, South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Journalist Ralph De La Cruz was smuggled out of Cuba in 1962 as a four-year-old boy and had not been back to his birthplace since. Hearing stories of the grandfather he never knew motivated him to make the journey back to the place where a Category 5 hurricane in 1932 devastated his small hometown and killed four members of his father's family.

Ralph and his parents escaped from Cuba in a fishing boat to be reunited with his older sisters who were sent to America a few months earlier. His return was a mission to reconnect with his family's history, their hometown and family members who stayed. Ralph was also able to put old hurts to rest and met people who knew him as a child, including a former neighbour who was imprisoned for not telling authorities what she knew about the family's escape.

He said his most nervous moments were in the airport both on the way into and out of the country where the attention he received from officials was disconcerting. The thought of arrest was never far away. Ralph said it was cathartic to be able to write about the journey and have it published.

"I went to put ghosts to rest, and whisper the goodbyes that have long been needed. To connect flesh and faces to stories and fill a lifetime's worth of blanks."

Comments from the floor:

"An extremely moving account."

Main points for my consideration:

Look for similar stories in a cultural context.

Stories in workshop compilation book resource – use for teaching.

Conference wrap up – Arlene Morgan

Arlene gave a synopsis of the issues, topics and areas covered over the preceding three days. She emphasised the need for participants to maintain their high standards in terms of reporting on issues of race and ethnicity, especially those working within mainstream news media outlets – the majority of attendees.

She said newsrooms needed to more accurately reflect the diverse ethnic make-up of the communities they served, or if they didn't they needed to develop techniques and train staff to become more receptive to minority stories and instigate working relationships with those communities.

As an example, she said while working at one paper, a survey was done on the obituaries the paper had written over the previous five years, and they discovered that it must only have been white people who died because there were absolutely no obituaries for anyone from any of the other quite large ethnic communities the paper supposedly served.

Arlene said each of the honourees this year had produced work which told the stories of their subjects with dignity and respect, but encouraged them to keep challenging themselves to overcome more barriers – within the newsroom and also within their communities.

"White isn't a default race," she said.

“Let's Do It Better” honourees for 2004

Career Achievement Award Winners:

Carole E. Simpson, veteran ABC broadcaster, was cited for her lifelong commitment to diversifying the broadcast industry through her stories, hiring initiatives as the anchor of ABC's World News Tonight Weekend broadcast, and mentoring of dozens of young journalists.

Elizabeth Llorente of The Record in Bergen, N.J., won a Career Achievement Award for print reporters in recognition of her more than 10 years of coverage of race and demographics.

Print Honourees:

The Paul Tobenkin Memorial Award:

Phoebe Zerwick and The Winston-Salem Journal Staff for outstanding achievement for newspaper reporting about race, with an eight-part investigation on the wrongful conviction of Darryl Hunt. The Journal's series, which helped gain the release of Hunt and the subsequent arrest of Willard Brown for the 20-year-old murder of Deborah Sykes, "epitomizes the best that journalism has to offer.

Leadership Awards:

- The Dallas Morning News, Karen Thomas
"For a Moment, Family"
- The Denver Post, Michael Riley
"A Grim Gamble"
- The South Florida Sun-Sentinel
Portfolio of Stories
- The Los Angeles Times, Team Report
"Green Card Marines"
- The Orange County Register, Anh Do, Teri Sforza, Cindy Yamanaka
"The Boy Monk"
- The Oregonian, Angie Chuang
A Portfolio of Work
- The Record, Elizabeth Llorente
"Diverse and Divided: One City, Two Communities"
- The San Jose Mercury News, Carolyn Jung
"The New Face of Wine Service: Diversity Increasing Among Nation's Sommeliers"
- The Star-Tribune, Minneapolis , Gregory A. Patterson
"Heart and Soul"
- The Wall Street Journal, Teri Agins
"A Fashion House with an Elite Aura Wrestles with Race"
- The Wall Street Journal, Bryan Gruley
War Stories: "For Lt. Withers, Act of Mercy Has Unexpected Sequel."

Television Honourees:

- ABC, The World News Tonight Weekend broadcast
Correspondents John Quinones and Elizabeth Vargas
"Mexican-American Experience"
- ABC, Nightline
Correspondent Chris Bury
"Nation of Immigrants: The Shadow Workers of Las Vegas."

- California Newsreel
Executive Producer Laurence Adelman
"The Power of an Illusion," a three-part series
- CBS, 60 Minutes
Correspondent Ed Bradley
"Alice Coles of Bayview"
- CBS, 60 Minutes II
Correspondent Bob Simon
"The Death of LCPL Gutierrez"
- PBS Executive Producers
June Cross and Dante James
"This Far By Faith," a spiritual journey of the African-American church in America.
- New York 1 News
Managing Editor Peter Landis and Team
Portfolio of Daily Stories From the New York Boroughs
- WMTW, Portland, Maine
Lisa Gardner and Kevyn Fowler
for a year-long series on the impact of Somali immigration on Lewiston-Auburn Twin Cities in Maine.

Bonita's assessment of the conference

Overall it was a fantastic learning experience. I realised that issues I have come across here in terms of reporting stories of race and ethnicity probably definitely affected my fellow participants eg. racism in the newsroom, interesting news stories passed over because of news editor's lack of knowledge/comprehension, quotes being used out of context to change the story or suit the angle, reporters and photographers being ignorant of cultural protocols, ethnic communities being unreceptive to media interest because of past bad experiences, the feeling that racial news can only be controversial.

Although hard and fast solutions were impossible to find, the issues were raised and debated thoroughly, with participants taking the parts of solutions which fitted their particular circumstances.

One aspect I did find disappointing was that there were no Native American media outlets represented, nor were any Native American journalists present, despite the fact that both do exist. I found it interesting that in a forum which looked closely at race and ethnicity, Native American culture did not feature in the work presented, or in discussion during the conference. As an indigenous person I found that somewhat disconcerting and raised the point in my conference feedback form.

However, I made excellent contacts with journalists and managers/editors from throughout North America, in both the newspaper and television industries, many of whom are keen to develop further working relationships with others from the conference, including me, who are able to help them in their work.

I was able to secure many literary resources, a DVD and two videos to utilise as teaching resources for Te Waharoa Ki Te Ao, and other programmes delivered by the Journalism Department.

DAY FOUR – June 13

Free day in New York

Attended New York Yankees baseball game at Yankee Stadium in The Bronx.

DAY FIVE – June 14

International Visitor Programme

Office of International Visitors, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State, Manhattan, New York

Albanian-American Women's Organisation – Shqipe Malushi, director

This social service organisation was established in New York about 10 years ago to assist women who moved from Albania to America to adjust to their new life and surroundings.

Clients are a combination of self-referrals and third party referrals. Traditional Albanian society is very patriarchal, so many women feel even more entrenched in their traditional roles when they reach America because of language and cultural barriers. Many become depressed and need extra support to adjust.

Shqipe said there are about 300,000 Albanians within the Tri-State area and they tend to move into communities where other Albanians already live. Albanians rarely feature in the mainstream media. Many like that it that way, but Shqipe said it makes publicising issues within the community to the general populace extremely difficult.

However she acknowledged that with so many millions of people in the area, other ethnic groups are also facing many of the same issues so getting publicity is near impossible. What little publicity the Albanian community has had in mainstream is linked to negative crime-related stories where the criminals or the victims are specifically identified as Albanian.

The coverage of the Kosovo Crisis however, was often the community's only link with their homeland, so the media was carefully scanned for information during that time.

Illyria (Albanian American newspaper) – Ruben Avxgiu, editor

An Albanian businessman set Illyria up in 1991 to push the political viewpoint of 1) helping democracy on Albania, 2) working for human rights in Kosovo, and 3) to serve the growing Albanian population in America which didn't have a regular voice.

A new owner now has a new perspective, that every political party has a voice and the paper has a strong news focus. Editor Ruben Avxgiu says the paper is “not black and white” anymore in terms of its allegiances. Initially the paper was based in the Bronx, where a great number of Albanians live, but is now based in Manhattan.

Illyria is a tabloid, averaging 32 pages per edition. It publishes on Tuesdays and Fridays, with circulations of about 8000 and 10,000 respectively, but he estimates their readership is probably at least three or four times that. He had been told that in one small town in Albania, one copy was read by 100 people. Issues cost \$1.50 and Illyria has subscribers all over the country and the paper is also sent to Albania and Australia. Copies also go to the National Library in Kosovo. Ruben said less than 5% of Albanians buy newspapers in America, but at least a third of Albanian households would see, if not buy a paper.

Ruben is the editor in America and there is another editor in Albania who supplies news from home. The paper is bilingual, but most of the content is written in Albanian. About 10 journalists write for Illyria, situated where Albanian communities exist across the country.

“This was the way Albanians first got connected, it's the bridge, the only Albanian institution that reaches all the Albanians in the community,” said Ruben. “Thankfully the owner is a businessman who doesn't worry about the cost (of producing the paper).”

He said distribution is the biggest hassle with subscribers often getting their papers late, according to the increasing number of complaints. They are working to resolve this issue. He said the paper has reached its peak performance based on the current investment level, but there is scope to develop further if the distribution issues are resolved and more investment is made in staff and resources. He is unsure if the present owner is prepared to make that investment at this stage.

There have been a couple of attempts by others to establish rival papers, but they did not survive as they found it impossible to break into the distribution network Illyria had. “We have the trust of the people.”

Production is done in their office using Quark Express and journalists take their own pictures.

DAY FIVE – June 15

International Visitor Programme

Office of International Visitors, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State, Syracuse, New York

Radio WPHR – Butch Charles, programme director

Radio WPHR Power is one of seven commercial radio stations broadcasting in the Syracuse area, under the Clear channel network. Butch Charles owned the station before it was bought by Clear.

Power was initially set up by an African American about 25 years ago as a political tool to inform and educate the local African American population about issues of the day. It was also a country music station before Butch bought it about 13 years ago.

“When you are purchasing a radio station you have a plan as to how you are going to run your business and make money,” he said. Butch changed to music to R&B, Soul and introduced Hip Hop to the area to change the target group and attract more advertisers.

Power has one journalist employed to provide news for hourly bulletins. Butch would like to have more than one, but the station is primarily a music station. He said it ranks in the top 15 stations of the 30 which broadcast in Syracuse.

“In order to have a more successful reach with minorities, these stations need to cater to the sound of those minorities.” He said there is sometimes some negative backlash from advertisers and the public for targeting the African American community.

“Do I see some racism? Yes, but that racism is a given in the USA, if not institutionally it will be individually.” He said racism in Syracuse was just above being subtle, but it wasn't overt.

“Smart businessmen recognise how diversity can help their businesses, they can make more money yet stand back from race.”

Syracuse University – Professor Charlotte Grimes, Newhouse School of Public Communications

Charlotte Grimes teaches classes on civil rights at Newhouse. She had recently attended a civil rights conference and was organising a symposium in partnership with a law professor from the university on Native American law and journalism, to be held in October.

Charlotte has an extensive history in journalism and journalism teaching, including time at Hampton University, an African American college where, interestingly, the same issues about teaching diversity arose within those classes. She said it was often difficult to get students to appreciate and understand the need for expanding their journalistic horizons into other cultures and ethnicities, especially after the struggle African Americans have been through to have a voice within the media industry. Her challenge was to help them realise that if they didn't become more openminded, they were in effect doing to others what their parents' and grandparents' generations had fought against.

She saw the number of ethnic press outlets as necessary to provide news and information to those communities, especially while mainstream outlets were coming to grips with the need to diversify and reflect their communities more. She envisages that even if or when that diversification ever did happen, there would still be a place for the ethnic press to fill particular target markets within those communities, just as the niches are continually being created and filled within the mainstream market.

But she says it's not all plain sailing. “A lot of ethnic presses and their communities often have a tense relationship with other. Often the community's perspective is that they (the ethnic media) should be a PR tool.”

Native American Service Agency – Jacob Thompson and Fran Cook

This organisation has provided social services to Native Americans living in Syracuse for the past 15 years, with a case load of 20 people at a time. They focus on community outreach programmes in the areas of adoption, foster care, disability development and Medicaid coordination. There are about 2000 Native Americans living in Syracuse, and about 6000 in total in the Onondaga county (iwi area which includes Syracuse). The agency is state funded.

Fran and Jacob said they did not have much interaction with the press, personally or professionally, and what little good coverage there is seems to be accompanied by negative headlines. Issues that do get coverage in mainstream media are usually land claims, casinos and bingo halls. The issue for the people is now sovereignty over their own lives.

They believe the biggest issues for Native Americans at the moment are the land claims of the Iroquois Nations. Fran said they have no interaction with the Indian Country News, situated just north of Syracuse. “We could always have a better relationship with the press, it could be better if we had more control over what they write.”

Fran is a native speaker of Mohawk and used to teach the language in high school in her tribal area. There are now total immersion Mohawk language schools, and educationalists are working on other programmes to carry across the education spectrum. She said there was absolutely no press coverage of things happening in this area.

DAY SIX – June 16

International Visitor Programme

Office of International Visitors, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State, Syracuse, New York

Indian Country Today – Tim Johnson, editor, and Kerri Lis, production manager

Indian Country Today is a national weekly broadsheet which carries a strong theme of covering tribal governance issues. They report in-depth stories on sovereignty and legal cases which affect or may have implications for all the Native American nations, including cases versus local, state and federal governing structures.

Editor Tim Johnson (Mohawk from the Six Nations Reserve) refers to the paper as the “watchdog” for the nations, of which 550 are federally recognised while he says there are more who aren't. He said because the paper goes nationwide, issues which are reported tend to have a national focus. He has been the editor there for five and a half years and has a Masters in Journalism.

“Events in California may have implications nationwide eg. US vs Lara,” said Tim, referring to the case where Billy Jo Lara, a Native American who had already been tried and punished under a tribal court and justice system, challenged the federal court's authority to prosecute him again for the same offence and lost.

The production hub of the paper is based in Cannastota, Syracuse, using Quark Express, Photoshop and Illustrator software. It gets printed on Alexandria, Virginia and gets distributed from there. News comes from four regional hubs with a fulltime journalist in each place, and the rest of the content comes from columnists. Tim said the aim is to have 20 original “voices” in each issue and the paper prides itself on having 100% original content rate in each edition. He said the first page is dedicated to news of national influence and interest and the paper has no particular political slant apart from going with “whoever is supporting Indians,” and noting that the Native American vote can and has turned election results around in some places.

The Indian Country Today costs \$1 per issue and has a circulation of 20,000 and an estimated readership of at least 40,000. The subscription rate is \$48 per year for 52 issues. It started in South Dakota in 1981 and evolved from there, going national in 1999. It covers all sorts of news from the nations, including culture, the arts, entertainment, health, education, trade and commerce.

Tim says the paper also acts as an antidote to the mostly negative news published by mainstream papers eg. printing a balanced version of a feature series published by the Buffalo News which focused on members of nations who were not yet benefiting from the settlements and business ventures of their nations. “We put the balance of the good in the nations alongside the bad,” said Tim.

The paper is not afraid to take anyone to task who they feel has misrepresented an issue or information, and include in their ranks of opponents outlets like The Wall Street Journal, Time Magazine, Fox News, the Washington Post and CNN. But Tim said although they are able to print the balance to those stories, they are unable to reach the mainstream audiences where so many of the myths about Native Americans become entrenched and perpetuated. “The general public don't know.”

The team at The Indian Country News are intending to make the information in the paper available on the internet through an archival system they are investigating at the moment, and will charge nominal service fees for those wanting to access the information to cover costs.

Kerri, who is white, said the philosophy of the paper is confirmed by the readership which continues to grow. It's read by tribal leaders, senators, governors and by every policymaker of importance. "No-one involved in Indian law ignores the paper," she said. "It's definitely being read, people are connecting with it." Tim said a local hate-group actually copies what the paper does from the other side of the spectrum. "Every opponent to Indian independence reads it too. Indian achievement awards were launched in February, they launched some too."

A book of ICT columns, editorials, cartoons covering the first five years of the new century is one of the initiatives the team is working on for publication next year. Tim said they have also worked really hard on improving the standard of their content. "One of the things we've put some effort into is the upgraded opinion/editorial section by cultivating a group of people to get a deep, intellectual range of columns." Tim said contributors and columnists, not all Native American, were typically experts in their particular fields, all with more than 20 years experience. "We have leading legal minds writing for us, we're getting solid information. I've never seen us bested on point of fact, justice lives at the core of what these people are advocating for. It's critical to have these people. The more solid network you have the more credible you are across the board, in print and broadcast."

Funding predominantly comes from advertising and sales, but also from the United Nations and the paper is owned by the Four Directions Media Inc, which is in turn owned by the Oneida Nation, the local iwi of Canastota. Tim says this allows the paper to be once removed from tribal politics. ICT also produces four national magazines annually, each with the self-explanatory titles Pow Wow, Business, Education, and Tourism and Gaming. Over the next five years Tim would like to see a magazine-style weekly television show established, covering and reinforcing issues highlighted by the paper. There is already a Native American non-profit television group that does some programming and production for television.

Tim said the gaming industry has become a huge economic base for many nations. Initially there was great concern that gambling would kill the culture, but in fact the opposite has happened where nations can now fund their own cultural and historical research. Some tribes are also paying dividends to their members, many replacing the federal welfare systems. Many stories in ICT reflect that economic activity and related events. "In this paper we don't just deal with events, but help people to look for the most appropriate ways to move forward culturally."

Assessment

I found my time spent at the Indian Country Today to be extremely valuable and it provided me with many insights into the philosophy of the paper, the challenges it faces and the solutions it uses to overcome obstacles. I was particularly interested to understand how it was funded and whether or not its contributors and columnists were paid. I especially enjoyed meeting with Tim and sharing experiences as editors, which made me realise how many issues are universal in the journalism world.

The issues facing the Native American nations were also closely aligned with the issues Maori face here in Aotearoa, especially those related to land claims and the legal process. I found the ICT team to be extremely professional, highly competent and experienced, but also very humble in their work. As far as they were concerned they were there to ensure the facts were made as clear as possible to their readers so people across the country could have access to valuable and important information regarding their tribal struggles.

They were also interested to hear what the media scene was like in Aotearoa, both mainstream and Maori, and were very interested in hearing about Maori TV in particular. I also left a copy of Mana Magazine with them which they were impressed with for its professional look and appeal to its target group.

This visit was the most valuable source of information and professional contact from an indigenous perspective and it formed the basis of a significant exchange of information and ideas.

DAY SEVEN – June 17

International Visitor Programme

Office of International Visitors, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State, Syracuse , New York

Travel from Syracuse to Los Angeles .

DAY EIGHT – June 18

International Visitor Programme

Office of International Visitors, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Department of State, Los Angeles, California

No programme due to time constraints. Travel from Los Angeles to Auckland .

Arrived home June 20.