

How to Write an Op-Ed 2017

JUDY SINGER: I'm Judy Singer. I'm the Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Diversity and I want to welcome you all to this event on how to write an Op-Ed, getting your voice into the news media. I want to just make a few framing remarks before turning it over to the moderator of this panel, Ann Marie Lipinski. And in thinking about how to help the faculty get their voice out into the world, we've done a number of events and this one happens to be the second time we've done this-- it's particularly popular.

And when we planned this event, we were thinking that there are people on the faculty who are interested in figuring out how to reach a broader audience. But I think the events of the last month have really called to task the need for people in academia, now more than ever, to get their voices out, regardless of where they fall in the debate. I think there's just a need for us to take the time that we have spent in dedicating our lives to the study of particular subjects to think about speaking, not just to our colleagues, which is what we do as our bread and butter, but to a broader audience.

And people in the room have a lot to offer. I'm particularly pleased with the breadth of people who are here. We have people from various different schools at Harvard, various different disciplines. We run the gamut from, oftentimes, we get arts and humanities and social science people here. We have science people, law, business, public health-- range of fields-- and I think that's, actually, terrific because it represents the riches that Harvard has to offer, but also the kinds of voices that the folks who are up here are interested in hearing from because you might not meet some of these people in the course of your everyday business.

The Op-Ed forum is particularly interesting because it's a short form. We're used to writing in longer form and I think one of the things that you'll hear from the panelists is how to help think about moving from the long form that we're comfortable being with whether it's an article which you don't think of as a long form, but to these people, that's a long form, or even teaching a class or a seminar where you've got an hour, two hours, three hours to give your views versus 90 seconds on the radio.

So the short form, I think, is particularly attractive and in thinking about how to take the work that we produce and make it more accessible to people, but also for people who are writing a book, one of my first pieces of advice is why don't you start with an Op-Ed because a book is a very long commitment and an Op-Ed is something that's much more achievable and I think that's some of what you'll hear today.

The third part of thinking about this event is that it's actually quite instrumental in nature. Our panelists are very interested in establishing relationships with members of our faculty who do have something to say about issues of the day or other kinds of topics that would have a broader audience. And I'm going to end with an anecdote that at the end of the event that we did two years ago, one of the people in the room, who was a first year assistant professor, went up to Trish Hall who was Jim Dao's predecessor at the New York Times and pitched an idea. And three weeks later, she had the lead Op-Ed in the New York Times. So that gave me great pleasure to see the kind of instrumental nature of that. So I'm hoping for a repeat and maybe a repeat across some other news outlets.

So with those framing remarks, I am going to turn the moderator role over to Ann Marie Lipinski who is the curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism, which is here at Harvard University. It's a wonderful resource that we have here and, in fact, there are lots of journalists at Nieman who potentially could also be helpful as you're thinking about this role. She also, before she came to Harvard, was the editor in chief of the Chicago Tribune and is a Pulitzer Prize winner herself. So she has been both in the publishing end and also now with many years here at Harvard and time as also with the University of Chicago, also understands the academic end and I think it's in a great position to bridge these two worlds. So let me turn it over to Ann Marie.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Thank you so much, Judy. Judy has very happily made me her co-conspirator on a couple of initiatives here at Harvard bringing faculty and journalists together. And I am always delighted to play that role for her and with her. So thank you for giving me the chance to do that again today. When she first reached out to me to see if this was possible today, it was many months before the election. And I think, certainly, my views and maybe your views of the value or lack thereof of opinion journalism or opinion writing have maybe changed some.

But I want to make sure-- so Op-Ed-- the term comes from opposite editorials. Right? That's what it means, but I think the op is often misused to just focus on opinion. It's also the first two letters of that word. And I think what you'll find with the group of people we are talking with today, the world is awash in opinion and you can publish it anywhere you want. You can publish your columns on medium, you can publish, you can tweet, you can post them on Facebook, you probably are members of small Facebook groups or Google Groups or Google Hangouts or any number of select cohorts you make yourself a part of and you can talk with them and share your opinions with them at ease.

The difference between that and what our colleagues today are going to talk about is really reaching an audience outside of that bubble and the accent not necessarily on opinion, but on information, on expertise, and on sharing that expertise in a sophisticated way with a broader audience than, perhaps, many of you are used to speaking to or with. And the value to us as journalists is tremendous. The ability of somebody with an expertise about a subject to be able to express that to people beyond their ken is incredibly valuable in a democracy and just to us individually as people who are very interested in your work, but maybe can't always understand it.

And so I think there's sometimes this divide between what journalism does and what the academy does and, hopefully, at the end of our time here together, that will be demystified for you and also some for our panelists whose backgrounds, with one exception, are on the journalism side. As Judy said, we saw this become very successful the first time she hosted such a conversation and, hopefully, that will be the same for today.

So I was, yesterday and today, just looking at kind of recent examples of the kinds of things that our three journalists here today think about or have chosen as opinion pieces or Op-Ed pieces to use. And so James, in the last day or so, has overseen the publication of a piece in the New York Times written by a Cuban born American who's writing about her reactions to Castro's death and the kind of haunting presence he had in her life really from the time she was cognizant. A freshmen from New York University writing about the animosity that-- I'm not sure if it's a he or she, there were initials only in the piece--

JAMES DAO: It's a she.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: She-- that she has experienced as somebody who is a Trump supporter. A piece about how the FCC is going to auction off a chunk of the public airwaves and an argument that the writer makes for using the proceeds from that to build a 21st century infrastructure of public interest media written by the president of a foundation. In the Globe "Ideas" section, there was a piece about our complicated views about nature and how we think about alien species invading our habitats, and examination of the labor movement in the age of Trump. We've all certainly heard the term Alt-Right. I've not heard the term Alt-Labor so I learned about Alt-Labor through that piece and it's a new approach to pro-worker activism.

And over a cognoscente at WBUR, there was a piece about speaking up for undocumented workers who you may work with yourself. And also, one that was very relevant to many of us last week, how to go home and deal with your family after the election at Thanksgiving. So that's a huge range of ideas and thoughts and expertise represented just really over the course of 24 or 48 hours on these three-- in two publications and one radio station.

But I wanted to start with Naomi and with that as a backdrop, because Naomi is somebody who has navigated both waters, if we want to think of them as separate ponds. So she is somebody who has written for the Washington Post and the LA Times and Nature and Science and The New Statesman and on and on. She's worked in the print, she's worked in video, she's written books, she's written Op-Eds for newspapers, for magazines, she's done a TED Talk, she's worked on a documentary.

So on the one hand, she's very skilled at the popular. Here are just two headlines-- one from a piece and one from a book-- The Pope and the Planet-- we'd all read that-- Merchants of Doubt-- we all read that-- and then, maybe the not so popular culture, here's the title of one, The Rejection of Continental Drift: Theory and Method in American Earth Science-- probably not something any of these three would publish.

JAMES DAO: Maybe with a different headline.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Maybe with a different headline. And that's a key, actually, what Jim just said. And so I want to see if we can learn from Naomi how she thinks about those as very separate disciplines, but rising from the same well of knowledge and expertise that you bring to both. So talk about coming at popular pieces, popular culture pieces, or publications in the popular culture with your academic background.

NAOMI ORESKES: Sure. OK. Thanks. Well, thanks very much for having me here and thanks, Judy, for organizing this and, Liz, I have to say I do feel kind of a weight of responsibility being the token academic on this panel. So I guess the best place to start is just by saying I don't think of them as being separate ponds. I've never thought of the diverse work I do. I work in science, I work in history of science, I work in what you call the popular realm. I never think of them and I never have thought of them as different projects and that's something that deans and chairs have not always understood, although I think they do now, and I'm in a very nice place now where now I get to be trotted out as an exemplar of how this can be done, but it wasn't always that way.

So the first thing you have to realize is that I think you have to have a conception of what you think your project is and I guess being an earth scientist, for me, the metaphor I've always had is kind of the iceberg metaphor that what I do in public is a kind of the tip of the iceberg. It's the small piece that stands out that people see, people like yourself or these folks, but it's supported by this giant mass of material beneath the surface that most of you don't see, but that's the part that supports it, that's the part that the upper part floats on.

And so all of you, as academics, have that mass of work that you've done that you've worked incredibly hard on or you've spent long hours in the archives or in the laboratory or in the field or wherever you work. And you have all this stuff at your disposal that you can use. And so I think that's the starting point is a sense of empowerment based on your knowledge and the knowledge you have that if you start to write about something based on your research, you know more about that than probably anybody. Right?

And so that's, I think, where my public work comes from is out of this body, this big body, of detailed work and long hours spent in dusty archives which Gabriella knows about. Right? So I

thought, maybe, I could just say something of how I wrote my first Op-Ed piece because that's the other second really important thing. And I don't think the folks on this panel will disagree, but they may have a slightly different view, because I know sometimes editors work with academics to figure out what they might want to write about, but that's not how I came to write my first Op-Ed.

I came to write my first Op-Ed because I had something I wanted to say. And I think that's the bottom line for anyone is, do you have something to say? If you don't, then as the great sage Tom Lehrer said, the least you can do is shut up. So don't talk until you have something to say, but when you do, that's the moment. And so I think the key thing is to sort of be aware, to kind of go through the world with an awareness of how your work might connect to something. And when that moment occurs, that's when you act.

And so some years ago, more than 10 years ago, we had some terrible wildfires in Southern California and my children were out of school for a week. We had a fire week. Here we have snow days, but in California, we have fire days. And it was a quite traumatic time in Southern California. Lots of people were displaced from their homes. And my children and I-- and you couldn't really go anywhere because it was so much smoke and dust. It was not safe to be outside.

After three days of baking cookies and things like that, and I'm reading the papers-- and this is the other thing, too, is noticing what's not being said. So there were all these things being written about the fires and no one was making the connection to climate change, no one. And I, personally, think that of all the different things that climate change does, is already doing, and will do to us, at least, if you live in the west, fires are the most important thing because they're really, really scary. People are afraid of fire, people get it that fires destroy their homes and their communities and their lives and cost billions of dollars in damage. So fires connect climate change to people's lives in very real, tangible, and emotionally present way.

And so I just wrote something about it. I wrote, basically, something that said, guys, you know climate change. And I sent it over the transom to the Los Angeles Times-- didn't know anybody. And an editor there saw it and liked it and called me up and said, we'd like to run with this. And

then over the next 24 hours, we worked together to clean it up and I learned a lot working with an editor about how to write a good Op-Ed piece. You learn by working with editors.

So after that experience, then I realized, OK, this is actually not that hard. I mean it's different, like I was just saying, I mean the style of an Op-Ed is different than what we're used to in academic life. You have to hit it hard, don't bury the lead, main idea up front, only one idea, not 17, no table of contents, no footnotes, almost no references-- and if they already have to kind of explore-- well, I guess now with hyperlinks, you kind of do.

JAMES DAO: That's right.

NAOMI ORESKES: My first Op-Ed was in the days before a hyperlink-- I mean old fashioned print-- all that kind thing. So anyway, the point is I had something to say and I said it and somebody was interested and then things went from there. So there's not really like a magic trick about writing an Op-Ed, but you do have to let go of a lot of your academic concern with detail, nuance, subtlety. The art of an Op-Ed piece, subtlety is not kind of like job one, although there is a place for it at times. It's not to say that the best Op-Ed pieces is a sledgehammer, it's not. But it's just we've been so trained to focus as academics on the subtlety, the nuance, the details, and so you do have to let go of some of your academic sensibilities.

If you can find someone to work with, that's a really good thing, but my initial Op-Eds were just on my own, but I was very lucky-- and this is something I think we could do here at Harvard and I'd actually like talk to you more about this later. So after I wrote my first Op-Ed piece, then I got an email from someone at UCSD. I was teaching in San Diego at the time-- and just a small aside-- when I was in San Diego, the New York Times never accepted any of my Op-Ed pieces, and then I moved here, and suddenly like [INAUDIBLE]. So OK, better late than never. I know it wasn't me.

But I got an email from someone in our press and communication office and she said, that was a great piece, I loved it, would you like to work with me in the future? And so, we did and we had a great partnership and it went like this. I had something to say, something happened, I would write a draft, I sent it to her-- Inga Kiddera was her name. Inga would look at it, she'd give me

some suggestions-- she had been in journalism-- I would make them, and then she would shop them around for me.

And that was a giant blessing because, frankly, it's hard to shop your own Op-Ed pieces. And nobody likes rejection, but it's particularly-- if you're an academic and you're used to getting reviews, you get feedback, you revise, you resubmit-- to have an Op-Ed editor to say, sorry, we're not interested and no explanation, nothing-- because that's how it goes because they're not obligation to give-- they're not reviewers, right? That was kind of hard, but she would shop them for me. And so working with Inga, we'd place pieces, as Tara said, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle-- practically every major newspaper in this country with the notable exception of one in New York, but that's OK.

And here's the other really important thing I just want to say before I pass on to the others. So one thing I've really noticed moving here from California-- it's not a criticism of Harvard which is an incredibly great university. I'm totally proud and thrilled to be here, but we tend to sort of think when we think about newspapers, the media, we think about The New York Times, The Boston Globe, and that's fine. They're absolutely fantastic, amazing newspapers and they reach lots and lots of people. But there are millions and millions of people in this country who do not read The New York Times and that could be hard to believe being at Harvard-- or The Boston Globe or even The Los Angeles Times. There's this world of people are out there that we don't reach and this election has made that incredibly clear, if we didn't know it beforehand.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: So thank you for that, Naomi, and I wanted to turn to Katie. So Naomi said something very, very important. She said she's home, she's baking cookies, there are fires all around her, she had this idea that fires connect people to climate change in a very real way. And so embedded in that observation is that this was incredibly timely. The wolf was at the door, she had knowledge, and she jumped on it very quickly. There was a reason for an editor to look at that piece in that moment.

And I'm wondering if you can talk about the importance of that, Katie, and conversely, getting an idea, a pitch, that's kind of-- it could happen any day of the year and there's not that sense of urgency or timeliness and how you think about those two in different ways.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: Sure. I can't overemphasize the importance of timeliness. If something is happening, that's when you should be contacting an editor, not three days later. I often, when I was the Ideas editor, would get a pitch about a topic that was very, very important, but not in the news anymore and there was not a lot of reason to start talking about it again. So within minutes of something happening is when you should be reaching out to an editor, when you should be thinking about it.

So that talks a lot to what Naomi said which is always be thinking about these things, always be thinking about what you have to say on different topics and areas of expertise that you have so that you can jump on it. And I would, actually, say the other good thing to do is just talk to editors in advance and get to know editors, have coffee with them. I know I often would make appointments with academics or other local voices that we wanted to, someday, have as contributors thinking about-- often, ideas would come through just a conversation and someone would say, I'm working on this topic and I have a lot of research on x and we would figure out an angle together.

And that was one of the things that I actually really enjoyed about working with Op-Eds is the idea that I could help the person think through what they were trying to say on a topic. It doesn't need to be a 700 word Op-Ed fully formed when you turn it in. It can be a nugget of an idea that we can work together to form into a piece. The counter side to that, the idea that you have something that could work any day, it's often what works is something that's counter-intuitive so something that breaks the stereotypes around a topic or that is interesting, unique research that only you are working on in that moment or that only you are talking about that will change a reader's mind, for instance.

I always say, why are we doing this piece now is one of the questions that I frequently ask people who are pitching Op-Eds to me and kind of making sure that when you're first approaching the editor, that you can say this is why we're doing this piece now. It's because this is a brand new piece of research or this is something that's on the news or this is something that only I can bring this expertise and the topic is extremely relevant to your readers because--

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Can you, Katie, so because you're The Boston Globe and you sit in this-- you're awash in academic institutions and real and potential contributors, do you have any observations about or maybe an example of a really successful and also maybe a less than successful pitch that you've had about something related to academic research and feels right or does not in the moment?

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: Sure. I think that they're-- all you have to do is read the Sunday "Idea" section and you'd find successful pitches from academics. We often have pieces, but things that are-- I'm trying to think, of course, I'm struggling now that you've asked me and put me on the spot-- but we--

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: I should say, very excitedly and happily, Katie's mind is in a new place. Although she edited ideas and Sunday Op-Eds for some time, she's the recently promoted managing editor of The Boston Globe so yea for Katie.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: Thank you. I would say that there are great examples. We did a piece about the history of the word racism a couple of weeks ago. I didn't actually edit that, but I was part of the initial process of soliciting it and bringing it to The Globe. And it was one of those pieces where it could have been very academic and jargony and I know that there was a lot of work put into making it something that a lay reader could read and get through-- early drafts were sort of dense-- but the writer worked very closely with the editor and made it something that felt very accessible to the average reader.

I think that there are a couple of pitfalls that writers often find themselves in which make things not successful. So for instance, what I was saying earlier was there's this phenomenon called editing by committee in which you will go through the first edit with a writer and they will send you back a note that says something to the effect of, OK well, I just need to share this around my department. That almost never works for an editor because what comes back from that process is a lot of caveats being added to the piece when--

Going back to something Naomi said, really what works the best is when you have a straight point that you're trying to make and you're using supporting evidence around that as opposed to something that becomes muddied because you want to make sure that this person gets credit for

their research or a side is added because you want to make sure it feels nuanced. Nuance is important and, in fact, I think people go too far in terms of taking nuance out, because I think often you do want to have those caveats, but you don't want to have the caveats take away from your argument and that's often what can happen.

It's when you start saying things like I'm making this really strident point, but there is all this research that says the opposite. And I feel like there is a pressure in academia to make sure everyone in your department feels like they are in the know about what you're writing or about this excellent opportunity you have to contribute to The Boston Globe or et cetera. But when that process starts to take away from the punch or impact that the piece can have, that's when it gets in the way.

And so the other thing that I always appreciate, as I mentioned, is when someone wants to credit their bosses' work. That happens all the time. It's constantly like-- and I want to say-- in the drafts, obviously. This doesn't often ever really make it into the paper, because that's one of the first things, as an editor, that you take out, frankly. So you'll get a piece that's like this Op-Ed wouldn't have been possible without the previous research by my department chair. So just know going in that if you want to do that, you're going to be really-- it's going to be hard to find an editor who's going to let that end up in the paper.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: I'm smiling because it's also completely antithetical to what would happen in a newsroom where reporters will never give their bosses credit for anything.

[LAUGHTER]

It's the precise opposite, culturally.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: Right.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: The editors only ruin things. Your bosses ruin your best work.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: Exactly.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: One of the great mysteries of the universe is how the pieces get chosen for The New York Times Op-Ed page. You're in the really fortunate position to be overwhelmed with submissions. You're in the really difficult position of being overwhelmed with submissions. So, Jim, can you just talk about that process? So you're thinking about tomorrow's page, what's been the run up to what we will read there, what will appear there-- in print or online.

JAMES DAO: Sure. I just want to say I've only been there 10 months so I have yet to reject one of Naomi's.

NAOMI ORESKES: But it will happen.

JAMES DAO: And it's true that we don't give explanations because, as I explained to one writer, if that's what we did, that's all we would do. So I'd love to be able to boil it down, but it's, of course, it's like a newsroom, in fact. It's sausage making and it's sausage making as ugly as anything that happens in the news operation. But I'll sort of run you through a typical day where we start with the morning meeting. We all come in trying to have read not just our paper, which is enough of an ordeal, but has skimmed other papers and have a sense of what's going on. And we discuss what is the big story that we care about? What is the running story we're going to continue to follow? And what is the role of opinion in this process?

And that, in and of itself, is a really complicated question because opinion is so much more diverse and broad than it once was. The Op-Ed page of The Times historically was two pieces and columnists and it still is that-- two pieces by outside writers, often academics, but they could be novelists, it could be regular people, and then two of our regular columnists. But today, we are now online only essays. We are the Sunday Review which is 12 to 15 very often long style essays, sometimes reported and sometimes personal narrative, sometimes standard opinionated Op-Eds with a prescription and a problem.

We are the international New York Times, which has its own group of outside international writers writing from across the globe. And there's a whole variety of online types of pieces that we do. One of our favorites is something called The Stone which is a philosopher's blog, basically. It's part of the Op-Ed operation. Some of The Stone essays get into the paper or the Sunday Review, but most of them just live online and it has a dedicated readership. Maybe, if

there's any philosophers here, you've actually looked at it. And we have others like that that are developing.

So as Katie pointed out, timeliness is huge. We're looking for pieces that can go-- sometimes, we get Op-Eds within an hour of an event taking place. And very often--

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: And that's when you should be pitching.

JAMES DAO: But very often, they're astonishingly good and we try not to distinguish between what goes online versus what goes in the paper because, more and more, we are purely online operation, but we do give a little bit more care and tending to the paper because the readers are a little bit more careful there and we have more time to work on them. But we get full-fledged 850 word Op-Eds within an hour or two of major events and if they are good, we will put them online as quickly as we can, sometimes within an hour or two hours depending on the quality of them.

What I would say to sort of be the counter voice on timeliness is every clever reporter has figured out, over the course of their career, that you can make almost anything feel timely if you have the right framing for it. And the key to anything, whether it's a news story or whether it's an Op-Ed, is that as Naomi points out very correctly, you should write about what you know and what you care about. We receive 1,000 pictures a day about people who want to tell us why Trump won and really, we don't care almost from any of you. We have columnists, editorial writers, and big brains across the globe trying to tell us what that is. We're probably not going to really care about your opinion on that.

What we are going to care about is if you have some amazing data about voting patterns in a particular part of the country that illuminate how a certain demographic voted-- that could be really interesting. We had a pollster from Cornell who did that and his material made it, it was only online because we had such a flood of post-election stuff. But it just cut an interesting slice out of the electorate that was really interesting to us and we thought illuminated a part of what was going on.

Presumably, any researcher doing, no matter how niche or esoteric, has some sort of resonance for people and that's the crucial part of figuring out whether you can make a New York Times

Op-Ed because we're not-- as popular as we are in college towns, most of our readers are not academics, most of our readers are not going to know your subjects very well. They're smart generalists, they're sophisticated readers. What they want to do is to take your nugget of information, your research whether it's history or science or politics, and your ability to pull back and say this is why this matters to lots of people is what's going can make the difference between a piece that we take or don't take.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: How many unassigned pieces do you get over the transom every day, roughly, an estimate?

JAMES DAO: It's hundreds. And I personally will wake up to 30 in my inbox and many of them I will just farm out to others to read, some of them I'll try to read.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: And what's the best--

JAMES DAO: It's both a blessing and a curse. It's not a curse-- the curse part of it isn't just that it's a lot to read and we can't keep up with it, but to some degree, we want to be able to direct where the Op-Ed page is going on our own. And we could just run things that were sent to us every day of the week for our entire careers. What we try to do as much as possible is to step back and say here's a thought that we think people aren't dealing with and then think of who the right writer is for that, whether it's a novelist or a journalist or an academic, and that's where your relationships with editors do matter. It not only helps you when you do pitch a story, but sometimes we'll come to you because we know that you've done research on something interesting or we know that you've just come out with a book on a particular topic that was totally meaningless and obscure to us until that moment when, suddenly, it wasn't and it really mattered. So our ability to have you on our Rolodexes is important.

But we publish-- I don't know, we counted it up the other day-- the operation I oversee probably publishes over 100 things a week between small online and long form in the Sunday Review. And then there's video and now there's audio and there's just an incredible array of things we now do. Weeding through that stuff is a huge part of the day. And I guess, the last point to go beyond the timeliness part of it is because Op-Ed has evolved a lot in the years and it's not just policy, problem, prescription type writing which is what it once was and which we still value and

we still do, particularly at this moment when we have a new administration where God knows where they're going, but you know, perhaps, it's a persuadable moment and it's a time for people to weigh in.

But we also we also run first person essays that are not even about a problem, necessarily. They're experiential, they're beautifully written very often, but they tell us something about a place in the world or about a state of mind or could be about a problem, as well. And you know that type of essay often is written by an academic, as well. It's going to sound idiotic for me to say this, but study us, study not just the daily Op-Ed page, but study the Sunday Review and think about what you like and what works for you and that's a very important part of the learning process in terms of figuring out what we do and how your work might fit into what we do.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Iris, so you work in a different medium. On the one hand, you do publish things that would look like they could work in print or they could work on cognoscente or [INAUDIBLE] online and its portfolio. But I wanted you to talk about the difference between what you're looking for and who you're looking for when you're looking for Op-Ed pieces we're going to hear. There's been an explosion in the last couple of years in listening to opinion and this very energetic podcast environment that we're enjoying right now. Talk a little bit about how you're choosing or assigning that's different from what your newspaper colleagues might be doing.

IRIS ADLER: Well, first of all, I would say that the criteria we use to choose a good cognoscente piece-- they're very similar to the criteria we use for an on-air piece. And some of those attributes have been talked about-- the ability to be concise. While our cognoscente pieces might be up to 800 words, often we'll take those exact pieces and turn them into radio commentaries and then we face said academia writer, we say, OK, now it's going to be cut to 200 words or 300 words. It's really a shocking process and we get a lot of resistance. But as you all know, it is very difficult to be listening to the radio or whatever platform you listen and have someone just talk at you without the inclusion of soundbytes or other kinds of sounds.

So the length, literally, is two minutes and that's what you get and it's very difficult taking that writer from 800 words to two minutes, but it's absolutely critical and some people don't want to

do it and that's fine. But in either case, we really need to be very focused whether it's a cognoscente piece or radio piece-- I think someone has talked-- but we're not dealing with big topics here. There was a very prominent Harvard academic who used to write for us and his topics would be like how do we fix education. I mean we really, really do need a very small, but compelling byte.

We also have emphasized more particularly for the radio or podcast, as you said, this little narrative style. Ever since the huge success of *This American Life* and serial that storytelling narrative has sort of infiltrated every part of the audio world, whatever platform we're talking about. And so often in our cognoscente pieces or our radio pieces, if the point could be wrapped in some kind of narrative, it makes it more compelling for the listener and people are just used to this now.

So we often help people try and find something of a story to help illustrate their point. One of the big differentiators-- and this sounds so obvious, but it's something we have to explain to people all the time-- that just because you're a brilliant writer does not mean that you're a great voice on the radio. And sometimes, you're a brilliant talker and then you get someone in a studio, you put a mic in front of them, and it's kind of daunting. You've all done this. You're sitting there alone in a studio, the mic, an engineer and producers sort of talking at you. They're saying now sound natural.

Not everybody could do it. We have some people who do it brilliantly all the time-- Nancy Gertner comes to mind who we use a lot-- from the Law School. So it's the actual voice, but then there's what I call the sort of voiciness. You could see why Naomi's a great writer because she has-- like right away, we would call it like pops through the air. She just has that kind of energy. And again, you can be brilliant and articulate and just not be able to bring that kind of energy that--

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Can someone learn that? Can you help them achieve that?

IRIS ADLER: Here's what I think you could do. You could have someone-- like literally, I tell people stand in front of the mirror and practice every night and record yourself and then listen back. Because when you listen back, you really get a sense of how flat you could sound, how

dull you could sound. And I will often coach people as they're in the studio and say it's going to sound very exaggerated to you, but you need to bring energy and emphasis which goes back to the more important point that if someone is really passionate about a topic, if they can bring that passion both to their writing and to the air, it is really useful because radio is a very intimate forum and it's very hard, I think, to be inauthentic on the radio or at least to be good.

You know people always point to Ira Glass who's the-- you all know, the huge radio This American Life star. And he sounds when you hear him on the air so authentic just like he's sitting down and just talking. But every word that Ira writes is written out and his ums are written. This is the sort of famous thing-- you know those ums he does and those like, wait, let me correct myself here thing-- this is all written down. So people who are really talented at it-- and they're few and far between-- know how to write to sound authentic, but for the rest of us, we just need to be able to do it. And I think often, some people, it's just practice and just getting comfortable so they can sort of be self-revealing. For other people, they're just not going to get there.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: You totally ruined This American Life for many people today.

NAOMI ORESKES: Now, you're going to tell us Garrison Keillor isn't authentic.

[LAUGHTER]

IRIS ADLER: I don't know him.

[Panel Discussion]

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: I wanted to ask just so we know how the [INAUDIBLE]. I wanted to ask you guys one more sort of lightning round question and we're going to open it up to your questions and I want to assure you all that I'm going to end no later than a quarter to two. I know some of you have classes to teach a, but b, some of you probably want to have some quick introductory conversations with our guests here today, too. So they'll be there'll be time for that. But the one sort of lightning round question I wanted to ask is and, Jim, you hinted at it. So we've been talking about kind of a traditional Op-Ed writing both for newspapers and for radio, but I wanted to talk about innovations in this space.

So The Times is doing Op-Docs and we think now about aspects of journalism being performative, in a sense, and not to take away from fairness or verisimilitude or any of those important traditions, but that just ink on paper or pixels or airwaves-- that it's not always sufficient. We're thinking about the visual nature of these pieces. We are thinking about sound. So if we could just sort of quickly-- and, Jim, I know The Times has experimented in this space a lot-- started some things, stopped some things.

But just if you could each just really quickly talk about something that you're excited about that's on the horizon and how, maybe, we should be thinking differently or more innovatively about telling these stories. I'll start with you.

JAMES DAO: Want me to start?

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Yeah.

JAMES DAO: Well, can I name three things? So well, you mentioned or I actually talked a little bit about The Stone. So one of the things we're doing this coming year are mostly online. They're not blogs, but they're formats, platforms for essentially essays. And I guess I can talk about this. It's a little bit proprietary, but we're hoping to start one on religion and just talking about religion in daily life from all religious points of view, anywhere on the globe. And we're expecting some of the writers will be theologians, some of them will be practicing ministers or rabbis, but we're hoping much of it will be just people talking about religion and how it guides their daily life through their religious experiences from that sort of ground up. And that will, we're hoping, have written essays, sometimes it will be pieces off the news, who knows, if there's significant news in the religion world.

Some of it we're hoping will be audio, some of it could be video, as well. And that will be just its own thing we're hoping to create in the coming year. Similarly, we're planning a mainly online feature on Vietnam and how Vietnam the war that has shaped American life today in all its many ways, whether it's having to do with foreign policy or military policy, military strategy, how Vietnam was experienced and still how the war is still experienced by people in Vietnam today. And that's going to be a running feature over the course of the year.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Will you bring in other media? Not just--

JAMES DAO: Yep.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: OK.

JAMES DAO: We're doing this sort of in conjunct with Ken Burns who's got a big series coming out on Vietnam. We are playing with, as I was talking to Iris and Katie about, with audio and trying to go the route of doing podcasts. And those are still being worked on. We haven't quite figured out how to do them, but certainly some of it will probably involve some of our columnists, people like maybe Gail Collins or Nick Krostof's kind of a natural for any experiment that you want to try whether it's social media or video. And now we're going to launch him on audio maybe and see how that works.

360 video is the other thing he's going to try. It's an amazing thing. The camera's-- I don't know if anybody's seen them, but 360 video cameras are the size of a tennis ball and you can put them down and just let them run for a couple of minutes and it's just going to be a whole other part of what we do, both in the newsroom and in the opinion section.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: OK. Katie, I have an example in my head for The Globe, but maybe you want to talk about a different one and that was the approach you took to writing about guns--

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: Oh, sure.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: --which included a massive tweet storm--

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: Yeah.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: --along with the print presentation, but maybe you could just talk a little bit about that which I thought was very innovative in that space and with that issue.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: And that's something that we've actually been experimenting, generally, with. I would echo, we're also doing a lot of experimenting with 360 video. We're currently working with some MIT academics on a project mapping the Charles River. We have

access to the USS Constitution that's in dry-docks right now that we're doing this cool history project on. And what Ann Marie is referring to is a editorial that we wrote back in June. It was a project that I led looking in the aftermath of the Orlando shooting, calling for a ban on assault rifles.

And what we did for that project is we approached it in three ways-- one for print, one for our online desktop, mobile experience, and then for social. The print product was probably something that all of you would be very familiar with. We wrapped the front page of The Globe on a Thursday morning with the editorial as well as some graphics kind of making the case that we should ban assault rifles. Then, we wrote a very traditional editorial. And then for digital, it was much more of an interactive experience. We also had several calls to action within it so we targeted six senators that we knew were vulnerable on this topic and asked them to change their vote and most of them lost at the beginning of November.

They received thousands of tweets via The Boston Globe website and that was something that was really heartening. Kelly Ayotte was one, in particular, that probably because of the local ties that came under assault, basically, off from The Globe's website and ultimately changed her vote which was something that we were really proud to see. And then finally, we did this really innovative project which is something we're experimenting with more and more of on social. Every five seconds or excuse me, every five minutes, we posted the name and age of a gun mass shooting victim since Sandy Hook and the killings there. And that was--

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Every single American victim since Sandy Hook.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: Exactly. Well, every single victim of a shooting in the United States. Some of them were-- a couple of them were actually foreigners. But the power of that was something we were experimenting with and we weren't expecting, but the power of that to see those names and to see how frequently they came and this was something that took 38 hours for us to accomplish was to list every victim's name. We had a very stringent standard for who would be included in that list, and yet, it took that long.

We took over The Globe's Twitter handle and particularly the part when we are talking about the children who have died that it became very poignant very quickly to see those names come one

after the other and ending on the Orlando Pulse Nightclub shooting. Just to kind of see the raw power of that was something that we've tried to take and apply in other ways. So we're actually now, almost in every major project that we do through the newsroom and the Op-Ed page, looking at it through that lens of what should we be doing in print, what should we be doing in digital, and what should we be doing on social. And we just had a huge piece about trolley accident that happened 100 years ago that we did the similar approach to and had a lot of success with.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: So, Naomi, I'm wondering if you think about your pieces now. You talked about how when you wrote that first piece for the LA Times these options didn't really exist. Do you think about that more acutely now? It's not just I write this thing, I give it to them, it goes into the newspaper. Are you thinking about building audience or trying new forms of storytelling?

NAOMI ORESKES: OK. To me, those are two different questions. In terms of the format, not so much. I mean different things come your way. I love radio. I have to say radio is my favorite thing because you just talk. It's like you get in that booth and it's like you're in the zone and everything else drops away. You don't have to worry about the bags under your eyes or what you're wearing. So I just love radio and I always say yes the opportunity to be on the radio. So don't be afraid of radio. Radio is an academic's dream come true because it's you and your words and your voice so I just think radio is fantastic.

I wouldn't say that it's changed how I think about what I'm doing. I'm not sitting around thinking, oh, could I do a podcast on this? I'm not doing that, although maybe I will-- I don't know. But in terms of the storytelling part, absolutely definitely and actually, my great postdoc, Jeff Zupan, is here who's working with me right now on a kind of novel approach to climate change solutions.

So yes, I've certainly been thinking about that for a while and I would say my work with journalists and the work I've done trying to reach a broader audience has certainly made me think much more about how we tell our stories and why, as academics, what some of the obstacles are for us. That as academics, we have certain conventions of academic life that we subscribe to that absolutely do get in the way-- no question about that. And so I think where I'm at right now and I

hope Judy's listening very closely, I'm not so much interested in changing what I do for journalists.

I'm pretty happy with what I've done in the journalistic popular domain. It's more like I think I'd like to become involved now in a movement to change how academics write for each other because I've come to think I don't actually understand why we, as academics, insist on writing books that are excruciatingly boring and that no one will read. I mean it makes no sense to me and I'm fully tenured so I can say this now-- and I'm not looking for another job and I don't want to be a dean. But really, I mean it's really this kind of extremely interesting mystery about how and why we write these incredibly boring books that only 17 other people in our field would read and it wasn't always that way.

And as a historian of science, I can tell you that we had Harvard professors of geology right here in this institution who, in the 1920s, were writing bestsellers about continental drift, what would have been considered a very academic topic. So some of the issues about why we, as academics, do the things we do, so I'd like to see the academic side of this world begin to move and shift and think more about who our audience is and why have we defined our audience in such an excruciating now way.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: That's great. And, Iris, the last word to you. If somebody comes to you, are you putting a premium on how innovative the approach might be? Are you looking for new ways of storytelling?

IRIS ADLER: We're pretty committed to podcast development I mean I would say that's, as a senior manager, 90% of my job right now. We kind of understand that nobody under the age of 40, let's say, owns a radio and that even-- no, they don't, they listen on iPhones or their iPads and even cars which are now internet connected. We're going to lose that listening platform, as well, listening to radios in cars. So we're very committed to developing innovative content in the digital space. And for us right now, that means audio because it's on demand and it's portable and that's what these generations coming up expect and want just like we do with television, et cetera.

So we're very committed to podcasting and I'm happy to say we produced a very successful one with The Times this year. We took their "Modern Love" column and we produced it as a podcast. You should go to iTunes and subscribe if you haven't yet. We're on the verge, just hiring people right now, working with The Boston Globe to produce a podcast on the Isabella Stewart Gardner theft as a kind of eight part serial like series. And so we're always looking for great content and voices for podcasts.

[Audience Q&A]

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Great. Thank you. So I wanted to turn to you all for your questions for our guests today and my guess is you have many. And if I could just ask, if people would introduce themselves before they ask their questions.

AUDIENCE: My name is Peter Girguis. I'm in the Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology. Thank you all very much. This was fantastic. I have two questions. I'll start with one that's more straightforward and one that might be more challenging. The first is I think Iris addressed this. To what extent are you open to academics and others bringing you something that they have developed if it moves beyond a podcast, some sort of innovative way of communicating what we do to the public? And how might you expect your various institutions to engage these maybe sort of more innovative, if not unconventional, ways of communicating? So first one.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Do you have an example?

AUDIENCE: Yeah. So let's say that there is-- this is a kind of shooting from the hip here example, but let's say that I'm a deep sea biologist and I'm interested in engaging the broader public in helping me identify and characterize some of these deep sea organisms that people haven't seen before, just sort of the citizen science movement, right? And so let's say I have a web platform or an app or something that allows folks to do this and let's say there's broad engagement. To what extent or how might I approach you all to say, hey, can you help me get this word out? Is that something that your office does or another office? So that's an example.

The second question is the bigger more difficult one.

IRIS ADLER: Can I just stop you there for a second?

AUDIENCE: Yes.

IRIS ADLER: Never use the words will you help me get the word out because that immediately signals to us that this is a sort of PR kind of request.

AUDIENCE: Right. Understood. So perhaps then to rephrase it, to what extent are you interested in being a part of this? So the second question is, how are you all viewing this change in the way information and rather misinformation is being presented as information and how do we engage with you all on topics like that. So if there is a position or an idea we have that touches upon that sort of the fake news and the like, where are those boundaries drawn? Frankly, how do you all as journalists decide what is and isn't ethically appropriate to take a position on or does that rest with us? If you see where I'm going with that.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: So maybe if we could get one or two of you to answer the first question and then one or two of you to-- I mean, we could spend the day on fake news which many of us are obsessing about and it's not just coming from those who would intentionally do harm, it's coming from our own industry, frankly.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: I'm happy to tackle the first one.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: OK. Go, Katie.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: I think that we have actually, at the Idea section, we have actually experimented a lot with trying to work with academics where they are. So one of the things that I was going to bring up before I started talking about the assault rifle campaign was that one of the things that we've been doing lately is taking artifacts or different manuscripts and transcripts and things like that and having academics essentially annotate them for us and have it be kind of an actual back and forth about a document or something-- a piece of science or--

One of the things that is going to be in the paper on Sunday is some MIT professors have come up with these mathematical quizzes. And they're making a broader point, but we're working on how to make them online and make them interactive. If you have something like an app that you

wanted to work with us on, we would probably figure out a way to repurpose it and put it in our paper or put it online and then include an introduction or something that directs traffic.

I mean, I think that there are always ways to work these things out and I, personally, have always been open to trying to find a solution on those. And so I would never hesitate to kind of approach an editor with a project like that as long as you're going into it with an open mind that the solution might not be one that works for you, too.

IRIS ADLER: Yeah. I think it depends a little bit how mission central your project might be to us. If it's this fascinating new way of understanding this world that you describe and there's a way that it can be incorporated into our platforms and be of joint benefit editorially to you as well as us, we're always open to those ideas.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: And on the fake news issue?

JAMES DAO: You're looking at me. So actually, I'm not entirely sure I understand the question, but fake news is just a big news story right now and how it exists and how it was disseminated the way it was and why people believed it are all like fascinating elements of a news story that we're also weighing in as an Op-Ed page. There's questions about how social media-- we've ran a couple of pieces in the Sunday Review a couple of weeks ago about how it's easy to game Facebook and Reddit, for instance, to disseminate this stuff and there's a huge appetite for it and it's profitable. And our News section came out with a similar story a few days later.

In terms of whether we, as the Op-Ed page, are susceptible to fakery is, of course, always been a problem and always been an issue. And the way we deal with it is we have fact checkers. The front line editors and there's about a dozen of them that work with me, part of their job is to fact check, but we also have a team of fact checkers that go through everything. And every piece gets at least some basic fact checking. But because we are opinion, we're allowing for a certain-- is not the stretching of fact, but we're allowing people to use what they can say is demonstrably reasonably provable fact to build an argument. And if the basic foundation of that is true and checkable, then that passes our first line test of whether we'll run it or not.

NAOMI ORESKES: Can I engage you, though, in a question related to this because a lot of my work in the last 10 years has been about not-- I wouldn't call it fake news, but disinformation promoted by people for various reasons and the promotion of what I think people now call false equivalence. And there's no question that the mainstream media are part of this story because of the so many times that mainstream media have quoted, let's say, at least in the realm of science, nonscientific sources like the Cato Institute on a question of science about which any scientist would have agreed that what the Cato Institution was saying was not correct scientifically, not supported by scientific facts.

And yet in an article in The New York Times, Washington Post, The Boston Globe, you know wherever, you would see those quotations juxtaposed with a scientist, therefore creating the impression that there was a scientific debate which, as I've shown in my work, is the whole point of that kind of thing. So that's one question I have is I guess my perception from my view is that the media, the news media, have not been as alert to that problem as I think they need to be-- that's one thing. And even though many journalists I've talked to say, oh, we don't do that anymore. We don't make that mistake anymore. We know we shouldn't do that, yet I see it all the time.

And then the other part has to do with the Opinion page and this is a tricky one because, obviously, opinion pages are opinions. But I have seen cases-- and I'm going to be specific to The New York Times now because I'm using facts-- where someone on the opinion page, either a guest writer or one of your own columnists-- and if you're interested, later, I can tell you offline who-- has said something in an opinion a matter of fact that was demonstrably false and used a false claim to build the opinion piece.

And one time-- this happened a few years ago before I had friends on the editorial page who I would now reach out to and call-- but where this happened with a particular columnist where I had seen it happen more than once. And on the third time, it happened to be about a topic that I knew very well that one of my own students had written their honors thesis on was a claim that was demonstrably false-- I had the documentation. And I did send something to The New York Times, never received any reply. Yeah. And that false claim is now, if you go to The New York Times microfiche, it's there.

So I guess I have two questions. One is about how you think about it, but the more important question, I think, for this audience is, what should we do? So we're reading The New York Times, we see something that we know is false as scholars and academics who have worked on it, yet it's now there in The New York Times. What is the right way for us to try to engage with you to try to correct something like that and prevent that from happening again?

JAMES DAO: Sure. So we pride ourselves in how many corrections we run and we run a lot. And they can be unbelievably arcane, but it's a crucial part of what we do. And as both the newsroom employee and a newsroom editor and now the Op-Ed editor, I generally believe that we should err on the side of correcting when we can, because sometimes it is a little bit hard to get to get to ground truth on some of the issues that come up.

But the columnists, believe it or not, make mistakes. In fact, I woke up this morning to two complaints about columns over the weekend and we will take that up with them. They have their own fact checkers. They try to run this stuff through their own process, but journalism is an incredibly imperfect process and that goes for the Op-Ed page, too. We are a self-correcting institution and we self-correct in two ways. Sometimes, when there's a clear factual error that somebody can tell us is a clear factual error, we will push-- most editors attitude is we will do a correction on it and that will go online under the piece as well as in the paper.

Sometimes, the problems of coverage are more nuanced or complicated and they're not simple facts. And we correct by trying to come up with different viewpoints or different types of stories to broaden the understanding of an issue beyond what might have been a less than accurate portrayal.

NAOMI ORESKES: But if I can just press slightly, I'm sorry, but what should we do? Because when I did reach out, I never got a response. And how do we communicate with you about these issues?

JAMES DAO: There is this-- I'll be honest, I don't know where you find it, but we have a corrections editor for the entire news organization.

NAOMI ORESKES: You mean the public editor?

JAMES DAO: No, you can go to the public editor, if you want, and a public editor may take it up or they may send the note to me. But there is an editor who just handles corrections for the entire--

NAOMI ORESKES: So that's the right place to go, not the Op-Ed page.

JAMES DAO: And I'm trying-- I don't know the email off hand, but it's probably where you find corrections in the newspaper. You will see an email there and you send your correction to there and, believe it or not, they go through all of them and then they either dispel them immediately if it doesn't look like it's a correctable error or they send it off to people like me and then I give it to another editor who will then try to get to ground truth. So we are constantly dealing-- and that's really-- if you know an editor, you can always send them a note.

NAOMI ORESKES: And that's what I would do now. Just curious, though, because lots of people don't necessarily know editors.

JAMES DAO: But there is a public process and it's laid out, I think it's probably a whole page on The Times website that explains the corrections process.

IRIS ADLER: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: I am Brigitte Madrian and I'm a professor at the Harvard Kennedy School. I work on the behavioral economics of household financial decision making. I have, I guess, a more logistical question. So in my discipline, economics, if you're trying to publish a paper, it would be considered an ethical violation to submit your paper to more than one journal at the same time. On the other hand, if you're trying to write a book, you could shop your book proposal around to multiple publishers and find the best deal. So I guess I'm asking for those of us who have never written an Op-Ed before, what are the ethical norms for getting an Op-Ed published? Can you only shop it around one place at a time so you have to do it sequentially? Or could you send it to 200 different outlets and if 150 of them say they love it, you could publish it in all 150 of them?

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: I would say definitely, one at a time. Never offer an Op-Ed to an editor that's not an exclusive to that editor.

JAMES DAO: Yeah, I would second that.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: So can I just then ask about the tension between that sequential offering and earlier comments about you're getting things within an hour of an event and you want things that are very-- three days from now is too late. So that system presumes that an editor's getting back to you instantly to say I love or I don't love this piece. So how do you navigate between those?

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: I often suggest putting an expire time or date on your email saying if I don't hear back from you by this time, then I will assume that you are not interested and I will move on. I frequently find myself, I can't speak for Jim, but I have 56,000 emails that are unread right now.

[LAUGHTER]

NAOMI ORESKES: That makes me feel better.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: I literally get thousands of e-mails every day and it's a combination of the fact that I have always had a foot in the newsroom and a foot in opinion and with ideas, we did reported pieces and opinion pieces so I think I get more than most people. But the point being, I often find myself sending a note to someone whose pitch I am reading a day later or two days later than I should be and saying, have you placed this somewhere else? I don't have the expectation that you've been waiting for me to get back to you because of that timeliness and that importance and timeliness. So as long as you're clear up front saying, if I don't hear from you by this time, I think that's fair game to move on to the next place.

JAMES DAO: It's good advice.

NAOMI ORESKES: I can make one suggestion that could be helpful, too. Sometimes, you might have an idea for something, like something's coming up and you anticipate that you might have something to say. So one of the pieces I'm most proud of was one I did in The Washington

Post when the fourth assessment report of the IPCC came out. And I knew that wants to report came out, they would be swamped with suggestions, but I had an idea for something I wanted to say in advance of the release.

And so I sent it to them two weeks ahead of time. I said, here's a piece that's anticipating the release of the AR4. I think this would be great to run a couple of days before it comes out. And they did and that piece got huge attention because it was actually ahead of the curve. And if you do something like that, then you have a little bit of room to maneuver, too, because as Kathleen said, often, editors don't get back to you right away and then you are in this awkward position of am I waiting or am I moving on? And usually, what I do if that happens is I'll send a follow up saying, if you're interested, please let me know, if not, I'm moving on and then you can move on. But definitely, if you can anticipate and get it in ahead of time, that gives you both a bit of room to maneuver.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: That's great, great, great advice. I mean, editors are always assigning their reporters anticipatorily-- is that a word? And so to think about that for Op-Eds is a really good piece of advice. You had your hand up.

AUDIENCE: I did?

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Oh, you didn't. OK.

AUDIENCE: Well, I sort of did.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Sort of did?

AUDIENCE: It was a follow up to this--

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Jeff, say who you are.

AUDIENCE: Oh, hi. I'm Jeffrey Zupan. I'm Naomi's postdoc. It was a follow up to that discussion where I've often been in a situation where there's a timeliness to an issue and you'd love for it to have the impact of The Times or Globe or something like that. But you have a Huffington Post blog and you could just post it in an hour. And so there's that deliberation as to

how long-- you say you're not waiting for us, but we're waiting for you, like we'd love to hear back. So is it appropriate to literally give you just five hours notice or something like that? I always felt rude putting such a hard time stamp.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: I think it's really a case by case basis. If it's something like you want to respond to claims that there has been a genocide in x country and that news has just broke, then I think giving editors five hours is fine. I think if it's something that is a week from now, we know this report is going to be released, give me a day or two. And I also think the other thing I would add is it's always appropriate to follow up because there are often times when I miss the first email, but the second email for some reason-- it's quieter or there's something happening and I can get to it faster. But I would say you're selling something when you're trying to put your opinion out there and you have every right to say this offer expires, I would say.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Yes.

AUDIENCE: Hi. I'm Melani Cammett from the Government department and I have a question that's sort of related to the fake news question, which is are you perceiving that expertise is more discredited now or taken less seriously? I'm asking for a particular reason. I was in a social situation about six months ago-- and I work on the Middle East, I specialize in the Middle East-- and I was absolutely shocked at how many statements were made that were completely wrong about Islam in the Middle East. So I got it in my head to write this book aimed at the general public correcting some of this misinformation. And I actually gave up the idea because I became convinced after conversations with colleagues that my expertise would not be taken seriously by precisely the people I want to target.

And so I've been sort of wrestling with whether it's worth bothering with this sort of thing and also whether-- and this relates to Naomi's point about where we place our pieces. If I'm writing something about how Muslims do not actually disproportionately blow themselves up or something like that. Is this better pitched at an outlet that's not The New York Times or The Boston Globe or something like that so that I reach a more general audience? Or is my likelihood of getting discredited higher elsewhere? Thank you.

JAMES DAO: That's a tough question.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: I know. I think you've kind of put your finger on the larger existential question that our industry is really doing some soul searching on right now. I think that if you're placing something with The Boston Globe, you sort of know the audience that is going to be reading The Boston Globe or The New York Times going into it. I would love to say that you should be broader in your thinking in terms of where you're placing things. I think that one of the issues we saw in the last election is the fact that we have seen the erosion of news outlets, particularly in the middle part of the country, given the financial circumstances that our industry finds itself.

That said, you are opening yourself up. I actually often feel like I'm a therapist as much as anything when I'm dealing with particularly new writers. And I have to explain, like you're putting yourself on a page. We had a piece that a writer, an academic at Berkeley wrote for us about sexual assault and her own personal experiences with it. And I literally had to-- I went back and forth with her repeatedly about the fact that she was really putting her own personal experiences for the world to read and then the comments were horrific. And I felt like we had done a lot of work to prepare her for that I just didn't-- that she was very upset.

And so I feel like that that's the one thing I always say is make sure you know what you're getting into, too, when you're offering your opinion, particularly on a controversial subject, that you know going into it there are going to be people who disagree with you.

NAOMI ORESKES: I don't think you should give up, though.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: No, no.

NAOMI ORESKES: I think, actually, the harder it is, the more important it is. Right?

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: Yeah. It's a good point.

NAOMI ORESKES: And I think there are things you can do to protect yourself and maybe we should have another session for us academics to talk about how to protect yourself, because I'm trying to figure out how come my name got taken off that list of the 40 horrible liberal professors-- anyway, that's another story. But there are a lot of people in this country who want

to hear what you have to say and the trick is to figure out how to reach them and that means working with your editor to think about strategies.

And one thing I learned after my last book that I'm taking forward into my next project-- and this gets back to the whole fly over country problem-- I hate that expression. But most book editors, like most newspaper editors, are very focused on certain populations in New York, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, people who buy books, people who buy newspapers, people who still subscribe to newspapers, and that's great and those people are important and we are those people. But there are a lot of other people in other places who will buy books and read books if you reach out to them, but your editor won't send you them because your editor's business model is not based on Des Moines-- I keep coming back to Iowa. I was obviously out of my mind right now.

But you can negotiate with your editor. And I learned this in my last book project because my editor was just going to send me to five big cities, urban markets, but people reached out to me and I went on a book tour in Kansas. I went to three cities in Kansas-- Lawrence, Hays, and Manhattan. It was one of the best things I ever did in my life. And to this day, I carry with me the woman I met in Hays, Kansas. So I went to Hays, Kansas to talk about climate change in a very, very, very red place surrounded by wheat fields and this woman came up to me and she said, God bless you for coming Hays.

So I mean, you can reach people, but you have to go to where they are and there are strategies to do that. And I think we could talk about that and I'd love to talk more about that, actually.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Yes.

AUDIENCE: I'm Tyler VanderWeele, School of Public Health. I was wondering if any of you had additional balm to offer to the paranoid academic who would like to keep in all of the caveats and exceptions. I recently published an Op-Ed on protective effects of religious participation on health. And after the editor was done with my carefully constructed piece, while I could see how it was much more appealing to a general audience, made me cringe a little bit. Is this something that we just kind of need to deal with and get over or do you have further advice you might give to those of us who find ourselves in such a position?

IRIS ADLER: I think you just need to keep on focusing on the impact that you're going to have by getting your pieces published. That's the price that you're paying in spite of the fact that it might be contrary to all of your training and all of your instincts. And quite frankly, that's why it's so hard to work with academics because they know they hold and cherish these sort of rules in their head about how they should write and how they should express them self very dearly, and it's understandable. That's how they've been trained. But you just have to think of the greater impact that you will have by sort of letting go of that and just suck it up and do it.

[LAUGHTER]

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: I want to be clear to underscore that it's not an anti-intellectualism or anything like that that motivates that response from journalists. I spent nine years on the Pulitzer Prize Board and for those books, we spent a lot of time talking about the footnotes because that was very important to that form. It's a different form and it has different conventions. So one is absolutely essential for one form and a different convention absolutely essential for building an audience with the other form. So you just have to kind of think of it that way and let go.

IRIS ADLER: I think it's also important that we really have hard data now, all of us, on our online writings and columns. When did people stop reading, at what point? And we have it for the radio, too. At what point did they stop listening to that story? And it's not that we don't want to go long and deep as you might want to, it's just that we really understand with very hard data that people are going to just stop paying attention.

JAMES DAO: Ann Marie, can I just say we all represent opinion sections so we want you to have a point of view and so that point of view has to be clear and if it's not, you publish it in some other place. But that said, we often want Op-Eds or long essays, whichever, to reflect you know the counter argument and to the degree you can explain what that counter-argument is concisely and accurately, it makes for a better piece, almost always. Of course, you're setting it up accurately so you can knock it down. But that should be part-- it doesn't have to be a part of every Op-Ed, but that's often a part of a very successful Op-Ed.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: Sorry, I'll just add, the one other thing I would say is trust your editor, especially if you're working with a reputable publication. You can push back if you think,

for instance, a headline goes too far or something, but we do do this for a living and we do have a sense of what people are going to read and what people are going to respond to. And so I often get pushback that how could I possibly choose to take this paragraph out, it's essential. But there is actually thinking behind why we're doing that.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: Does anyone have a question who hasn't asked a question first? No? OK. Go ahead.

AUDIENCE: This is just a quick follow up to what the gentleman asked earlier. So I've had great experiences with most editors. On rare occasion, I come across an editor who has really taken what they've gotten from me and used it to convey a very different message. So at what point does my ownership over those ideas begin and so on? And is it appropriate for me to say, sorry, I don't want to be a part of this?

JAMES DAO: Yeah, totally. Absolutely.

KATHLEEN KINGSBURY: Absolutely.

JAMES DAO: We view-- and if this was a New York Times editor, you let me know-- we view our role as helping you to make your argument, not to make our-- most of us, we're running pieces regularly that have arguments that we think are daft or terrible or wrong headed, but that's what we do. That's what the Op-Ed is. That's the Op in Op-Ed, to some degree. So you should always-- it is your piece. If you don't like where it's going, then you pull it. If it's right on deadline. I may not use you again, but-- I'm kidding. But we always send playbacks of the edited versions and very often people pitch a fit at the last minute and we try to work out a compromise, and if we can't-- it's never happened under my watch, but I'm sure there's been cases where people pull their pieces.

NAOMI ORESKES: I have to go to class, but I wanted to just add because this is so important for you guys on the supply side. That does happen and I've had great experiences with almost all the editors I've worked with, learned a lot from them. Totally agree like your editor is an expert and you should trust them, but I recently did have an experience with a piece that had gone back and forth, worked closely with an editor. I was happy, he was happy, all good. And at the 11th

hour, I mean literally, like 11 o'clock at night on the night before this was supposed to run, he came back with a change that had been suggested by his boss-- we won't say what newspaper it was-- and it was unacceptable to me.

And I was actually very shocked and I said to this editor who I had a relationship with. I said you can't be serious. Actually, to my mind, completely undermined in a significant way what I was doing and I just said it's not acceptable. I said either we get it that or I'm pulling the piece. And at that point, you have leverage because they've actually made a space. Not that they don't have other things they could put in, of course, I'm sure you have tons of things.

JAMES DAO: We've learned our lesson on that. Yeah.

NAOMI ORESKES: But the point is it wasn't acceptable and I just said it's not acceptable. And then we went back and forth a few more times and came up with a compromise that was. So you have leverage, especially at that last moment and you shouldn't allow anything to go forward that-- I mean, stylistic things are one thing, but if there's something substantive that you are not comfortable with, you actually have to stop it because that's your expertise and credibility on the line.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: And the last thing an editor wants is the person who wrote the piece complaining publicly about how something was distorted in their piece. So it's just in everybody's interest. And before we let Naomi go, there is one point I wanted to bring up that maybe she could just quickly address before she goes to class. And that is I think I've heard from, in particular, from junior faculty, that it's very hard sometimes to think about and to justify why they should be spending time doing this kind of public work when they're so busy doing the work they need to do to achieve tenure or some other status--

NAOMI ORESKES: Yeah.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: --and focus third time on academic publishing. And so I'm wondering if you could just, from a point of empathy, just talk about that for a minute. What is the value of doing this work when you've got so much else to do?

NAOMI ORESKES: Yeah. That's a hard one because I never like to tell other people what to do or how to live their lives, but in terms of the value, I think that's a good way of putting the question. I think there's a couple of things. I think this election really brings home in a really serious way-- a lot of people are beating up on themselves about the election and different things they could or should have done. And all I know is I sleep well at night because I know for the last 15 years, I've been doing everything possible that I can from my vantage point to communicate to the American people about climate change and why it matters to our lives.

So I sleep well at night knowing that I've done my part and that's, for me, personally gigantic. And I couldn't justify being an ivory tower academic if I didn't personally have that piece of my life. So it's just a really personal thing. Other people will feel differently. On a less personal note, I think the value from a sort of pragmatic standpoint is that you actually do become a better writer and better communicator when you work with professionals like these amazing people here. This is my chance to suck up to these wonderful people who have taken the time to come to be with us today.

Just like you want people to respect your expertise, they have expertise. Like Iris just said, they have data at their fingertips. They have experience. They know a lot about what works. And when you work with them, you learn from their expertise and you become a better writer and that carries over into your teaching and makes you better able to reach your students, it carries over into your pitches to publishers when you're shopping those books around and your publisher asks, well, who's going to read this other than the 17 experts in Sanskrit irregular verbs? Right?

You have to make the case for your work on all kinds of different levels-- well, Liz isn't at Harvard Press anymore, but when you go to the editor at Harvard Press. So being able to make that pitch to boil it down to say why somebody should take the time to read my 800 page magnum ocean opus on the history of cold war oceans. I'm much more able to sell my academic work as a result of having done this more broader-- I don't like to call popular broader work. So I think it does make you better at your job, overall. That doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen.

And I know when I work with my students now, Jeff will tell you, I'm always hitting on my students now, what is the point here? Why is this important? Why Should your reader now spend the next three days of his or her life reading this book? Right? And that carries over to everything you do. So I think that's the pragmatic value answer.

ANN MARIE LIPINSKI: That's a great answer. Thank you very much. I started by saying it was a kind of a different time when Judy first put this together and a lot has changed in the months since then. And the discussion here that came up a couple of times about fake news is really a huge-- not so much development, because it had been happening, but a moment and a moment for all of us to acknowledge. And trust me, it's rocked our industry in really significant ways as well as the tech and the social industry that is also grappling with these issues.

But the cure for fake news is factual news. The cure for lies is knowledge. And it is so incredibly important that you all think about what role you can play in that, at least it is from my perspective. And I'm in a completely share Naomi's view of the value of that. So really on behalf of the democracy, to thank you all who have so much knowledge and expertise, to thank you all for taking the time to even think about this issue and how you might bring your voice to the public in a stronger way. And then, please join me before we break and let you talk to them individually, if you'd like, please join me in thanking our three amazing panelists for their time.

[APPLAUSE]