

Stationers Foundation Report

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My journey toward a Masters in journalism from Northwestern University began at Stationers' Hall at an awards and committees luncheon. I was being presented with both the Major Award and the Francis Matthew Award from the Stationer's Foundation, which were monetary prizes that provided me with the financial funding to help secure a visa to study at Northwestern and to start my journey in exploring the future of the journalism industry.

Weeks before the luncheon, I had interviewed with the awards committee as part of the application process. I presented to the panel that I wanted to study journalism at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern because I wanted to combine my passion for journalism and my technical skills from working as a software developer to understand and contribute to how the journalism industry would thrive in the digital age. As one of the top journalism schools in the world, I believed Northwestern would provide me with the best possible learning opportunity in achieving this goal. The school is heavily focused on the combination of technology and journalism while also teaching the foundational skills of reporting, which I needed to work on before I could leverage my technical skills in the industry. I also believed the component of studying in a new country, a country home to many top media outlets such as The New York Times and The Washington Post, would give me a chance to see journalism through a different lens especially as America faces deep divisions and polarization over media coverage. This report looks at how the one-year experience at Northwestern contributed to my learning goals and how I will leverage the skills from Medill going forward.

I arrived in Chicago, on September 4th 2019, with a chance to explore the city and get settled before the majority of other students arrived. For the first two nights I stayed in the center of Chicago before I moved into my apartment in the City of Evanston. I had the best of both worlds at Northwestern because Medill's newsroom was located in Chicago and within the buzz of the city and my apartment was located in Evanston, a small city about an hour, by train, from Chicago. Evanston, where Northwestern's main campus is located, has a small-town vibe with spectacular architecture from Northwestern's buildings and a beautiful lakefront, which became an important component in my daily life when the pandemic hit Chicago. In fact those initial weeks of exploring both Chicago and Evanston became more pivotal than I would recognize at the time because they gave me a chance to see the sights and explore before Chicago's brutal winter and then because of the pandemic many of those same opportunities were not available in the spring and summer.



My first day in Evanston



Northwestern campus in Evanston

The initial orientation weeks were a good way to acclimatize to the city, but the pace rapidly changed as the first quarter began. The Medill program is run predominantly out of the school's newsroom in the heart of downtown Chicago with the first quarter focusing on ensuring everyone understood standards around ethics, factchecking, interviewing and grammar. These standards are taught through a class called methods that operates like a mini newsroom with small groups of students. I was allocated to a class with a professor known for his Medill Fs, a tool leveraged by Medill to enforce a high level of scrutiny when it comes to factchecking.

A Medill F is given to any piece of work that contains a factual error, which could be a name misspelling, an incorrect fact or providing a source who cannot be contacted for verification. I found the methods class and the Medill F incredibly daunting. I came to Medill with a passion for journalism, but I had never reported a story before. I hadn't even interviewed someone for a story before; this class threw me right into the deep end in learning those skills alongside students who had worked as professional reporters and students who had done undergraduate degrees in journalism.

On the first day of the class in methods, we were told to get out on to the streets of Chicago to interview a number of people on a specific topic and file a report of who we spoke to, what they said, pictures of them and their contact details. The professor would then call those individuals to verify the information and ensure we spoke to them.

From the first day onwards, the reporting got more complex. Some days, we would be told to go out and cover a story at 11 a.m. and file it by 3 p.m. While other times we worked on stories specific to our allocated beat, for example I covered healthcare in the neighborhood of Lake View. Through the class, I covered a wide variety of stories ranging from the final day of a 11-day-long teacher strike from the Chicago Teacher's Union in the snow to the Chicago Christmas tree lighting to an anti-fascism rally.



Chicago Teacher Union Strike

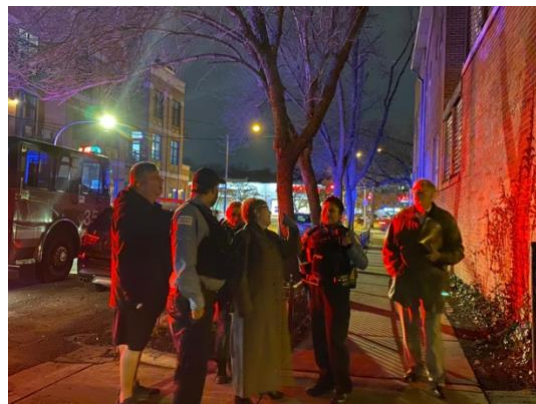
The process was grueling and exhausting, I had a long commute and was learning about a new city as well as an abundance of new skills every day. I was getting my fair share of Medill Fs, which taught me vital reporting skills along the way. The harsh and tiring process during the cold Chicago winter was challenging but essential in teaching me the rigorous toolkit reporters need in this day and age.

As I was a part of the social justice and investigative specialization at Medill, I was also taking a class focused on policing in Chicago. The city has long struggled with police and government corruption. This class focused on the consent decree imposed on the Chicago police department following the killing of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald by a police officer. We explored existing reporting that covered the police, the importance of representation and understanding of communities when reporting on police conduct and hearing perspectives from police, law enforcement agencies and activists while also working towards an article focused on a topic related to Chicago policing. In my article I wanted to understand if the existing standards for the number of therapists needed and a no note-taking policy for mental health services for police officers from the consent decree would provide sufficient support.

This story idea came from spending a night doing a ride-along with two Chicago police officers as they covered their district. Another student and I discussed mental health services with the officers during the ride-along, which then gave me the idea to look further into the consent decree to understand how sufficient the mental health support was compared to other police departments.

The ride-along was an incredibly unique experience; it is rare to secure a ride-along with a police department, which has typically had poor relationships with the media. This experience and the class enabled me to gain deep understanding of Chicago communities, which helped me in further reporting during the year. The information on policing also became even more relevant following the civil unrest that occurred after the killings of several Black individuals by police officers later in the academic year.

The second quarter, after Christmas, enabled me to leverage those essential skills from quarter one into my reporting areas of interest. I covered ride-hailing in Chicago, which helped me create a varied portfolio, ranging from Q&As to enterprise pieces, to demonstrate my skillset in business reporting. On the other hand, I tried a completely different style of reporting as part of the Medill Explores program, a 10-week class that contains a weeklong reporting trip giving students a chance to report in different environments. Students could select a trip that appealed to them most ranging from locations such as Puerto Rico, London, Sao Paulo. I selected a trip to Los Angeles, which would focus on sports reporting. The business and fan experience side of the American sports industry has always fascinated me, and this class gave me a chance to touch on it without prior sports reporting experience.



Ride-along with Chicago Police Department

The trip included covering the Genesis Invitational, a golf charity event hosted by Tiger Woods, a Los Angeles Laker's game and National Hockey League game as well as trips to sports networks such as the NFL Network. Tackling a subject that I was unfamiliar with was daunting but the trip was crucial in teaching me that with enough research I could cover any story, including sport which was outside my comfort zone



Covering the Genesis Invitational

During the trip, we covered three days of the golf tournament, which included attending Tiger Wood's press conference. We witnessed the impact of Kobe Bryant's death on the L.A. sports community, which happened weeks before we arrived. We spoke to journalists at top outlets and broadcast networks such as ESPN, the Los Angeles Times and the PGA Tour. The trip was an amazing experience, I learnt so much about reporting on deadline and the importance of pushing yourself outside your comfort zone. The trip became even more vital to my experience in America as a few weeks later, the pandemic hit Chicago and we went into lockdown a week before the quarter ended, which limited my ability to explore in the spring and summer quarters.

The lockdown brought some angst as it happened just before spring break. I struggled to decide what would be best, to return home to the U.K. as classes would be online or to stay in Chicago. I decided to stay put in Chicago as the Mayor had responded quickly to a rise in cases and travelling appeared to present more risks than staying put.

The third quarter was taught completely online but despite this, it contained some of my favorite classes. I was able to specialize on my interest in business reporting through an advanced business reporting class while also taking a class from the business school on anti-trust regulation. I also studied narrative structure during this quarter, which helped me think outside the box on how to frame stories and capture readers attention and was an incredibly beneficial in my final project. I also took a class on analytics which introduced me to the importance of understanding of how users interact with content through examining data and how to not be misled by audience information and data in news organization. We learnt this through working with small news startups who needed guidance on understanding how to leverage their analytics better. Working with these small outlets and hearing from their management teams gave me an understanding of some of the innovation taking place at news startups in the U.S. and how this could be leveraged back in the U.K. to create a new model of journalism, one with a nonprofit focus leveraging data analysis.

I continued this exploration of independent media into my final quarter at Northwestern when working on my final project, which was to independently create a piece of work under the

guidance of a supervisor and that could be published in a professional outlet. I came up with the idea for my article based on the early months of the pandemic, I noticed that stories from independent media outlets were gaining more traction than I had ever seen before. I wanted to explore why this was happening while traditional outlets struggled with revenue loss, job cuts and furloughs. Over the course of 10 weeks, I examined three very different media outlets, the [Chicago Reader](#), [Cicero Independiente](#), and [South Side Weekly](#), to understand what helped position them to navigate the pandemic and continue reporting when other outlets struggled. I interviewed 29 individuals, learning about how the outlet's leveraged nimble operating models and a deep understanding of communities to tell the stories mainstream media outlets missed. This not only created an interesting story for my project but also helped me understand a new framework of nonprofit journalism; a framework which in the long-term I hope to leverage in launching a similar model in the U.K. In the meantime, I am currently trying to get the article published in an external outlet and plan to share the article with the Stationer's Foundation once published.



A collage of community partners for South Side Weekly

My year at Medill has been a whirlwind experience and as I reflect on my time there, I am still overwhelmed by the variety of reporting opportunities and guest speaker interactions I have had during my time on the program. Over the year, I have been able to focus my areas of interest which was business and technology reporting and digital business models for journalism while also writing a range of other stories from sports reporting to investigative reporting. It's hard to believe just how much I managed to fit into a year, but this skillset will equip me as I enter the journalism industry and look toward the future of journalism in the digital age.

Going forward I will be starting a fellowship at Business Insider in London where I will be covering investing, which will give me a chance to experience reporting in a professional environment and in my area of interest which is business and finance reporting. I hope to gain a chance to work in America again at some point in the future because of the innovation and passion for journalism in the states, but the timing just didn't feel right at the end of the course because of the pandemic. In the long-term I plan to use my time from Medill, my previous work as a software developer and future work as a reporter to work toward creating a sustainable and new journalism model for the U.K.

I would once again like to thank the Stationer's Foundation for all the support. This experience would not have been possible without the generosity of the Stationer's Foundation and I will forever be thankful to the foundation for enabling me to attend my dream course. I look forward to continuing to participate in Stationer's events going forward.

Sample of stories written from the year

[Would you take a job without knowing how much you will make? Uber and Lyft drivers do – Medill Reports](#)

[The cost of not shopping around – Medill Reports](#)

[Bridging Chicago's Food Gap During COVID-19 – South Side Weekly](#)

[PGA newcomer, former Northwestern student, takes on the Genesis Invitational – Medill Reports](#)

[Via no longer sees Uber and Lyft as direct competitors: its operations chief discusses strategy and the future of transportation – Medill Reports](#)

[Optimistic outlook from analysts on Abbott Laboratories for 2021 – Medill Reports](#)

[Arts and culture nonprofits hit by stay-at-home order find flexibility from foundations – Medill Reports](#)