



Reporting on Missing Indigenous People

2021

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Introduction

This is designed as a module to fit in a course on reporting in a post-secondary journalism program in Canada. It includes a summary, learning outcomes, recommended readings, in-class exercise and assignment.

This module is designed as a two-hour class for journalism students in their second year or higher because it presumes students have some understanding of the basics of reporting. It could be adapted to suit the needs of the instructor or journalism program. For example, it could be incorporated into a general reporting course or one specific to reporting in and for Indigenous communities, stretched to cover multiple classes, or offered as a separate seminar.

It is strongly advised to include other Indigenous cultural competency education elements in any reporting course, including specific information on the territory or territories in which you reside. This is important for you as an instructor too. Teaching your students means preparing yourself for the task. Read the materials and consider holding another educational component ahead of time. It's recommended to have some training on trauma-informed reporting. Bring in a guest speaker, such as a journalist who has experience reporting in and for Indigenous communities.

Class summary

How do you report responsibly on a missing Indigenous person? How do you weigh the importance of accuracy, fairness and independence -- the core principles of journalistic ethics and standards in Canada -- with the need for empathy and cultural competency? By using specifically designed media guidelines and case studies, this class examines the particular challenges journalists face when covering these stories and identifies ways to tell them that are more accurate and human-centred.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this module, students should be able to:

- Begin to understand the history and context facing missing and murdered Indigenous people
- Analyze or critique media coverage of missing Indigenous people
- Explain or show how to apply the media guidelines in a reporting scenario

Readings

There are a few readings that should be required as part of the context for Indigenous reporting, as noted below. This includes the Principles for Change from the National Inquiry Final Report as this section needs to be read in order to interpret the Calls for Justice.

- [LOFEO Media Guidelines on Reporting on Missing Indigenous People](#) (required)
- [The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#), A Deeper Dive: Media and Representation, Vol. 1a., pg. 385-396. (required)
- [The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#), Principles for Change, Vol. 1b., pg. 167-173. (required)
- [The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#), Calls for Media and Social Influencers, Vol. 1b.,pg. 187-188. (required)
- Video: LOFEO introduction and explanation of guidelines, “in the field” observations of two Indigenous journalists : [Michelle Perley](#), [Nic Meloney](#), [Trina Roache](#)
- [Reporting in Indigenous Communities](#) by Duncan McCue
- Other: refer to the resource list at the end of the [LOFEO media guidelines](#)

Assignments

These examples cover a range of assignment types for instructors to adapt to their needs. An instructor can choose one or more, based on the course and level of the students.

- Short answer or multiple choice: A series of questions based on the media guidelines and other readings. This assignment tests whether students have reflected on the reading(s) and class discussion, and can be done at the end of the class or after it.
 - Example: Multiple Choice
For a story about a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Person, newsroom editors and managers should NOT:
 - a) assign a single journalist as a point of contact for the family and community
 - b) select a reporter with necessary training and experience to interview people who have suffered trauma
 - c) assign multiple reporters to ensure all angles are covered
 - d) allocate sufficient time for the story to be completed based on the cultural context and traumatic circumstances
 - Example: Short Answer
Q: After a story is published, what should the reporter do when it comes to the main interviewees?
A: The reporter should check in with interviewees and make sure to share a link with them to the story.

- Case study: An essay-style critique of one or two news stories using the media guidelines as a lens. This assignment tests whether students are able to apply the guidelines to a reporting scenario.
 - Example questions for students: In what ways does the story reflect the guidelines and best practices for reporting on missing Indigenous people? What's missing? What feedback do you have for the reporter/writer? What feedback do you have for the editor/producer/manager? What questions does this story leave you with about the reporting process?
- Personal reflection: An essay on how you'd react as a family member when a reporter calls OR what you learned about communicating with sources as a reporter. This assignment tests whether students have thought about the reading(s) and discussion from someone else's viewpoint.
 - Example questions for students: What would you want to know when a reporter calls? How would you want a reporter to interact with you? What do you expect from a reporter? How could you apply these media guidelines when interviewing sources in a reporting scenario involving other marginalized communities?

In-class exercise

Instructors could use or adapt one of these examples. The time needed for each exercise would depend on the course and number of students.

Exercise 1: This is designed to follow a lecture/discussion on the LOFEO media guidelines and context for those guidelines.

- Reporting scenario: The police send out a news release about a missing person. With a little googling, you discover this is an Indigenous person.
- **Step 1:** Divide the students into three groups to cover three phases of the reporting process: research and gathering; writing and production; publication and followup.
- **Step 2:** Give each group 15 minutes to consider key questions:
 - Group 1: What do you do/consider before reaching out to a source? What do you do/consider when interviewing a source?
 - Challenge question: What happens if someone says they don't want to talk with you?
 - Group 2: What do you do/consider when you are writing or packaging a story?
 - Challenge question: What happens if you're writing for multiple platforms with various deadlines?
 - Group 3: What do you do/consider when you are publishing or airing your story? What do you do/consider after?
 - Challenge question: What happens if someone says they want to see the story before publication?
- **Step 3:** Bring everyone together and have each group share their notes, starting with Group 1, and discuss what was learned.

Exercise 2: This is designed to see what students come up with, then compare that to the LOFEO media guidelines. This is similar to Exercise 1, but emphasizes discovery as opposed to retention.

- Reporting scenario: A caller tells your newsroom that their friend is missing. With a little googling, you discover this is an Indigenous person.
- **Step 1:** Divide the students into three groups to cover three phases of the reporting process: research and gathering; writing and production; publication and followup.
- **Step 2:** Give each group 15 minutes to consider key questions:
 - Group 1: What do you do/consider before reaching out to a source? What do you do/consider when interviewing a source?
 - Challenge question: What happens if someone says they don't want to talk with you?
 - Group 2: What do you do/consider when you are writing or packaging a story?
 - Challenge question: What happens if you're writing for multiple platforms with various deadlines?
 - Group 3: What do you do/consider when you are publishing or airing your story? What do you do/consider after?
 - Challenge question: What happens if someone says they want to see the story before publication?
- **Step 3:** Bring everyone together and have each group share their notes, starting with Group 1.
- **Step 4:** Go through the LOFEO media guidelines and compare them with what the students came up with. Are there similarities? Any gaps?

Exercise 3:

- Critique: Compare 2-3 news stories about the same case of a missing Indigenous person.
- **Step 1:** Divide the students into 2-3 groups depending on the size of the class to consider key questions:
 - How does each story fare when you look at it through the lens of the media guidelines?
 - Consider headline, lead, overall story structure, word choice, sources, multimedia
 - Consider the timing or urgency of the information.
 - How would you change or rework the piece?
 - How do you think family and friends of the missing person might feel about the story?
- **Step 3:** Bring everyone together and have each group share their notes.

Case Studies

Case studies: Reporting on missing Indigenous people

The following stories could be used for an assignment or in-class exercise. They are all online and remain publicly available.

Loretta Saunders

CBC: [Missing woman prompts police to issue public plea](#)

CBC: [Search for Loretta Saunders, missing SMU student, continues](#)

APTN: [Loretta Saunders' family holding tightly to hope \(video\)](#)

National Post: [Pregnant student studying cases of murdered and missing Aboriginal women disappears in Halifax](#)

Cassidy Bernard

APTN: ['I miss her every day': Family, community still waiting for information on who killed Cassidy Bernard](#)

Saltwire: [Cassidy Bernard's ex made violent threat We'koqma'q woman's death](#)

CBC: [Rally for Cassidy Bernard lines highway outside We'koqma'q](#)

Saltwire: [Standing in solidarity in Whycomomagh](#)

Credits

This module was developed by journalism educators Terra Tailleir (University of King's College) and Erin Moore (Nova Scotia Community College), in collaboration with the team at Looking Out For Each Other. It was piloted in Reporting in Mi'kma'ki, a course taught by Terra and Mi'kmaw journalist Trina Roache, in summer 2021.

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