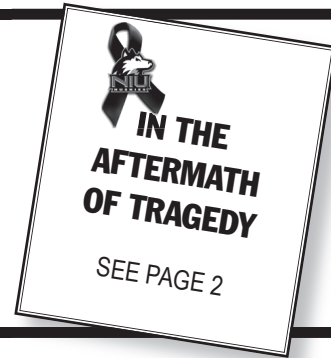


# NINA

NORTHERN ILLINOIS NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION



Count the day lost when your newspaper ... has not done something to benefit the community it serves.



Oscar S. Stauffer

## ONLINE RESOURCES FOR JOURNALISTS

[www.northernstar.info/nina](http://www.northernstar.info/nina)

Vol. 46, No. 1

Route to:

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- Managing Ed.
- Newsroom
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- 
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# Visual journalism: Help is here

*April 25 conference focuses on print/video*

NINA continues its commitment to new-media training with our April 25 spring conference, "It's a Visual World."

The event will offer help for publishers, editors, reporters and photographers in learning to think more visually to take advantage of video and photos with limited resources.

Speaker Curt Chandler will look at ways newspapers are electrifying their storytelling with better use of pictures in print and a commitment to photos and videos on the web. And, to emphasize how each medium requires its own approach to visual journalism, we'll take three traditional print ideas and show how they could be done differently -- and more powerfully -- for print, Web and other casts.

The conversation will address not just the "how-to" questions, but also the "why" questions. We'll look at philosophies for doing video and other multimedia on the Web. What's working? What's not working? What are reasonable expectations for small to midsize newspapers? What kind of time and training investments are necessary?

"This is relatively new territory for most small to mid-sized weekly and daily newspapers in northern Illinois," said NINA First Vice President Pete Nenni of the Daily Herald. "So, having someone of Curt's background and experience talk on this subject will provide some valuable insight."

**Speaker:** Curt Chandler is senior lecturer specializing in multimedia reporting at Penn State University. Before entering the academic world last summer, he



was the editor for online innovation at the post-gazette.com in Pittsburgh. Curt has a degree in newspaper writing from Northwestern University and more than 25 years of newspaper experience

as a visual journalist, manager and online editor. He also worked for the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the Ogden (Utah) Standard-Examiner and the Pueblo (Colo.) Chieftan. He has conducted multimedia training in newsroom and seminars for working journalists in addition to working in the classroom with students who aspire to be journalists.

**When:** Friday, April 25, 2008

**Time:** 8:45 a.m. to noon

**Where:** Holmes Student Center, Room 305, NIU-DeKalb

**Cost:** \$20 for NINA members and attendees from member publications; \$40 for nonmembers.

**Who should attend:** Editors, publishers, reporters, photojournalists, online staffers.

**Parking:** Use either the NIU visitor lot or the Newman Center lot. Both cost \$5 a day.

**Registration deadline:** Friday, April 18. Contact Jim Killam at 815-753-4239, or [jkillam@niu.edu](mailto:jkillam@niu.edu).

# In a tragedy, humanity comes before deadlines

By Jim Killam

I just spent an hour talking with someone who was in the Cole Hall basement at 3 p.m. Feb. 14. Seven people down there heard the whole horrible event overhead – gunshots, screaming, a mad stampede for the auditorium exits. Those in the basement barricaded themselves in offices for 90 minutes, not knowing if a shooter would burst through the doors at any moment. Finally, police arrived and led them out.

As a journalist, I should have been taking notes and running a voice recorder. As a college newspaper adviser, I should have asked if he minded if a student reporter interviewed him. But this was a friend, telling me not only about what he experienced that day, but what he's experienced since, emotionally. At some point, his will make a compelling story. Just not right now.

Such has been the day-to-day experience of helping my students cover this story, while we also have been part of the story and dealing with the emotional fallout. We are all experiencing thoughts and emotions that are difficult to explain to someone who wasn't here that day. Here at the Northern Star, we've learned a lot about being friends first, journalists second. One of our students, Dan Parmenter, died that day. Two others were in the auditorium and escaped without being hit. They are dealing with a lot right now.

We've heard the term "NIU family" bandied about lately. To be honest, I'd never really thought of NIU that way. The Northern Star and its alumni are most definitely a family, but the whole university? We have 25,000 students, and 3,300 faculty and staff. It's more of a small city than a family.

That perception has changed, at least for



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now. Wherever we were at 3 p.m. Feb. 14, we all experienced something absolutely awful together. Whether we knew each other or not, "Where were you?" became the first line of almost every conversation for a few days.

We also have become a lot more aware of what's going on around us. We watch each other's backs. I sat this week in the Holmes Student Center coffee shop, talking with Geri Nikolai from the Rockford Register Star. Across the room, two male students ran toward a door, trying to catch a Huskie Bus. I completely lost my train of thought by zeroing in on those two guys until I knew they weren't dangerous.

When a lone student stands outside a building, we give a second and third glance. When someone walks into a classroom late, everyone turns and looks. And I suppose I'll never look at a guitar case the same way again. It's not that we're fearful, at least outwardly. We're just more alert.

We've also grown to understand something counselors call "event fatigue." We are talked out, counseled out and just plain tired. It's not that we mind talking about the tragedy. We're just out of things to say.

Since Feb. 14, I've probably done 30 interviews with reporters (print, broadcast and online) from all over the world. Some of our Northern Star students have done even more. We learned quickly how to distinguish between reporters who see you as that day's story, and those who genuinely care.

Examples of the former: A national TV producer, on the phone an hour after the shootings, who told one of our students, "This could be your one chance to be on national TV." Or the network camera man, covering a church service, who asked parishioners to sit down during the scripture reading because they were blocking his shot.

Examples of the latter: The many reporters who used the Northern Star as an office from which to write and

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# Taking good notes is a lost art

By Jason Akst

*"Ya get good notes?"*

— Jason Robards as Ben  
Bradlee

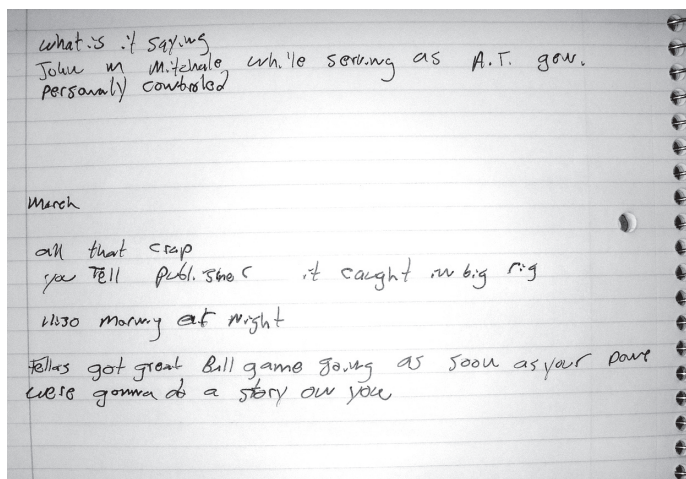
*"Verbatim."*

— Robert Redford as Bob  
Woodward, speaking for  
Dustin Hoffman as Carl  
Bernstein

In the fog of blogs, convergence and economic survival, I apologize for highlighting yet another worry, but a basic, critical reporting skill is dying. Tomorrow's journalists don't take good notes (if teaching journalism at NIU is any indication).

I have wanted to say something for a while, but what sent me over the edge was my basic news writing students brainstorming Valentine's Day feature angles. I drew a giant heart on the board with lines to things like "chocolate," "sex," "love," "romance," "lingerie," and "getting dumped/being dumped." The students enjoyed creating these angles, knew this was an assignment, heard my rant about reporters' notes, and knew I don't put class notes or PowerPoint online. Of two sections of class (about 33 students), only a handful took any notes.

So I mentioned "writing an article about students' lack of note-taking ability for the Northern Illinois Newspaper Association, an organization that might provide you your first career job," and that I would be peeking at their notes over the next few days. No improvement. I showed the "All the President's Men"



One student's notes from a recent journalism class.

scene of Hoffman/Bernstein scribbling each word, challenging my students to get the same notes. Ouch.

I wish this semester is an anomaly, but over several years of teaching college journalism, it's clear that many of our up-and-comers don't:

- take good notes;
- know how to take good notes even if they wanted to;
- have training in note taking;
- want to learn more about taking notes;
- care (beyond lip service) about taking notes.

I perused a stack of basic journalism textbooks to make sure notes are still important. Everyone thinks so. Most books dispense advice about how note taking is a multifaceted process of listening, writing, interpreting, and following up; how it's nearly impossible to get every word, so learn when to quote and when to paraphrase; to use a pencil in bad weather; how tape recorders fail, and so forth. A few acknowledge that note taking is critical

– but so fundamental that many j schools don't teach it – and many FRONT COVERS depict a reporter taking notes! What gives?

The decline of the once exalted note seems partly societal, partly technical. Nowadays, note taking is a menial chore for menial people. A former boss assigned meeting "scribes," so that only person would have to take notes, thereby enabling everybody else to (God forgive me for writing this) "think outside the box." Haven't you been surprised in recent meetings at how few people take notes?

With our students, the problem is much more technologically located. They are certain there will be an accurate, easily downloadable version of events ... that they can retrieve in nanoseconds ... on deadline ... for free. They think this because 1) it's often true, and 2) we have addicted them to the Internet and PowerPoint.

Regardless of the source of the problem, taking notes is like playing pool or making guacamole (to

use two extremes): one gets better with practice.

## WHAT MIGHT HELP:

- Employers: institute a "policy" that novice reporters' notes are subject to spot checking. Call it quality control.

- If you have meetings and see reporters not taking notes, embarrass them.

- Emphasize note taking in mentoring. Pair strong note-taking veterans with weak note-taking beginners. Beats don't matter; in fact, pairing a sports writer with a cops reporter might be good.

- Create easy, low/no-budget note-taking contests. Play a short scene of anything with lots of quick dialogue. Whoever gets closest to verbatim wins a better parking spot, a gift card ... whatever.

- Find a retired secretary to teach shorthand.

- Journalism faculty: put as little material online as possible. Force students to take notes (be sure to explain your policy).

**If tomorrow's** journalists don't start taking better notes, what are the consequences? Robards/Bradlee said it best: "I can't do the reporting for my reporters, which means I have to trust them. And I hate trusting anybody."



Jason Akst is a journalism instructor at Northern Illinois University. Contact him at jakst@niu.edu, or 815-753-7009.

## Tragedies

Continued from page 2

file. They were unfailingly gracious in asking our students for interviews and background information, and sensitive in understanding what we were dealing with.

At a workshop I attended recently, news videographer Seth Gitner of The Roanoke Times said this about interviewing people: "It's always an honor when someone lets me into their life."

Of all the journalistic lessons I've been reminded of through this whole, awful experience, that may be the best. When I interview someone, the honor is mine. No one is just a source, an eyewitness, or a skin color to satisfy perception of fairness and balance. When people agree to be interviewed, they trust us with their words, and often their emotions and their dignity. The best reporters appreciate and uphold this trust.

Certainly, our students who go on to become professional reporters will cover tragedy again. I think they'll do so with empathy and sensitivity ... knowing how it feels to be on the other side of those notebooks, cameras and microphones.

## Memorial scholarship in works

The Northern Star is establishing a scholarship in memory of Daniel Parmenter, one of the five students killed in the Feb. 14 NIU shootings. Dan worked at the newspaper as an advertising sales representative.

To establish the scholarship, \$25,000 must be raised as base fund. Recently, the NINA Board voted to donate \$1,000 toward the fund.

Companies and individuals interested in donating toward the scholarship may send checks, made out to the NIU Foundation, to:

Maria Krull  
Northern Star  
Campus Life Building, Suite 130  
DeKalb, IL 60115

In the memo line, please write, "Dan Parmenter scholarship."

The report, "State of the News Media 2008: An Annual Report on American Journalism," has been released.

See it at:

[www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/2008/](http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/2008/)



## Stay connected!

### Blog

To join in the conversation about multimedia, training and the future of our newsrooms, visit NINA's "Digital Ink" blog at:

<http://ninareporter.blogspot.com>

Better yet, subscribe to Digital Ink through a service like Google Reader, and get all updates delivered to your desktop.

### E-mail list

Subscribe to our listserv and get information about workshops, conferences and other professional development opportunities. Contact Jim Killam: [jkillam@niu.edu](mailto:jkillam@niu.edu)

### Web site

Find newsletters, job listings, membership information, board meetings and other information at:

[www.northernstar.info/nina](http://www.northernstar.info/nina)

## CALENDAR

### Friday, April 19

IHSA Journalism Sectional competitions at various sites statewide.

### Friday, April 25

NINA Spring Conference at NIU-DeKalb. See page 1.

### Friday, April 25

NIU Journalism Banquet, including recognition of Illinois Journalist of the Year.

### Saturday, April 26

IHSA State Journalism Finals, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston.

### Friday, June 20

NINA Board meeting. Committees at 9 a.m., full board at 10 a.m. Northern Star, NIU-DeKalb.

### Friday, Sept. 12

NINA Board meeting. Committees at 9 a.m., full board at 10 a.m. Northern Star, NIU-DeKalb.

### Thursday, Oct. 23

NINA Board meeting and dinner, Sycamore.

### Friday, Oct. 24

NINA Fall Conference and Awards Luncheon, NIU-DeKalb.

### Tuesday, Nov. 4

Election Day

### Friday, Dec. 5

NINA Board meeting. Committees at 9 a.m., full board at 10 a.m. Northern Star, NIU-DeKalb.