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I became infinitely more googlable this summer than I was before I started my internship at the Hearst Newspapers syndicate on Washington, D.C.'s illustrious K Street. I wrote dozens of articles, zipping to a different location each day to cover all sorts of spot news on topics ranging from Supreme Court nominee (and now Chief Justice) John Roberts to illegal immigration crackdowns, mass transit security in the wake of the London attacks to Guantanamo Bay. I was in the House and Senate press galleries, the National Press Club, the Pentagon. I encountered and interviewed a veritable laundry list of both national political figures and famous-for-D.C. types, diligently picked up my Washington Post every day and endured the malarial languor that is summer in our nation's capitol in the summer.

Most days took on a familiar format – I would stop into the news bureau in downtown D.C. to grab my mail and a fresh mini-cassette and steno pad, put my press badge around my neck and rush downstairs to the glorious (really) Metro to hit a Congressional hearing, press conference or other news event around the city. After the event, I'd call my bureau chief, Chuck Lewis, to give him a quick post-mortem as I hurried back to the office.

Back at my desk, I'd flip on the little TV to a muted CNN and submit a schedule (teaser) to put in our news budget (list of stories to be posted to the New York Times wire service later in the day). The rest of the afternoon and evening would be spent making follow-up phone calls, doing background research, writing a story and going through several back-and-forth edits with Chuck or the night editor, Dan Freedman. Some days were a little different – I went to a couple luncheons at the Press Club for Newt Gingrich and the governor of Virginia, and a couple of Christian Science Monitor breakfasts with dignitaries like Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and (embattled) AFL-CIO President John Sweeney. Even on the few days I was just in the office working on a long-term project or reading up on the wire stories, though, it was great.

And beyond the everyday, my internship at Hearst raised my consciousness of social and economic issues that had previously been far off my radar. My work on immigration stories makes a good example.

I could watch Lou Dobbs howl about our insecure borders on cable news or grumble about bottlenecks at the Canadian border, but from both my suburban Long Island and sleepy Hanover vantage points, immigration policy seemed irrelevant to my life, and I either skimmed or skipped those stories in the newspapers.

In the course of my work at Hearst, though, I became intimately acquainted with immigration policy, and from my very first day, latched on to any event related to border security, U.S.-Mexico relations or undocumented worker laws. The concerns of our readers in Laredo, Texas, which shares its border with violence-plagued Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, became mine. The concerns of readers in Arizona and New Mexico, where the governors proclaimed states of emergency this summer citing out-of-control borders, became mine as well. My first day on the job, Chuck laid out the issues the wire clients want to print in their newspapers. Immigration, border security, Hispanics and drug trafficking topped the list because they're what the people who read our six papers in Texas, for example, want to read about.

Flipping through the federal daybook online, which lists various goings-on about Capitol Hill, I started to highlight immigration-related hearings and news events not just because they would interest my target audience and give my story a better shot at getting picked up, but because I became genuinely interested. I had hour-long phone calls with immigration officials and interest groups outside of my stories just because I wanted to know more and better understand all the concerns involved. It was wonderful to go beyond the technical aspects of reporting and become really engaged with what I was writing about. The result is that immigration policy has become a field I'm very interested in pursuing further both at Dartmouth and in future professional experiences.

Of course I did learn a great deal on the technical level as well; I learned a lot about how the D.C. news-gathering works, as well as the lingo and the processes that belong to it. I also became very endeared to Chuck's parlance, as when he, after final edits on my stories, would say, "Alrighty, we're

going to send this around the world” (or post it to the wire). Truly, Chuck made the experience very fruitful; I was treated not as an intern, but as a reporter, doing exactly what the other reporters in the bureau were doing and absolutely none of the grunt work and paper-pushing that so many of my friends wound up doing at their summer internships. He gave me near-complete independence in deciding what I wanted to cover every day and demanded good work. When I left the office at night – I usually didn’t leave until after 7 – I felt like I had really accomplished something when my story was posted to the wire. Seeing the story picked up in papers like the Chicago Tribune or the Houston Chronicle the next morning was just icing.

Beyond the day-to-day, here’s one thing I really took away about what journalism entails: It’s about getting to the point. This is something we tend not to do in academic writing, at least in circles that reward complicated prose and favor unnecessarily complex language over terse, clear writing. In government, our laws take on a similarly verbose style, and at the same time, nowhere else is there a greater appreciation for empty (but high-sounding) language and spin than in politicians’ communication with the public. So, as I discovered this summer, government is a hotbed for inexpressive communication – be it over- or undersimplified.

Writing about government for newspapers, your job is to get to the point for the readers, and that means cutting through the Washington baloney and highfalutin bureaucratese that plagues the city. One of the many meaningless words thrown around D.C. (and elsewhere), is “reform.” What the heck does that mean? The second story I wrote for Chuck, my fourth day on the job, took me to the hospital at George Washington University for a Hillary Clinton-Bill Frist press conference. The unlikely duo was rolling out a mildly significant bill that would “reform” healthcare recordkeeping nationwide.

“Reform” alone doesn’t mean anything. Working on the article when I returned to the office, I lazily wrote in my lead that Clinton and Frist proposed to “reform” healthcare information technology. Chuck jumped all over it with one of his signature emphatic questions in the margin: WHAT DOES THAT MEAN??????

I learned I had to do a little better than that, and doing better implied not just taking whatever ambiguities the senators' press people felt like giving out that day, but finding out what, if anything, they meant. Although I felt like I got better at identifying that kind of vague language as I got more practice, it also got tougher to dispense with it when I sat down to write my stories. Language is contagious, and when you sit in a Congressional hearing for four hours, swimming in language that is a mixture of fluffy talking points and convoluted wonk-speak, it can be difficult to get it out of your head after you leave. It's a struggle I became more sensitive to as my internship progressed, but certainly had not mastered by the time I left. This is one of the difficulties I encountered that made me respect the role of reporters even more than I did before I started my internship – and it can be harder than it looks, even, and sometimes more so, when you write pre-packaged news (based on press conferences and the like, as I often did).

The entire incredible experience, which I cannot do justice in a brief report, would not have been possible without support from the Rockefeller Center. As Chuck warned me before I started, the internship would be uncompensated in terms of dollar bills but would pay richly in experience, and it did. Some of the evidence is tangible – my Congress press badge, my notes, all the stories published in papers across the country with my byline on them. But I have even more evidence in the form of the incredible anecdotes I will tell about the people I met, the places I worked and the stories I tacked – everything from those A1, above-the-fold stories like the Roberts nomination and Plamegate to regional interest pieces. My internship was an experience I'll remember fondly for years to come.