



International Journalism & Media Management Training Program @ Western Kentucky University

Cambodian Journalism Seminar Field Report

January 2, 2003 – January 6, 2003

Prepared by Renee Shaw and Kevin Willis

Edited by Jerry Barnaby and Cheryl Kirby-Stokes

April 30, 2003



INTERNEWS

Contact:

George C. Papagiannis,
Director, Radio Operations and Training
Telephone 202 833 5740, ext. 109
Fax 202 833 5745
george@internews.org



Contact:

Jerry Barnaby
Director, Educational Telecommunications
Telephone 270 745 651
Fax 2707452084
jerry.barnaby@wku.edu

INTRODUCTION

The journey from the U.S. to Cambodia actually started six months before the plane left, when a group of ten Khmer journalists came to Western Kentucky University for an intensive three-week training session. Kevin Willis and Renee Shaw had worked with the journalists throughout the training and were selected for the follow-on visit.



Renee Shaw is a producer/reporter for Kentucky Educational Television where she has been employed since 1997. Her duties include producing, writing, editing and hosting Legislative Coverage; co-producer of KET's longest running public affairs program Comment on Kentucky; reporter for KET's Monday night issues forum Kentucky Tonight; and producer of special and interstitial public affairs programs. Prior to this, Shaw worked for Western's Public Radio in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Shaw graduated from Western Kentucky University with a Masters in Communications in 1996, and earned Bachelors of Arts degrees in Government and Broadcasting in 1994. While at Western, the Tennessee native received top honors from the Kentucky Associated Press and the Society of Professional Journalists for her work at WKYU-FM.

Kevin Willis graduated from WKU in 1999, with a degree in broadcasting. During his student years, he had worked as a news intern and part-time worker at Western's Public Radio. He also worked as a part-time news anchor at WSM-FM in Nashville. Since graduation, Kevin has worked as an anchor/reporter for Western's Public Radio. In July of 2000, he took over the morning drive-time news responsibilities. As part of this training program, Kevin traveled to Indonesia for two weeks in February 2002. He helped co-present sessions in Jakarta, and at site visits to stations in Bali and Lombok.

Our plan was to put the participants' new skills to work by having them report on HIV/AIDS issues. Since Cambodia has the highest rate of HIV infection of any Asian country, the Program staff decided to center the follow-on training around reporting quality information on issues surrounding the disease. One of the main goals of the trip was to oversee the creation of HIV/AIDS news stories, and then hear them broadcast by the journalist's stations.

The following are combined, edited personal accounts of the seminar.

Wednesday, January 1, 2003

Kevin Willis

After a long flight from Nashville, Renee and I arrived in Phnom Penh. Terry Reagan, one of the WKU managerial trainers, greeted us at the airport. Also there to meet us were our translators and a driver. After checking into our hotel, we battled our jet lag by going out and seeing some of the city.



Our first stop was Tuol Sleng, the museum set on the grounds of one of the deadliest Khmer Rouge prisons. Of the thousands of people sent to the camp, only six were known to survive. Going into rooms that were used to torture and murder people was a heartbreaking, yet incredible, experience. The grounds are kept just as they were when the Khmer Rouge were driven out. The exception are the thousands of pictures—the mug shots taken by the Khmer Rouge of their

victims. These pictures are displayed throughout the rooms, putting human faces on the men, women, children and babies murdered by the regime.

My spirits were considerably down following this experience. Still, I wouldn't trade in the visit to Tuol Sleng for anything. It was something I wanted—and needed—to see in order to better understand the history of this country.

We then made our way to the Russian and Central markets for shopping. Terry had already been, so he was a veteran of the ways of the Khmer market. I'm not usually comfortable with the thought of having to barter for what I want. After all, in the U.S. you don't exactly go to the supermarket and try to talk down the cashier on the price of your breakfast cereal. But I soon picked up on the bartering technique and used it to get some great gifts for family and friends.



Rasi, one of the radio managers trained at WKU, was nice enough to take out the Bowling Green group to dinner that evening. This was quite an experience. The restaurant, located on the opposite side of the Mekong River where we were staying, looked huge enough to seat about 500 people. The WKU group, Rasi and her family gathered around a large table. Virtually all Khmer restaurants are open-air, so you usually have to contend with flies and mosquitoes. But since it was late evening, the bugs weren't as intense as during the daytime. Another treat was the musical entertainment—four pretty, young Khmer ladies dressed up like they were going to the Prom. A “one man band” backed them on synthesizer, and the ladies sang what was described to me as Khmer pop music.

SEMINAR: CAMBODIAN COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE, PHNOM PENH

Thursday, January 2 – Seminar Day 1

Kevin Willis

It was great to reunite with our friends who graduated from the WKU session. I was especially happy to see Pisey, who has become a good friend of mine following our time in Bowling Green. Pisey was scheduled to lead a session that Sunday, and I had no doubt he would do a great job.



After Renee and I introduced the translators and ourselves, we explained the expectations behind our training. We explained that the focus of the training would be reporting on HIV/AIDS issues. Also, we told the group how we wanted to gauge the progress of those who had attended the Bowling Green session, continue that progress and spread the knowledge to the new journalists who were joining us for the first time.

Effects of WKU training

We heard reports from the WKU graduates about how the Bowling Green training had impacted their work over the past four to five months. Some of the participants reported positive and encouraging breakthroughs; others said they were still facing difficult circumstances that made it difficult to implement parts of the training. These are included in Appendix A.

After hearing these stories, Renee and I realized there was cause for both hope and concern. We were dealing with journalists who had the desire and ability to create great work. Unfortunately, not all of them worked in environments that allowed for this potential to shine through. We knew we would have to provide the necessary skills to these journalists, yet at the same time realize the reality of their workplace. We hoped that by empowering the reporters with knowledge, they would be able to slowly break through some of the restrictive barriers they faced at the office.



Renee Shaw

The Role Of Journalists

After introductions of trainers and participants, we discussed the Role of a Journalist on Reporting HIV/AIDS. This exercise was to establish the goals of the training in writing stories dealing with the issue. The main areas discussed were: spread of disease in rural areas; parent-to-child transmission, as well as sexual transmission; protection from the incurable disease AIDS; discrimination against those infected because of lack of understanding about how the disease is transmitted; treatment options; segregation of sufferers; testing; other diseases that develop as a result of HIV/AIDS; and personal health concerns by journalists interacting with HIV/AIDS victims. All of these issues were brainstormed by the group, with the help of the trainers, as story ideas and suggestions.

Many of the participants were greatly concerned about HIV/AIDS transmission by casual contact. The Cambodian journalists remarked that Cambodia's health standards are different from the West, particularly America, which made them (the Cambodians) more susceptible or prone to communicable diseases like Tuberculosis and Malaria. Questions surfaced about interviewing HIV/AIDS sufferers and if the disease could be transmitted by **microphone** and **space-sharing**. Kevin and I tried to allay those fears and told the participants that the experts that would be in later in the week to give health-related information about the disease could address those kinds of concerns.



Ethical Considerations

We discussed Ethical Considerations in HIV/AIDS reporting, mostly surrounding the issue of interviewing patients in fragile or near-death life stages. One ethical consideration in interviewing relayed to the participants was to take time with the patient, who may be suffering from fatigue, a side effect from medications for the illness. Perhaps the patient can't articulate the way the reporter would like him or her to or with the brevity and detail. It is

important for the reporter to be sensitive to the situation and feelings of the interviewee. The more patient the reporter, the better the story. Other ways to deal with that particular challenge were discussed. For example if the AIDS patient is too fatigued or incoherent to be interviewed, then interviewing family members about their loved ones may be more appropriate. We cautioned

the reporters about not jumping to conclusions or making assumptions about transmission between family members, particularly spouses. It would be unfair and possibly incorrect to make such assumptions and then include those in their stories without proof.

Perhaps, something that caught me off-guard was the Cambodians inquiry about referring to HIV/AIDS by the proper, scientific name in their stories, rather than using the local euphemism of the disease. Apparently, Cambodians refer to AIDS as the “light disease” because of the significant weight loss or wasting of the sufferers. Cambodians also call it “that” disease. Kevin and I suggested that the first reference to the disease in their stories should be the abbreviated, scientific term HIV/AIDS. Depending on the sophistication of their listening audience on the topic, it may even be necessary to detail the abbreviations and what they mean. We did recommend that if the reporter needed to “localize the language” and use the slang terms, “light or that disease,” to do so after they have established the mainstream term.

For instance: (this is not a statistical example based on factual numbers) *“36-hundred Cambodians have contracted HIV/AIDS since 1995. The light disease, as it is commonly called, has also claimed the lives of hundreds of children.”*

We also briefly discussed some questions about doctor/patient confidentiality. How much should be disclosed in identifying and naming the patient? Should the reporter help conceal the identity of the AIDS patient? Our answer to those questions was: only if the interviewee asks to have his or her identity concealed. The reporter has the permission to use the patient’s name since they agreed to do the interview without specifying any anonymity requests. If the AIDS victim is concerned about certain aspects of his or her identity, occupation or family being referenced in the story and expresses those concerns to the reporter, the reporter is obligated to meet the conditions on which the patient agreed to do the interview and not breach those for the sake of getting a better or “juicer” story. Those kinds of tactics will cause the journalist to lose credibility with their sources and even with the audience.

Taboos in Reporting HIV/AIDS

We discussed Taboos, a topic that stemmed from an earlier discussion about misconceptions. The first was the perception that Westerners with HIV/AIDS are not discriminated against like those in the East. Because of the taboos of how the disease is transmitted (intercourse – either heterosexually or homosexually, intravenous drug use, prostitution), unsafe behaviors are not commonly discussed in the culture. Many journalists said that Cambodian society does not allow for open communication about sex and drug issues that are a part of the disease. This still stems from misconceptions about transmission, and the lack of knowledge about the issue breeds further discrimination, which the journalists were urged to think about in terms of angles for their stories. In brainstorming the angles for their HIV/AIDS stories, we looked at myriad ways the disease is transmitted and how each of those could be used as a separate story. This exercise was intended for the journalists to unearth the taboos and find ways to produce pieces that would not offend, but inform. Topics included sex workers, drug use and needle-sharing, the impact on the homosexual community (from fronts other than just the disease) and pedophilia. Some journalists expressed the link between child molestation and homosexuality and the possible transmission of the disease in that manner.



From that discussion on taboos, surfaced the question: *How do you deal with the issue of how the victim contracted the disease? How do you get that information?*

The trainers responses: ask bluntly, with a sensitivity of wording and use of tact; work up to the question, don't just ask that right at the start of the interview, but build some trust with the interviewee before attacking them with an uneasy question; understand gender sensitivities and considerations. On this last point some of the female journalists expressed discomfort in asking sex related questions to men. This is probably a societal gender nuance that I could not appreciate considering my culture. I encouraged them to look at their roles as a journalist as being gender-neutral, without respect to who they are interviewing. Perhaps for their first "patient" interview, the reporters would feel more comfortable talking with victims of the same sex to allay any worries.



Use Of Sound/ Interviewing/ PICPOT / Balance

While Kevin was working with the journalists who did not receive training at WKU during the summer of 2002, I worked with those who did and reiterated some aspects of that training. For the afternoon session we discussed ways to incorporate sound into stories. One of the reporters asked if it was fine to use sound recorded from other stories (like sound effects) and recycle that sound into newer stories. I told them that all sound should be fresh. The habit of recycling sound (ambulance sirens, cop moto sounds, etc) is a bad one. All sound should originate from that piece and be about that piece. Using sounds from a "library" is a lazy practice, not to mention it could become a gateway habit of recycling other "sounds" that are not appropriate.

We also talked about the timing and necessity of sound. Having "noise" in a story to startle the listener is not appealing. I told them the sound needs to make sense for that situation. Embellishing a story with sounds can enhance the story if it is done tastefully and with a purpose.

I also encouraged them to use shorter soundbites and maybe more than one or two depending on the nature of the story and the time constraints. Keeping in mind that balance of sources and soundbites from those stories is still crucial. That point generated a discussion about balancing stories when one side refuses to comment. I replied that reporters have an obligation to seek opposing viewpoints, but if one side refuses to comment on a matter, the reporter should mention that in the story. If that situation is similar to others in the past when a particular organization or government official, etc., has not commented, then a sentence in the story referencing past reactions to events of the same nature could be included to give the story more balance.

We also discussed how to decipher the angle of a story by using PICPOT – proximity, impact, conflict, prominence, oddity and timeliness. We worked on examples for occasions when each would provide the basis for the lead. This exercise drew considerable and spirited discussion about "prominence" being the lead indicator for a story, i.e., what affects the King or his actions. We worked through some examples that demonstrated the importance of focus on the "people" in examining the other facets of news values.

CODE OF ETHICS GROUP

Kevin Willis

One of the most important developments to come from the training at Western Kentucky University was the selection of four participants to create a “Code of Ethics” that could be used by all Khmer journalists. The idea for the group came about following a training session on media ethics. Some of the participants mentioned there was no formal set of guidelines in Cambodia that outlined the ethical responsibilities for journalists. People were simply hired to be reporters, not having any idea about what constituted ethical, fair and objective reporting.

Our participants told us that the lack of an ethical compass led to many problems in the world of Khmer journalism, such as:

- journalists accepting bribes in order to cover stories;
- journalists using their jobs to spread falsities that either provided support for or detracted from the government or certain politicians;
- journalists plagiarizing material from other sources.

The four journalists that were selected to write a rough draft of a code of ethics in Bowling Green had a wide range of experience. Kanhchana and Savry were young and aspiring reporters, while Phan and Pisey were seasoned employees, who held positions of respect at their stations. Using a code of ethics written by a U.S based journalism group as a model, our group set out to create a brand new code for Khmer reporters.

** JoAnn Albers, Director of Western’s Schools of Journalism and Broadcasting, guided the Bowling Green sessions on the Code of Ethics.



The group came to easy consensus on several of the key tenants of their new code. All four agreed to provisions such as:

- A journalist will not accept bribes;
- A journalist should not plagiarize;
- A journalist will always protect their sources.

However, there were some parts of the code that provided spirited debate. Phan wanted to insert a point that stated, “A journalist should not criticize or humiliate the nation.” This caused concern amongst the other participants, because they worried that the provision might have a chilling effect on what journalists would be able to report. It wasn’t clear exactly what would be considered criticism or humiliation of the nation. Did that mean it would be wrong for a journalist to cover or expose a story that might reflect poorly on the government, the culture or a particular city or province? The group eventually decided to keep the controversial rule in the code, but agreed to review the rough draft once we were all together in Cambodia during the follow-on.

On Thursday afternoon, I met with the original Code of Ethics group to discuss where we stood on finalizing the proposal. Once it was completed we planned to distribute it to all radio stations partnered with the Internews-WKU program in Cambodia. During our meeting some of the language was cleaned up, and edits were made. No decision was made on whether or not to include the rule prohibiting journalists from “criticizing” and “humiliating” the nation. We would have to deal with it later.

** The Code of Ethics is posted on the web site (www.wkyu.org).

Friday, January 3rd - Seminar Day 2



Kevin Willis

The morning marked the first guest speaker presentation about issues dealing with HIV and AIDS. Dr. Tia Phalla, Secretary General of the National Aids Authority, led a discussion on HIV prevention. In order to create quality news reports on HIV-related issues, our participants first needed to get the basic facts on how the disease is transmitted. Two major problems facing the Khmer public are the lack of quality information about HIV and the prevalence of incorrect information. By bringing in experts on the issue, we hoped our reporters would be able to pass along this much-needed information to their listening audience.

Dr. Phalla dispelled several myths often heard in Khmer society. Many Khmer believe the HIV virus will die if the infected person stops having sexual intercourse. Another falsity is that the virus can be cured through the use of “local” doctors, who use natural treatments such as herbs and spices. Dr. Phalla explained how each of these myths made it all the more difficult to convince parts of the Khmer population that HIV is a deadly issue that must be taken seriously.

Dr. Sok Pun was the morning’s second speaker. Dr. Pun is the HIV/AIDS Program Manager of CARE International in Cambodia. He gave us some sobering facts. Every night in Cambodia an estimated twenty people are infected with HIV. Ninety percent of the country’s HIV infections are sexually transmitted. Because it sometimes takes months—or even years—for an HIV infected person to show signs of the virus, they often continue to spread the disease to many others.

Both during and after the speaker’s presentations, Renee and I pressed our participants to apply the information they were receiving into story ideas. What types of stories were they coming up with? How could they relay these vital facts to their audience? It took a while to get the discussion going, but slowly our participants put forth story ideas. We put them all on the dry-erase board at the front of the class. The brainstorming session produced story ideas dealing with the importance of condom use, the incurability of AIDS and the importance of blood testing. We told our participants to keep track of these ideas and to continue to add to the list as the sessions continued.



After lunch, we heard from Dr. Chinn Senya, the Infectious Disease Department Director at the PBNS Hospital in Phnom Penh. Dr. Senya told first-hand accounts about the lives of those infected by AIDS. He told our participants about the slow death process that overtakes those who succumb to the disease.

Dr. Senya also provided information about ARV (anti-retroviral) drugs, which are designed to prolong the lives of AIDS patients. Access to ARV’s in Cambodia is very limited because of the high level of poverty among Khmer HIV/AIDS patients. Funding problems within the government are also a big problem, as only about 500 patients in Khmer hospitals receive free ARV’s. Dr. Senya told us that unless there is improved access to ARV’s, 230,000 Cambodians would die of AIDS by the year 2010.

Following Dr. Senya’s presentation Renee and I again asked our participants to discuss their thoughts on what they had heard. The information created some wide eyes in the group, particularly from our younger participants who were joining us for the first time at this training.

Christen, from FM 88 in Phnom Penh, told us that he was grateful for the information concerning how the virus was spread. He talked about the misinformation that was prevalent in many circles, including the assumption that you can spread HIV through simple touching, drinking after someone, etc. Our participants once again started to brainstorm potential story ideas for their on-air projects.



DISCUSSION GROUPS

Renee and I then split our journalists into two groups. Renee took the more advanced journalists, who had graduated from the WKU training, and I took the less experienced group. Since we would be getting back to the HIV/AIDS guest presentations in the morning, I decided to lead discussions on some other issues, ones centering around ethical issues facing Khmer journalists.

My translator, Meng, had told me earlier that Cambodians were not used to being asked to openly discuss their thoughts and feelings in a classroom setting. I wanted to give these young journalists the freedom to share some of their experiences with me, so that I could better learn about some of the hardships and realities they face while on the job.

The first issue we talked about was “envelope journalism.” This is a serious problem in Cambodia, as well as in other underdeveloped countries. Envelope journalism is the practice of journalists accepting bribes from the government, businesses or individuals in order to cover specific stories. The practice completely undermines the notion of balanced and objective reporting and raises some obviously troubling questions. Is the reporter only covering the story because he or she is getting bribed? Is the story unfairly favorable because the writer is getting paid off? Will the journalist cover other sides of the issue, or will they have to be bribed in order to do that as well?

The participants were candid and upfront about their experiences with envelope journalism. Several admitted they had taken money in the past to cover stories. They told me that the bribes they received often exceeded the salary they make in two months while reporting. When I asked for a show of hands from those who had taken bribes, five of the six made the admission. I told the group I respected and appreciated their honesty.

I engaged the group in a discussion about the negative repercussions of envelope journalism. I asked them to think about how the public would react if they found out that reporters were being bribed in order to cover stories. Would the public have any reason to trust the Khmer media? Would the journalists be able to have any self-respect, knowing they had essentially been bought-off?

The participants spoke about the way envelope journalism ruined the credibility of the country’s media. I was especially pleased to hear the comments of Bo, a young reporter from Phnom Penh. Thinking back to the information he had heard that morning, Bo wondered out loud if the Khmer public would have any reason to trust the HIV/AIDS stories they would be presenting on the air in the coming weeks. Suddenly, one could sense the “light bulbs” turning on within the other participants. We discussed how media corruption spoiled the positive messages and information that could be distributed through reporting, especially on life-or-death issues such as HIV/AIDS. I felt this was an important connection to make, since the main focus of the training was on providing reliable information on the virus.

We concluded our small-group discussion by talking about the ethics of using news stories as a vehicle to push a certain opinion or position. In countries where there are severe hardships—and little formal training for aspiring journalists—reporters sometimes get into the habit of using their job as a platform for pushing a specific agenda. At our Phnom Penh training, we had two participants from a radio station essentially run by the ruling party. It has the reputation of giving overly favorable coverage to the Prime Minister and his party. On the other hand we also had a participant from a station known for constantly blasting the Prime Minister, his government and their policies. Renee and I would eventually have to deal with both situations head-on during our station visits.

Touch, a middle-aged reporter from Phnom Penh, told us about an awkward position he often has to negotiate. In addition to reporting he also hosts a live call-in show. Callers often voice their displeasure with the government on the program, and then ask Touch to comment on their complaints. This puts Touch in a bit of jam, because as a journalist, he should not be expressing his personal opinions (in favor or against) the government, the opposition party, etc. Touch says he sometimes tries to get away with not stating an opinion, but that this sometimes angers the callers, who are looking for agreement. Others in our group shared similar experiences, as call-in shows are growing increasingly popular in Cambodia.

The participants and I discussed possible solutions to this problem. Because many of the participants' radio stations are not financially capable of hiring new staff, it was not realistic to think that the reporters could be replaced as hosts of the call-in shows. So we settled on a compromise: if the reporters were to host the shows, they should announce at the very beginning that the show is a forum for the opinions of listeners, not the opinions of the host. The host/journalist should serve as a moderator, asking questions of the callers and providing background information on the relevant topics. This way the host can continue to serve a useful function, but refrain from showing any bias while discussing hot-button issues.

Renee Shaw

Health Expert Training

One disappointment in the presentations was the cancellation of the person scheduled to speak on developing guidelines for ethical reporting of HIV/AIDS stories. Several questions emerged from the journalists and the trainers about how to deal with doctor/patient confidentiality concerns. The Secretary General spoke on that issue, but really relayed more health-related information rather than tools for journalists dealing with the issue in their reporting. There was a dearth of understanding about those legal/ethical questions that none of the speakers could really address. Given the change in culture, neither Kevin nor I felt we could lend that kind of advice. That was a real deficit in the program, shortchanging the reporters of some much needed guidance.



We “hinted” the participants should interview the experts after their presentations for their stories. To our dismay many would place microphones on their desks for getting their “sound.” We told them that quality of sound is just as important as the content. If it cannot be heard, then what is the use? Even with that reprimand many still continued using the microphones on their desk rather than conducting personal interviews with the experts after their presentations. We

remarked on their lack of motivation and told them they needed to demonstrate more initiative in getting stories.

Brainstorming Story Ideas

At the conclusion of the morning presentations, we asked the reporters to evaluate the kinds of information already disseminated and come up with some story ideas based on what they heard. We encouraged them to answer the questions: What's the story? Who would you interview? What are other angles? Here is what they determined:

- 1) Monks and volunteer groups disseminating information about AIDS;
- 2) Rates and numbers of HIV/AIDS sufferers in 2002 and predictions for 2003;
- 3) Families of HIV/AIDS victims and the discrimination they face;
- 4) Transmission;
- 5) Promoting Condom Use/ Prevention;
- 6) Dangers of HIV/AIDS;
- 7) Social consequences;
- 8) Lives of sex workers;
- 9) Effect on homosexual community;
- 10) Cost and access to treatment;
- 11) "Traditional doctors" who claim to cure HIV/AIDS.

At the end of the day on Friday, we broke the participants into groups by station affiliation. They were asked to come up with a story idea, a lead, additional information and, if time permits, find a soundbite from an expert during the interview. This was considered assignment #1.

Sok An:

Idea – Care for HIV/AIDS patients

Lead – siren as nat sound to start piece, then intro reporter

No lead sentence

This segued into a discussion about creating the LEAD and the characteristics: grab the audience's attention, tell what is happening now, demonstrate uniqueness, be interesting and be specific. This was referred to as the "pyramid lead or story", where the piece starts very specific and then gets broader with details and more information. We told the participants to keep their leads short and to not begin stories with soundbites because they have no context and cause listener confusion. Sok An then suggested that he narrow his focus to "bed shortages."

Kimsan and Sophaylin

Idea – AIDS prevention

Lead – 100-percent condom use could reduce the spread...

Suggested: reworking, use of stats in lead off-putting, need an update on strategy

Dinchentra

Idea – Impact of HIV/AIDS

He suggested a 10 minute piece as a special program.

I understood this idea to be outside the station's format.

Soun Touch

Idea – Living with HIV/AIDS (discrimination)

Participant suggested opening with soundbite. We asked if that was a common practice. We reinforced what we had already stated about that matter. Kevin added that it would be preferable

to open a story with nat sound, but not a soundbite. He used the example of America's Indy 500 and the phrase "gentlemen start your engines."

Savry

Lead was too long to dictate; needed some focus and direction;

Had too many points.

Discussion: The lead should tell what's happening now

Example: "AIDS experts are warning citizens that anyone can contract HIV/AIDS."

More discussion: What questions need to be answered with this kind of lead? Additional information?

Participant Responses:	How contract HIV/AIDS? By anyone?
Trainer Question:	What are the 5 W's of News?
Assignment #1	Trainer Follow Up on a Possible lead and story using Savry's topic:

HIV/AIDS experts are warning citizens that anyone can contract the disease.

Dr. Sok An, with blah blah, says anyone who engages in unprotected sex or uses dirty drug needles are at high risk for infection. Jane Doe, an HIV/AIDS patient, says blah blah (lead into soundbite, then bite). Over (number here) Cambodians have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, the highest rate of infection in Southeast Asia.

This exercise was to serve as a prototype for how the participant's stories should flow. The trainers would be evaluating their stories based on these elements: the lead, additional information, lead into soundbite, soundbite and close or conclusion.

Saturday January 4th - Seminar Day 3

Kevin Willis

Dr. Tia Phalla, from the National Aids Authority, delivered a second presentation to our participants. This time the talk concerned the establishment of ethical guidelines for HIV/AIDS reporting. Since this subject was so obviously important to the Internews-WKU mission, Renee and I engaged our journalists and Dr. Phalla in many back-and-forth discussions.

Because the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS are so sensitive, it is imperative that journalists be accurate in the information they pass along to the public. Dr. Phalla told us that journalists have the power to save more lives than any of the country's doctors. But this will only happen if the correct information is being broadcast to the public. Unfortunately, this does not always happen.

Dr. Phalla mentioned that some media accounts erroneously lead the public to believe that ARV drugs can cure HIV. By not mentioning the fact that HIV and AIDS are incurable, some of these reports were giving false hope to those who already contracted the disease, and those who were putting themselves at risk of catching it. Dr. Phalla told the group that he sees the effects of this sort of misinformation when he talks to the public about HIV prevention. According to the Doctor people often say, "So what if I catch the virus? I'll just get some of those drugs to cure it."

Pisey, one of our participants, proposed that all stories on HIV/AIDS mention the fact that there is currently no known cure for the virus. This way the point will always be made to the audience. Once again, the issue of "local doctors" came up. In Cambodia there are village doctors who

claim to have cures for AIDS. They charge patients large sums of money for these “cures.” I asked our participants how the media should cover such an issue? Should these “doctors” be allowed to give their side of the story even if they’re lying?

Our group seemed divided on this issue. Some believed that airing sound bites with these local doctors was wrong, since it could possibly mislead listeners. But others believed that it was the duty of the media to report on the issue, even if they personally disagreed with what was being said. After much debate on the issue, our group came to a consensus. Kim Peou, a participant from Radio Free Asia, voiced the opinion that it was ethically acceptable to air the views of these local doctors, as long as they also offered the perspective of real medical doctors. That way listeners can hear medical experts explain that any “local cures” are bogus.

This debate really symbolized much of what we were trying to get across to our participants concerning objectivity and fairness. Offering both sides of the story is imperative, regardless of whether you’re dealing with the government, a local temple or HIV/AIDS. Following the presentations our participants took the opportunity to interview the speakers, gathering sound for their future on-air projects.

SITE VISITS

Kevin Willis

Our participants had now heard from numerous guest speakers and had been given more information on HIV/AIDS than they could ever imagine existed. They had also gathered sound bites from the experts. Now it was time to get the side of those who were infected with HIV. Renee went with half the group to a local hospital with HIV patients. I took the other half to the Seedling of Hope Hospice, a small facility that cares for a couple dozen patients.

The Hospice was located on a busy, dusty street in Phnom Penh, but still had the feeling of being isolated. We met the director of the Hospice and his staff. We were told that most of those being housed at Hospice were in the advanced stages of the disease and had less than a year or so to live. The participants fanned out and started interviewing the patients.

Something Renee and I had worried about before our site visits was how the participants would react to interviewing those who were HIV-positive. We engaged the group in a discussion about any such fears. Some said they were worried that they might catch other diseases, such as TB, while interviewing the sick. But Dr. Sok Pun reassured our reporters that there was virtually no chance of this happening. A second concern of ours was how the patients would react to a bunch of strangers with microphones coming into their space. This worry turned out to be pointless, because the patients at the Hospice were more than willing to share. Several of them expressed appreciation at that fact that someone was taking the time to hear their story, and many offered words of warning to those who were taking part in risky lifestyles that made them susceptible to contracting the virus.

While some members of my group said they had interviewed HIV/AIDS patients before, the majority had not. The visit to the Hospice provided the chance to put a human face on the lectures we had been hearing the previous days. I encouraged the reporters to get as many interviews as they could while we were there. One of the rules of journalism states that it’s always better to have too much than too little.

Renee Shaw

A second group went to Sihanouk Hospital of Center of Hope. The participants conducted interviews with Dr. Jennifer Hines, the hospital's medical director, and Dr. Sok Phan, HIV/AIDS Department Manager. I had to encourage the reporters to take some initiative in doing the interviews and not just sit at a table and place mics around. Once again initiative was not apparent in many or perhaps it is a lack of confidence. They relied too much on the trainer to give instructions on what to do rather than just doing it. Once they got in there, they were fine, but they needed a little push to get them going.

At the time we arrived, all of the patients at the hospital were asleep. This proved a valuable lesson in that given the poor health conditions of the patients, they were told by the physicians that patients are more active and alert in the morning hours before they are given medications. Also, an incident arose where one journalist wanted to assume that because the patient's mother had stated her son was suffering from HIV/AIDS that was proof enough. I told her to corroborate that with the doctor. Dr. Phan replied that the patient was suspected of having the disease because of the symptoms, but that blood work had not been returned from the lab with that conclusive finding. The reporter was told that she could not assume the patient was suffering from HIV/AIDS until lab work had proved that to be the case. We discussed that her story is not to be based on parental assumptions or inconclusive medical opinions. Also, just because it was convenient for her to get the interview did not mean she could present a runaway story based on spotty information.

Now that the participants had their sound, they could begin writing their stories. After listening to all of the experts, many had decided to change the focus or angle of their previous ideas. We spent time that afternoon reviewing writing techniques and use of sound. Many of the participants were still struggling with narrowing their lead and omitting bias or commentary in their pieces.

Sunday, January 5th - Seminar Day 4

Kevin Willis

An important element of the Internews-WKU training is the identifying of top participants who have the skills and ability to become trainers themselves. During the WKU training two of our participants distinguished themselves as candidates for this role: Pisey and Kim Peou. Before coming to Cambodia I had contacted these two through email, inviting them to present sessions during the follow-on training. Both gladly accepted the opportunity. Pisey would lead a session entitled, "Defining News and News Value." Kim would present the session, "Building the Story." I offered suggestions on what types of elements the two might consider for their presentations, but for the most part the decision was left up to them.

Pisey's Session: Defining News and News Value



Pisey did not let us down. I got to know Pisey very well during the WKU training, as we were paired together for the "guest/host" program. He is an extremely serious and capable journalist, who symbolizes the struggles Khmer reporters face. Pisey wants to implement 100% of the techniques and skills he learns, but sometimes cannot do so because of political pressures at the workplace.

Pisey led a discussion about the six characteristics that help define the word, “News.” They are: proximity, timeliness, conflict, impact, prominence and oddity. This presentation had been given in Bowling Green, but we wanted to make sure the participants who had not come to WKU got a chance to get the information.

Pisey did a brilliant job of incorporating the HIV/AIDS theme into his presentation. After defining each of the six characteristics, he asked the group for examples dealing with HIV/AIDS issues. Savry, a young reporter from Battambang, offered a story idea about the high cost of ARV drugs used to fight HIV. Pisey probed the group about the newsworthiness of the story. Yes, the story is newsworthy, the group concluded. But in what ways? The story contains proximity, timeliness, conflict and impact. It is an important story, and one that needs to be told by the Khmer media.

Other topics included story ideas about the discrimination faced by HIV/AIDS patients, the ways the virus is spread and ways people can reduce the risk of catching it. All of our participants seemed to have good topics and good ideas. The next big step was the actual creation of the stories. That is when we would see how our journalists put to use the information we had given them.

As for Pisey, it became obvious to Renee and me that he was truly one of the jewels of this program. He presentation was excellent, and he came across as a natural teacher. I gave him a copy of the training manual I had created for our Phnom Penh training. In addition to using the manual during our visit, I also wanted to give copies to those participants who could also use it at the workplace while conducting their own trainings.

** The training manual is still in development and will incorporate the lessons learned from the follow on training for sue by the WKU-Internews journalists.

Renee Shaw

Pisey’s Session: Defining News and News Value

Pisey began with defining news as storytelling based on proven fact. He discussed the elements of news value and gave good examples of each. He placed a strong emphasis on “proven fact” since that had been a point of contention in previous discussions about reports containing fact and not commentary. Pisey also had an exercise planned for the other participants to evaluate PICPOT. His presentation was very well-organized with timely examples pertinent to our training about HIV/AIDS reporting. His presentation of the material by using overhead transparencies helped to illustrate his points. He even constructed a diagram of key points and definitions. It was a well-organized presentation that covered a lot of ground. It had been well-rehearsed and timed without resorting to unwieldy personal storytelling. Even though the same information had already been discussed, Pisey’s reinforcement of those issues made an impact on their understanding. He interacted well with the class by getting them involved through questions and examples. It was an excellent effort and a stellar session!!! I would highly recommend Pisey for future training opportunities.



Kevin Willis

Kim Peou’s presentation: Building the Story

Kim works for Radio Free Asia, an organization that has a wonderful reputation in the region for covering the top stories in a professional, fair and objective manner. We observed in Bowling Green that Kim had a great deal of talent, but did not always put forth a maximum effort. It reminded several of us of the child who is head of the class, knows it and then starts to slack off as a result. We hoped that including Kim as a trainer would provide incentive for her to apply herself throughout the sessions, not just some of the time.

Kim was not as prepared as Pisey, unfortunately. At first she seemed to be “winging it” and lost the attention of the group. Renee and I worked to steer her back to the subject at hand: namely, how to build up the news story now that we had information from experts and sound bytes from patients. This seemed to help quite a bit, as Kim told the group about the ways she has used Internet research to enhance past story ideas. We also discussed ways to use other material to build up news stories, such as print media reports, statistics and other research. The purpose of the session was to give our participants some ideas on how they can add context and additional information to their reports.

Renee Shaw

Kim Peou’s presentation: Building the Story

Kim Peou discussed the 5 w’s/1 H approach to news and information gathering. She briefly touched on the necessity for a story to be balanced. She could have offered some information on length of soundbites, use of nat sound, attribution and story research, but those crucial elements and others were absent from her presentation. There was a large gap between potential and performance. Her lack of effort and preparation were evident, as there was little to no concrete information, rather commentary and reference to personal experience in journalism. I would not recommend Kim Peou for future training opportunities.

Kevin Willis

Writing the Story

With the time remaining after Kim’s presentation, we let the participants get a head start on writing the first story for their on-air project. Tomorrow was set aside for writing and reviewing the first draft, but Renee and I wanted to go ahead and give the reporters some additional time. Plus, we hoped this would encourage them to write and produce more than one story. We hoped to hear at least two stories once we visited the reporter’s stations later in the training.

Renee Shaw

Writing the Story

Before we had them flesh out their stories, we reviewed some of the common mistakes that had been made in their earlier drafts. Deciphering between news and commentary; using complete sentences when writing the lead into sound; using incomplete sentences; avoiding echo soundbites and the montage approach of having no narration, just butted soundbites with no reference; attribution; overuse of statistics and word variety. Kevin and I reviewed their stories with the translators for these common errors and recommended ways in which they could improve. In many cases it appeared as if we



were writing the stories for them, as interest and initiative to improve was not apparent by some of those who had already been trained at Western.

Monday, January 6th - Seminar Day 5

Kevin Willis

Our participants were given all morning to write their first stories and pick out the relevant sound bite(s) for the production. By 2 pm Renee and I wanted to hear from each participant one 45-60 second story, including at least one sound bite.

Once Renee and I heard the first story drafts, we were reminded about the huge difference between having someone listen to a lecture about story writing and actually having them write. The stories contained several problems that we expected to encounter: bad lead sentences, not attributing sound bites to their sources and a lack of overall flow from beginning to end.

We had each participant read his or her story out loud. They had their sound bites cued up and ready to play as well. After hearing the story and the sound, we opened the floor for any comments the other journalists had. We wanted to let the participants apply what they had learned from the sessions while critiquing the rough drafts.

Several of the stories were impressive, if not perfect. Phan had two stories prepared, one of which was particularly surprising. The story dealt with the need for proper condom use in order to prevent the spread of HIV. Renee and I were pleasantly astonished with this choice of subject matter. We did not know if the participants would feel comfortable in dealing with this sort of topic for their stories. Obviously the Khmer culture is much different from America's, where discussions over condom use are not normally considered shocking. Even though it may make some listeners feel uncomfortable, Renee and I felt it was extremely important for journalists to air these types of stories. Where else would the public hear these facts if not for the media?

Touch's story dealt with the traditional doctors who claimed they could cure AIDS. A reporter from Battambang named Sophaylin also presented a story on condom use. Sok An wrote a pair of stories, one dealing with the transmission of HIV through blood transfusions and another about adverse reactions to AIDS drugs.

Renee and I were both pleased with the subject choices, even if the writing and technical aspects of the stories needed work. Also, some of the reporters had decided to put together a "feature" length presentation. A regular story for radio written in Khmer should be somewhere between 45-60 seconds. But some of our students decided to attempt longer stories that were two minutes or more in length. We had given the reporters that option and were very impressed with their initiative.

Finalizing the Code of Ethics

George and I met with the Code of Ethics crew (Pisey, Phan, Savry, and Kanhchana) to hopefully work out the final details of the document. I expected to run into the same problem we had encountered in Bowling Green and the previous week in Phnom Penh: the controversy over the provision stating, "A reporter will not criticize or humiliate the nation."

As I said earlier in this journal, this statement disturbed the trainers because it seemed to imply that reporters should not pursue stories that might call into question the wisdom of government

policy, certain officials, etc. One of the things we wanted to impress upon the Khmer journalists is that they should not be censored from producing stories that give voice to those who might criticize the status quo within Cambodia.

Phan, who worked at a station run by Cambodia's ruling party, had insisted in Bowling Green that the questionable provision be added to the Code. But to the surprise of George and myself, Pisey announced that the group had reached agreement on the matter. The group had decided to put the issue to a vote, with the majority ruling. All four journalists (even Phan!) decided the statement should be deleted from the Code.

I asked Phan afterwards about what led to his change of heart. He said he had been thinking about the issue since he returned to Cambodia from Bowling Green. While not going into much detail, Phan said he believed it was appropriate for reporters to air stories that may ultimately reflect poorly on those in power. This may not seem to be much of a revelation at first, but when you consider Phan's previous attitude in Bowling Green, it seemed like a big step forward.

Our Code of Ethics group finished making minor changes to the document, and it was given to Meng for translation. Once it is given final approval by George, it will be distributed to all radio stations in Cambodia who partner with the Internews program. These stations have all agreed to adopt the Code as official station policy.

Renee Shaw

Many of the journalists had already completed one if not two drafts of their stories, and many had incorporated the suggestions made by the trainers. Participants Phan, Savry and Sok An demonstrated substantial improvement in their final drafts. Their leads were concise, sources were credited, and the flow of their pieces improved and soundbites were shorter than before. They even wrote two or three stories with different angles and use of other soundbites. Many of the others seemed to struggle with eliminating their opinions or making statements based on opinion rather than fact; long, unwieldy leads; use of medical jargon, rather than common language; lack of details and information that could enhance the story without adding to its length. This was disappointing to see in those participants who were a part of the WKU training. The new journalists made common mistakes in writing stories for the first time but showed promise and drive to improve. For summaries of individual performances and critiques on participants, please refer to the grade sheets.

Tuesday, January 7th - National Holiday - Angkor Wat in Siem Reap

Kevin Willis

This was the Khmer National Independence holiday, so no training sessions were scheduled. It provided us the opportunity to fulfill one of my personal hopes for the trip: visiting world-famous Angkor Wat. Terry and Bart, the two managerial trainers, joined Renee and me on the trip. To make a long story short, it did not disappoint!



Angkor Wat is a stunning sight to see, even more incredible than photos lead you to believe. The steps you have to climb to reach the top of the main temple are steep, but we managed to survive. The architecture and wall carvings are beyond description! The temple and the hundreds of others around it is truly a national treasure for the people of Cambodia.

#####

Kevin Willis
Cambodia Follow-On Seminar
January 2 - 6, 2003

Accomplishments

- Gathered information on positive changes implemented by WKU program graduates (see page 2).
- Trained six new reporters, who had not attended WKU sessions.
- Finalized Code of Ethics document that will be distributed to partner stations in Cambodia and adopted as station policy (pages 3, 4).
- Exposed participants to four local HIV/AIDS experts, who provided over 15 hours worth of information to the reporters through lectures, question-and-answer sessions and interview opportunities
- Made site visits to AIDS Hospice and hospital in Phnom Penh, allowing participants to interview staff and patients and see first-hand the effects of the virus on the community.
- Creation of over twenty on-air stories dealing with HIV/AIDS issues.
- Visits to five stations (by Renee and I) for further training and observation of news operations.
- Travel to Poipet for news-gathering opportunity by Battambang 91.5 FM reporters.
- Elimination of unethical practices at 91.5 concerning use of newspaper articles for story sources (page 13).

Challenges ahead

- Covering the nationwide summer elections.
- Elimination of “envelope journalism” in Cambodia, where journalists receive bribes for covering stories.
- Bridging of gaps between government and journalists.
- Training of new, young reporters who have no previous experience in media or any formal journalism training.
- Building on existing training, seeing that reporters continue to develop new sources and story ideas.
- Making journalism an attractive career opportunity for young Cambodians.

#####

Renee Shaw
Cambodia Follow-On Seminar
January 2 - 6, 2003

The seminar training gave the trainees the fundamentals of the role of journalists; ethical considerations of HIV/AIDS reporting; and the taboos associated with reporting on HIV/AIDS. For many of the newer journalists who were not involved in the WKU training, each afternoon was dedicated to bringing them up to speed on using sound, interviewing, ensuring and maintaining balance in stories, attribution, envelop journalism and the fundamental news values. A review of those said topics was reviewed that same afternoon for journalists who took part in the training at Western Kentucky University.

During a session on "Lessons Learned," WKU participants reported on the improvements made in their reporting since being trained in Bowling Green. Progress was reported in several areas: using appropriate sound and soundbites, attribution, localizing national stories, and improving balance of sources and views. From the start of the training, heavy emphasis was placed on writing the story, brainstorming story ideas and angles, enveloping the lead and flushing out the story with pertinent facts and information. Several exercises throughout the course of the first week concentrated on the basic elements of news writing, and the challenges and ethical dilemmas journalists encounter in dealing with sensitive issues such as HIV/AIDS.

As the journalists were refreshed on the elements of news writing, health experts in the area of HIV/AIDS spent a few days disseminating important health information about the disease. Presentations on disease transmission, prevention, access and availability of life-prolonging medications, and the overall impact on communities in Cambodia were made by the health officials. Throughout those sessions, participants were constantly encouraged to brainstorm ideas and topics, consider possible leads and story angles, decipher what the story is, who to interview and what details would be necessary to complete a one-minute story. Group exercises were held to allow the journalists to work on that task. Site visits to an area hospital and hospice allowed the participants to get some "real experience" in understanding the sensitivity of reporting on HIV/AIDS. During those visits, reporters were allowed to interview hospital staff and make contacts for future stories. Sound from those interviews, along with the sound they gathered from the experts during the training, gave them several sources from which to choose and allowed them to write more than one story on the issue. Kevin and I worked with them (collectively and individually) on writing leads, shortening soundbites, providing background information without inundating the audience with multiple facts and statistics; attribution and omitting commentary from their stories. Often times these mistakes were recurring, and it seemed as if we were covering the same ground repeatedly without progress. That proved particularly frustrating when evidenced in the work of some of the journalists who were trained at WKU. Several drafts of their stories were revised or edited by the trainers, and an end-of-the-day lecture on lessons learned from the editing sessions was conducted to review common mistakes. Toward the end of the training week, I think our reinforcement of those issues began to make sense, and more importantly, they seemed to practice what we preached.

Overall, I think many benefited from the WKU training and follow-up. The most challenging issues pressing many of these journalists are confidence and motivation or drive. There appears to be great potential in all of them, but I think many of the journalists feel stifled by an oppressive political culture that would reprimand them for enterprising stories that cast a harsh light on the government or its response to matters affecting the people. I was also disappointed at the resistance to broadcast newscasts live by the stations with means to do so. I don't think they have yet to be convinced of the revenue-generating benefits of live broadcasting. I think that some of

the stations are bogged down in just filling air time that the idea of "freshening" stories for the immediate broadcast is not a common practice. Perhaps there are other constraints of which I'm not aware that make taped newscasts more convenient.

#####