

Student Safety Handout

As a regular part of your courses, you may be asked to work in parts of the city that may be unfamiliar to you and to cover incidents and events that may unexpectedly present dangerous situations. Instructors will never knowingly put students at undue risk, but conditions can become unsafe quickly. If you feel you have been asked or are required to cover an event or story that makes you uncomfortable about your safety, discuss the assignment with your instructor or with staff from the Office of Student Affairs.

If you find yourself in a situation in which you fear for your safety, get out. There will be other stories.

Police departments do not always recognize the right of journalists to cover stories. Lately, there have been increasing confrontations with officers who want to prevent reporting. If you are threatened by law enforcement, calmly and politely display your press pass and explain your presence. If you are ordered by law enforcement personnel to leave or move, do so.

If you are arrested or detained while covering a story, your first call should be to an attorney. We have a couple of options for you:

1. The National Lawyers Guild has lawyers (and law students supervised by experienced lawyers) available to represent (pro bono) people arrested or charged for participating in or covering demonstrations. The arrest/jail support hotline is (212) 679-6018. Most likely, once you are brought to the precinct and present identification, you will be released with a return date, rather than being held and arraigned. More information here: <https://www.nlg.org/massdefenseprogram/>
2. Clifford Chance, an international law firm with a large office in New York, has also volunteered to assist any student with a legal problem, without charge. Associate Carlisle Overbey, (212.878.8504, cell 704.299.3579, carlisle.overbey@cliffordchance.com) has agreed to take calls from students needing legal assistance.

After you speak to an attorney, you should, if you are able to, contact someone at the school: your instructor; Anthony LaViscount, director of Student Affairs (646-758-7853); John Mancini, Director of Editorial Projects (917-951-8577); or John Scully, director of Public Safety (201-906-4084).

Student Safety Protocols

Before you leave

- Make sure someone knows where you are going and what you are doing. Leave your cell phone number with someone who knows you are in the field.
- Be sure your cell phone is charged.
- Make sure you have some money on you, but don't carry too much.
- Always know where you are going. Just in case there is a problem with getting maps on your phone, print out a map of the area where you are going before you leave.
- Always travel with an adequate MetroCard balance.
- Think about what you are wearing and what you are carrying. Would these items stand out and make you a potential target for theft or assault? Carry only the equipment you need.
- Research neighborhoods in which you will be reporting so you have a sense of the community

In the field

- If you are in the field at night, take a buddy.
- Don't leave equipment or other valuables in view. It's an invitation for thieves.
- When walking around, stay alert to your surroundings. Don't walk around while you are talking on the phone or listening to music on headphones. Be conscious of who is around you.
- Avoid secluded locations. As much as possible, do your reporting and interviews in well-lit, public areas.
- Walk with a self-assured stride. Look confident and in control. Keep your head up and look around; make brief eye contact. Always project that you have a destination or a purpose.
- If you hear someone walking behind you, change direction & pace. Walk towards an open business, another group, or traffic. Avoid isolation and confrontation.

For tips on crime prevention and personal safety and safe subway riding, please review these links from the NYPD:
<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/services/law-enforcement/crime-prevention-and-safety-tips.page>

Additional Student Safety Tips

- Be particularly mindful when entering subway stations, on subway platforms, and when crossing streets.
- If biking, always wear a helmet and observe traffic rules and keep a safe distance from vehicle doors that may swing open.
- Always dial 911 in the event of any kind of emergency.
- Students should try to anticipate any safety issues in advance and should always feel comfortable discussing and troubleshooting safety concerns in advance with faculty members and other staff members at the school.
- These safety tips are not meant to anticipate every type of unsafe situation or safety concern that can arise, but to provide some useful guidance on a few measures to promote student safety while reporting. From the journalism school's standpoint, student safety is a paramount priority.

Student-Police Interactions

There is often a tension between the role of the journalist and the role of the police officer, which can lead to disputes. We do not expect students on assignment to engage in confrontations with law enforcement officers. Simply put, you do need to follow lawful orders of a police officer. And, in fact, you may need to follow unlawful orders of a police officer and challenge the order later to vindicate your rights. If you are planning to cover a news event that could provoke a confrontation with law enforcement, please keep in mind the following guidelines:

1. Bring credentials (and wear them!). Every student journalist covering the event should have something that clearly identifies him or her as a member of the press. A personalized credential from your local, county or state police department may be the best identification. If that isn't available or cannot be obtained in time for the event, an official credential document issued by the publication or school, identifying the journalist by name and photo as a member of the staff, may be the next best alternative. (In New York, students are not entitled to Police Department-issued press credentials, and law enforcement officers do not always recognize the CUNY-issued student press pass as valid identification.) Also carry a government ID, such as a driver's license, and a credit card or cash (in case you need to post bond). Keep in mind that a press ID may still be ignored.
2. Identify an emergency contact in advance. Memorize or write their number with a Sharpie on your arm. Work out a plan in advance of what they will do in the event you are arrested or injured. Call and text them the moment that it appears things are escalating, because it may be hours before you can get access to a phone if you're jailed (and this provides a written record – with timestamp – of what is happening). Use Twitter and other publicly accessible channels to get the word out widely so people will know where to look for you.
3. Write the number of a lawyer with a Sharpie on your arm so if you lose your phone or it is confiscated then you still have the number.
4. Recognize that demographic characteristics, including race, gender, sex, etc., as well as how you are dressed, may affect how you are treated by members of the police. We wish this were not so, but it plainly is.
5. In NYC, know which NYPD precinct is located where you are reporting. Locate your local precinct by entering your location in the address box or zoom in to location:
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/bureaus/patrol/find-your-precinct.page>
6. Obey all police orders. If ordered by police to leave an area or disperse, move outside the crowd and find a place to observe and cover as close as possible. If possible, identify yourself as a journalist to the officer in charge and ask for guidance as to where you can continue your job without interfering with theirs. If you believe police are acting unlawfully or unreasonably in orders given to you, do your best to document the names and titles of those involved as well as the names and contact information of other witnesses. If possible, take photos or video of the police misconduct and, as soon as possible, write down what happened. It is generally not a wise idea to disobey a police order on the scene, but you can ask them to reconsider if you make clear that you do not want to interfere with their

efforts and will ultimately obey an order given. However, as soon as is practicable, contact an attorney for guidance on how to file a formal complaint.

7. Students who are not US citizens, whether documented or undocumented, need to be mindful of the collateral immigration consequences of being arrested.
8. If arrested or detained, act immediately.
 - a. Inform the police officers in question that you are a journalist there to cover the events and show them your press credentials. If they disregard your status, encourage them to contact their superior officer before they take any action against a member of the press.
 - b. If police insist on arresting or detaining you, let them know that you wish to contact a lawyer (see above) and do so immediately. Do not agree to plead guilty to any charge without first talking to legal counsel or fully understanding what you are doing. If you believe you are not guilty, you preserve all of your legal rights only by pleading “not guilty.”
 - c. Under the 4th amendment you do not have to show images or recordings if asked to do so by police. They cannot seize your camera unless they believe that you have captured a crime. Police cannot view content without a warrant. They cannot delete images or files. Password protect your phone and do not use facial recognition, as the police cannot force you to tell them your password.
9. Bear witness. If you or a colleague are being arrested by police or otherwise prevented from doing your job as a journalist, ask that those around you record the event and send their material to your professor as soon as possible

Additional resources

1. RCFP Police, Protesters, And The Press:
https://www.rcfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Police_Protesters_and_the_Press_2018.pdf
2. Poynter’s 23 guidelines for journalists to safely cover protests:
<https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2020/23-guidelines-for-journalists-to-safely-cover-protests-this-weekend/?fbclid=IwAR1rXa-zg5COlezJwsfWBvcku4Nz3E97WUVSzcZ9j28KoLtMzRrtSOkSxz0>
3. Student Press Law Center’s Eighteen tips for staying safe while covering protests:
<https://splc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Covering-Protest-Tips-1.pdf>

Adapted from: <https://jschoollegal.wordpress.com/student-safety/>