

Op-Ed Writing Workshop

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Co-leader, Michigan Chapter of Scholars
Strategy Network



What is Scholars Strategy Network?

- An organization of university-based scholars committed to using research to improve policy and strength democracy
- <https://scholars.org/>



Agenda for today

- 1:30 to 2:00 pm – Writing & Publishing Op-Eds- researcher perspective
 - Sarah Reckhow
- 2:00 to 2:30 pm – Writing and Publishing Op-Eds- editor perspective
 - Ron French, Bridge Michigan
- 2:30 to 3:00 pm – Conversation/Q&A- what ideas do you have for an Op-Ed?

Guidelines from Scholars Strategy Network

- What to include in a pitch
 - **Why this topic?**
 - **Why now? What is timely?**
 - **Why me? Why are you an authority?**

Dear Editor Name,

Next week, the North Carolina legislature is debating a bill that will change the way citizens can register to vote. Please take a look at the OpEd copied below about how this change is long overdue and will lead to an increase in youth voter turnout in the next election. I have been studying election reforms like this for the last five years as a Professor of Political Science at North Carolina State University.

[Include if especially time sensitive] Given the timeliness of the debate, if I don't hear from you by Thursday, I will assume you are unable to publish and may send it elsewhere.

Thank you,

First Last (123) 444-5555

[Paste a copy of the OpEd here.]

My Experience

- Lowe, Kate, Sarah Reckhow, and Juliet Gainsborough. 2021. “How Biden’s infrastructure package might leave behind poor and minority communities yet again.” **The Washington Post. Monkey Cage.**
- Lowe, Kate, Sarah Reckhow, and Andrew Benjamin. 2021. “Pete Buttigieg may not know this yet: Rail transportation funding is a racial equity issue.” **The Washington Post. Monkey Cage.**
- Reckhow, Sarah. 2020. “Reforms we voted for two years ago prepared us for pandemic voting.” **Lansing State Journal.** October 28.
- Reckhow, Sarah and Craig Thiel. 2020. “Whitmer, don’t turn your back on struggling schools.” **The Detroit News.** March 4.
- Henig, Jacobsen, Reckhow. 2019. “Why have Education Politics Gone National?” **EdWeek.**
- Reckhow, Sarah, Rebecca Jacobsen, and Jeffrey Henig. 2019. “Why are teachers protesting in ‘blue’ cities?” **The Washington Post. Monkey Cage.** March 8.
- Reckhow, Sarah, Davia Downey, and Josh Sapotichne. 2018. “Detroit and Flint Keep Relying on Private Money to Solve Public Problems: Why?” **The Washington Post. Monkey Cage.** November 27.
- Thiel, Craig and Sarah Reckhow. 2017. “Special Education Funding Falls More Heavily on Urban School Districts.” **Bridge.** December 21.
- Reckhow, Sarah. 2016. “Learn from the Costly Mistakes of Failed EAA.” **Detroit Free Press.**

Why publish in media/news sources?

- Provide research insights and information that is relevant for a current news issue or current policy debate
- Draw public and policymaker attention to your research in ways that show how it speaks to current issues
- It's fun, engaging, and a good way to break bad habits of scholarly writing
- You have more control over the message and presentation of your work compared to being quoted for an article

Dos and Don'ts of Media/Op-Ed Writing

- Do make sure you can make direct connection to a current news issue or policy debate
- Do have a clear argument/takeaway
- Do revise revise revise
- Do provide clear and direct explanation of research findings
- Do reference relevant research by other scholars/practitioners
- Don't reference academic theories
- Don't use academic jargon
- Don't write long sentences
- Don't use an Op-Ed to get attention for a new publication if there's no hook to current issues

Timing Matters- Follow the News Cycle

You'll be much more successful placing a piece with a current news/events tie-in

- You can draw on older research– if the research speaks directly to current issues
- You can write something based on unpublished research or a working paper- if the research speaks directly to current issues
 - **Acknowledging the issues with making public claims based on work that is not yet peer-reviewed

In most U.S. public schools, it's no big deal when students sip water from a drinking fountain — but it is in Detroit and Flint, Mich. [Detroit's](#) 2018-2019 school year began with the school system's water shut off because of elevated levels of toxic lead. In [Flint](#), school officials have kept the tap water off since the 2014 lead-in-water crisis; this year, they sought funding for drinking water stations for the 2018-2019 school year.

Americans often look to philanthropy or charities, such as the Red Cross, after natural disasters. That's happened in both Flint and Detroit — even though their crises were [unnatural disasters](#), caused by public policy decisions.

Placing Your Writing – How To

- The Washington Post- Monkey Cage
 - Research informed analysis on current news issues
 - Not opinion; focused on politics
 - Open submission process with extensive editing support
- Michigan media sources
 - Keep Michigan audience in mind- what is relevant in our state?
 - Media/Communications specialists at the university can help with placement-
 - Caroline Brooks (MSU)
 - Opinion pieces can be fine
- Collaborating with practitioner co-author
 - Think tanks and advocacy groups have staff focused on PR/comms- can help with placement

MONKEY CAGE

How Biden's infrastructure package might leave behind poor and minority communities yet again

If the administration wants the plan to help disadvantaged neighborhoods, here's what to keep in mind

Analysis by Kate Lowe, Sarah Reckhow and Juliet Gainsborough
December 7, 2021 at 7:00 a.m. EST

COMMENTARY | Opinion *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

Learn from the costly mistakes of failed EAA

Sarah Reckhow

Published 11:20 p.m. ET March 19, 2016

Special education funding falls more heavily on urban school districts

December 21, 2017 | [Craig Thiel](#), [Sarah Reckhow](#) in [Guest Commentary](#)

While the state requires special education services for eligible students, it only funds a portion of the overall costs.

Publishing in The Monkey Cage

- Advantages- national audience, set-up to highlight research and provide editing support
- Editors are political scientists
- Send a pitch: monkeycageblog@gmail.com
 - 1 to 2 paragraphs
 - which news or current issue your piece will illuminate
 - which research findings you will bring to bear on this topic
 - how your post will change public or policymakers' perceptions on this topic
 - <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/06/10/about-monkey-cage/>
 - <https://www.dropbox.com/s/ofe79coead4r8es/Monkey%20Cage%20Contributor%20Guidelines.pdf?dl=0>
 - <https://www.dropbox.com/s/zwv5owj64p3d4y7/Ethics%20code.pdf?dl=0>

MONKEY CAGE

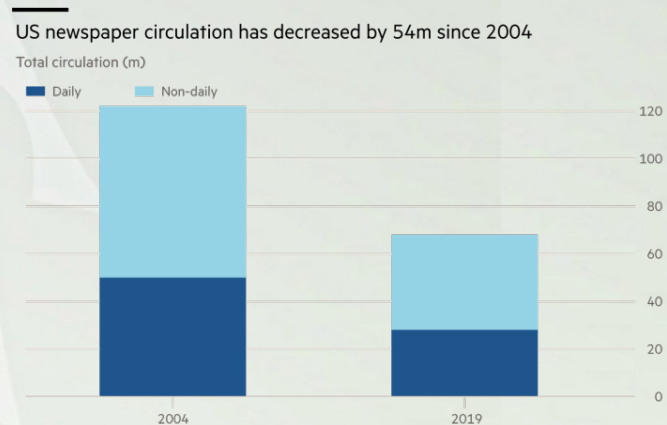
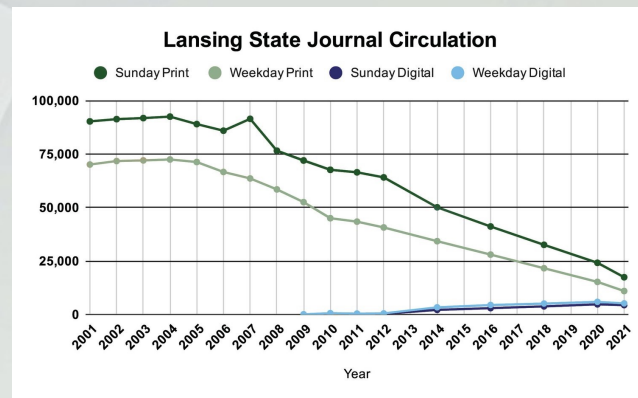
Pete Buttigieg may not know this yet: Rail transportation funding is a racial equity issue.

Transit projects serving Black and low-income communities get canceled. Projects serving White communities go forward. The reason isn't obvious.

Analysis by Kate Lowe, Sarah Reckhow and Andrea Benjamin
February 1, 2021

Publishing in Michigan-based media sources

- Advantages- connections with university communications; reach state-level audience; opinion perspectives allowable
- Audience matters- what is the Michigan connection?
- *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News*- Metro Detroit focused and statewide audience; Print and online access
- *Lansing State Journal*- Lansing focused, some state policymaker; Print and online
- *Bridge Michigan*- Statewide and online only; nonpartisan and nonprofit; Publication of the Center for Michigan



Ron French

Ron French is associate editor of Bridge Michigan, where one of his many duties is coordinating guest commentary. French is a graduate of Purdue University and has worked as a journalist for 40 years in Indiana and Michigan. French won more than 40 state and national awards at The Detroit News before leaving in 2011 to help launch Bridge Michigan, a nonpartisan, nonprofit online publication focusing on news and analysis about Michigan and its citizens. Bridge is free, published daily, and has about 600,000 readers a month. French was a Knight-Wallace Fellow at the University of Michigan in 2002, won a regional Emmy for documentary filmmaking in 2018, and is the author of the book, “Driven Abroad: The Outsourcing of America.” When not writing or editing, he splits his time between mowing the lawn at his home in Okemos and mowing the lawn at his cabin on Paradise Lake in Emmet County.

