Five questions for Elizabeth Skewes[1]

Elizabeth A. Skewes said she has always danced between the worlds of politics and journalism, but when she found out that teaching was so much fun, she joined the academy.

“I was a newspaper reporter and magazine editor for the first part of my career and did some adjunct teaching along with that. I just loved teaching. I liked my part-time gig better than my full-time one and that’s what sent me back to grad school,” said Skewes, associate professor of journalism and media studies at the College of Media, Communication and Information at the University of Colorado Boulder.

She has an undergraduate degree in political science from UCLA, a master’s degree in journalism from Ohio State and a Ph.D. in mass communications from Syracuse University. Her research includes media coverage of United States presidential politics, including the 2008, 2012 and 2016 presidential campaigns. She also is studying the way media cover mass tragedies and victims, and how that coverage has changed since the mid-1960s.

1. One area of interest for you is presidential politics, including projects related to the past three elections. Did the 2016 campaign complicate or strengthen your research?

As a reporter early in my career, I covered politics, mostly at the state and local level. At Syracuse, I decided to do my dissertation on media coverage of presidential politics, so that’s where this got its start. During the 2000 election, while working on my dissertation, I took out a student loan and got some small grants so that I could cover the campaigns. I traveled with Al Gore’s campaign for about a week and with Dick Cheney’s. Because of my journalistic background, I received credentials through the local paper in Syracuse to travel on the press planes. I was writing for the paper about the campaigns and doing campaign research, too. I interviewed reporters and campaign press secretaries to get a better understanding of the relationship that existed between the campaigns and the press that covered them. Later I traveled with John Kerry and spent time with Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John McCain and Mitt Romney, again to gauge how journalists do their job and get at what we can do to try to improve campaign coverage.

One of my current interests is the second-tier candidates in the presidential race. In 2016, we saw a lot of Donald Trump and Clinton and Bernie Sanders. But on the Republican side, you had wavering coverage around the other candidates. There were 17 candidates on the Republican side that made it to the debate stage, but even more that did not. The problem is, if candidates don’t get media coverage, voters don’t recognize them as being an option, and so the media have a powerful way of determining who becomes a nominee.

If Trump had not been so colorful, and had the media not given him so much space, then some of the other candidates might have risen to the surface as real potential nominees. When there’s only one person the media puts in front of your face every day, you start to think that’s who we are going with. I think we could have more choices if the media would cover the breadth of candidates rather than narrowing in on just one or two so early in the nomination process.

2. You wrote a book titled “Message Control: How News Is Made on the Presidential Campaign Trail.” Did the 2016 campaign support your book/research or did it turn it on its head?

You’ve seen some significant changes in communication as a result of the 2016 campaign, and it will be several years before we can unpack it all. Some of the things that I wrote about in “Message Control” still hold. I still think that you see a battle between the news media – particularly the legacy news media – and the candidates to determine what is going to be the story of the day. Reporters don’t want to be manipulated by candidates, but the candidates, whose images are at stake, want to use the media to send a particular message to the public.

What was upended, primarily through Trump’s candidacy, is that a candidate can go straight to the public with a smart phone and Twitter feed. The media likes to cover what’s new and different and Trump was new and different; his use of Twitter was new and different. Early on, much of what he did was covered noncritically. Over time, the media began to realize that by focusing on his tweets and not digging into other issues with him, they were missing a key part of the story that was his candidacy.

Trump connected with his base through Twitter. It's the kind of messaging that candidates have been looking for. Voters who go to a candidate's website are dyed-in-the-wool supporters. In a mobile media world, if you can get to people on cellphones or use Twitter to blast whatever you want to say, that's pretty powerful.

Obama used Twitter, too, to make people feel special. That direct-to-voter strategy is powerful and that's the kind of thing that the 2016 campaign turned sideways, if you will. The mechanism and message shifted and Trump managed to dominate the conversation. I think mainstream media are still an important source of information for voters in an election, and I don't think we've yet seen the role of the media diminished to where it doesn't matter. We do, however, see an administration that continues a dismissal of the press. It will be interesting over the next few years and into the 2020 election cycle to see how journalism responds and re-establishes itself as a reliable source of information.

3. Fake news abounds; facts are no longer facts. What advice do you have for current and future journalists and how has this affected the way you teach your media/journalism classes?

It's interesting because I'm struggling a little bit with that in my classes. I've been trying to teach for a couple years the idea that there are many outlets that come from one side or the other of the political spectrum, not from a traditional news sense of having balance or fairness.

Traditional journalism needs to stake out territory for itself and own that space. The public is interested in news from a variety of sources, but traditional news needs to relay the idea that you turn to them for information that has a reduced bias and that includes multiple voices rather than just one perspective. President Obama talked about that during his closing comments to the press corps, and there is a role for traditional journalism values to try to be neutral.

It's true that it is nice to read something with a point of view, especially if it matches what you believe. You avoid cognitive dissonance. But what journalism needs to do is stake out that area where what it will give the public is something more all-encompassing with the assurance that it will try to get the facts right. I would argue that journalism needs to do that even if it takes more time to do it. The social media world gets you information fast; but there are few places where you get good information. Traditional media needs to make the case that even if it takes 12 hours to get the complete story, the public should come back to them.

In the past, journalism focused on highlighting what a person said and what the opposition said, but then leaving the issue for the public to figure out. That doesn't work in a contemporary society. I think that if someone lies, it's important for the media to call them out. For instance, Trump said that 3 million to 5 million fraudulent votes were cast in the election. The Washington Post explained why this was a lie through multiple sources who helped readers walk through the facts. This is no longer a difference of opinions; sources don't support what Trump says and The Washington Post basically said that he needs to stop claiming there were fraudulent votes. I think there's a role for this in contemporary journalism when there is evidence. Journalism should not mince words. This president has a history of lying and it is part of a journalist's job to hold people in positions of power accountable. Journalists need to call them out when they lie, steal, cheat or misrepresent.

It is also going to be important for journalism to keep focused on the long game. Sometimes I think there's a tendency to cover the "tweet of the day" and that takes important journalism resources away from the longer-haul game.

4. Besides examining the media and second-tier candidates, what are your other areas of interest?

I do some volunteer work as a victim's advocate for the Longmont Police Department, and perhaps in part because of that, I started working on how victims of crime, particularly victims of mass shootings, are covered in the media. What does the media owe victims in terms of care and respect, and what does it owe the public in terms of information, and how is that balanced?

One of the research papers that I'm working on with a doctoral student, Chelsea Daggett, includes a look back at a shooting in 1966 in Austin at the University of Texas campus. Most of the victims were treated as a name and a condition; you didn't hear their stories. The coverage largely focused on the shooter and what he did and what was wrong with him. We also look at other mass shootings, including the Aurora theater shooting. What we've found is

that, over time, we have become more victim-focused because the criticism was that the media had ignored the lives of victims. Now the media has gone full circle. After the Aurora shooting, for instance, news organizations – 9 News was one – said they wouldn't use the shooter's name because they wanted to respect victims. But by not talking about James Holmes, we don't get the stories of what went wrong. If we don't talk about the shooters, then the public policy decisions about what we need to do about mental health care or background checks don't rise to the surface.

Citizens need the information to be able to participate in policy decisions. I get the sense that we have tilted too far and may be missing important stories. What we'll try to figure out in our research is why media organizations are doing this and how they can balance the need to be respectful of victims against the information needs of citizens.

In other research, I'm looking at Trump and his tweets and whether that serves as a distraction from other issues and what that might mean for coverage of him going forward. Another paper I'm working on looks at how mass tragedies are politicized in the context of a presidential campaign. I'm also doing a little bit of research with a colleague on how presidents and other leaders are portrayed in popular culture, specifically the presidential portrayal on television shows like "The West Wing," "Scandal," "Madam Secretary" and others.

5. What is one of your favorite memories from your time as a reporter/editor?

At Dickinson College, I was the editor of the alumni magazine and got to go to Haiti in 1994. It turns out that the person in charge of United States military operations in Haiti when Jean-Bertrand Aristide was reinstated as president was a Dickinson graduate.

The day after U.S. troops went in, I was on a plane with the assistant alumni director of the college, who also was a great photographer. We didn't have a place to stay but we wanted to do a story on Maj. Gen. David Meade. I had tried to set up interviews ahead of time, but got nowhere. We went to the joint information bureau, which is where all the media went, and I told them who I was and what I wanted.

I was so insignificant compared to all the heavy hitter news organization there – CNN and the L.A. Times and others – that I thought we wouldn't get far. We left and thought we'd wait a few days to try again. We caught a ride with a local cab and went out to headquarters. I told them I was with the Dickinson magazine and that I wanted to see Maj. Gen. Meade. It turned out that the major in charge of the public information office at headquarters recognized Dickinson College, and 10 minutes later, we were invited in.

We spent the next 10 days shadowing Maj. Gen. Meade for the magazine. We got to go on a PSYOP (psychological operation) mission on a Black Hawk helicopter and also went on patrol with some of the units. It was amazing. Toward the end of our trip, Meade invited us into a security briefing with the head of the Haitian police force. We got to walk right in, past all the major news organizations that were left outside of the room. It was a good moment for us and our small magazine.

Flash Forward events, online challenge bring finances into focus[2]
[3]

Whether you're 25 or 65, making smart decisions about your money and debt now will benefit your entire future.

If you're ready to get a clearer picture of your financial future and learn how to shape it, sign up for **Flash Forward: a CU Financial Event**, held on each University of Colorado campus between Feb. 27 and March 10.

There are three tracks – Participate, Plan and Prepare. Each one covers different topics relevant to your life and career.

"Throughout my career at the University of Colorado, I have had the privilege of seeing many employees transition into retirement. My hope is that all employees have a solid plan in place so they can be excited and prepared for

retirement," said Michelle Martinez, director of benefits administration in Employee Services. "You all work hard, so take some time out of your busy day and do this for yourself."

Take a look at each category below to find out which group applies to you, then visit the Employee Services website[4] to register.
PARTICIPATE
Did you just start your career? Get a late start saving? These presentations will give you tips on maximizing your money, managing your debt and getting on solid financial ground.

Talks include:

Student Loans and Public Service Loan Forgiveness: Did you know that as a CU employee, you may be eligible for Public Service Loan Forgiveness? Be sure to stop by and discover information about the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, your student loan repayment and forgiveness options, and ways to deal with defaulted loans.

Max Out Your Credit (Knowledge): Credit affects many aspects of our lives including our ability to buy a car or even get a job. This presentation will help you ensure your credit report reflects the real you. Take steps to better understand credit fundamentals such as ways to improve your credit, information that affects your credit report, and implications of your credit score.

PERA Fundamentals: For PERA enrollees, this session presents a variety of topics that will help you get the most out of your money and PERA account. Learn about choices upon terminating PERA-covered employment, ways to access 401(k) and 457 voluntary tax-deferred savings plans, and the availability of post-retirement health insurance plans.

Find the full presentation schedule and register here[5].
PLAN
If you're more established in your career, it's time to start planning for retirement and thinking about conditions that affect your long-term goals. Take this opportunity to make sure you're on track with your savings plan, budgeting strategy and credit knowledge.

Talks include:

Halfway There: A Retirement Checkup: Adjust your retirement plan and maximize savings with this personal evaluation. This financial checkup will assist you in evaluating your current savings, managing competing priorities and formulating a plan to reach your financial goals.

Wills and Trusts 101: Uncommon Solutions to Common Problems: You don't have to be a millionaire to create a plan for your estate. Preparation can help you distribute your assets according to your wishes and the needs of your loved ones. Let us help walk you through trusts, the probate process, fees and more.

Other talks include:
PERA Fundamentals Max Out Your Credit (Knowledge)
Find the full presentation schedule here[6].
PREPARE
If you're preparing to retire, or maybe not quite ready, this track was designed to help faculty and staff within five years of retirement arrange the transition. Topics range from PERA and your 401(a) to income options after retirement.

Talks include:

CU's Process for Retiring: 401(a) Participants: Are you a CU 401(a) participant? Stop by to learn about your university retiree benefit options, the process behind becoming a university retiree, eligibility requirements for retirement and more.

Paying Yourself: Income Options in Retirement: You've finally saved enough and you're ready to retire, what are your income options now? This discussion will provide you with all the information you need including when to tap into

different assets and flexible income choices offered by TIAA.

Social Security: Social Security is a large part of retiring and often leaves people confused. This interactive lecture will give you the clarity you seek by addressing questions about Social Security retirement benefits, Medicare, working while retired and pre-retirement planning.

CU's Process for Retiring: PERA Participants: Are you a PERA participant? This presentation will help you learn about your university retiree benefit options, the process of retiring with CU, and your benefit options.

Preparing for Retirement from PERA: Planning to retire in the next five years? This insightful PERA session will give you the valuable information you need to plan accordingly to meet your retirement goals. We'll discuss the availability of PERA-sponsored post-retirement life and health insurance, your monthly and lump-sum benefit options, and annual increases.

Other talks include: **Wills and Trusts 101: Uncommon Solutions to Common Problems**

Find the full schedule and register here[4].
TAKE THE FINANCIAL CHALLENGE
Don't forget to take our Financial Challenge and test your financial know-how. Running from Feb. 10 to March 10, five challenges aim to boost your knowledge. For each one completed, you'll be entered for a chance to win one of eight $50 prizes. You'll even earn one entry by attending a Flash Forward talk.

Join us at a campus near you:
UCCS, Monday, Feb. 27 **CU Denver,** Wednesday, March 1 **CU Boulder,** Monday, March 6 **CU System,** Tuesday, March 7 **CU Anschutz,** Friday, March 10
Visit the website to sign up and see the full schedule[7]. You can even sign up the day of the event, so bring along your spouse or a coworker.

Tax forms are in the mail, on the portal[8]

It's tax season again and that means tax forms – including the W-2, 1095-C and 1042-S – are being mailed or made available online in the CU Resources area of the employee portal[9].

W-2: The W-2, a federal tax form stating how much you were paid in a year, was mailed in January. If you didn't receive yours, you can view and download it in the portal[9]. For instructions on reading the form and viewing it online, please click here[10].

1095-C: The 1095-C, which reports whether CU offered you health coverage that met Affordable Care Act standards, will be mailed by March 2. It will be available in the portal shortly thereafter. This form is not necessary when filing your taxes, but you should save it with your tax return. Find more information about the form here[11].

1042-S: If you're an international CU employee whose wage is eligible for a tax treaty, you will receive your Form 1042-S[12] (Foreign Person's U.S. Source Income Subject to Withholding) by Feb. 15. If you have not received it by this date, complete a Reissue Request Form[13] and submit it to Employee Services.

If you have questions, please contact Employee Services at 303-860-4200, option 2, or email employee.services@cu.edu[14].

Call for submissions: Chase Faculty Community Service Award, humanities grants[15]

The CU Office of Academic Affairs solicits submissions for the Chase Faculty Community Service Award and President's Fund for The Humanities mini-grants.

Please direct inquiries to AcademicAffairs@cu.edu[16].

CHASE FACULTY COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

The Chase Faculty Community Service Award is made possible by an endowment from the Chase Corporation through the CU Foundation. The endowment provides **$10,000** to a full-time CU faculty member who has provided exceptional educational, humanitarian, civic or other service in the community.

Eligible: Full-time faculty members with the rank of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, senior instructor or instructor. **Deadline:** 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 7

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CHASE FACULTY COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD[17]

PRESIDENT'S FUND FOR THE HUMANITIES (MINI-GRANTS)

The President's Fund for the Humanities was established to promote and enhance the humanities on and across campuses and in the wider community, and to preserve a balance in the university's programs of education and research by giving special attention to the humanities. Projects selected for funding in the spring are restricted to a maximum award of **$2,000**.

Eligible: Projects must be authored by a full-time faculty member with the rank of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, senior instructor or instructor. **Deadline:** 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 7

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PRESIDENT'S FUND FOR THE HUMANITIES[18]

Can't get to sleep? A wilderness weekend can help[19]

Chancellor search committee named[20]

UCCS to name newest building in honor of El Pomar Foundation chairman[21]

New cohort will cultivate Latino/a leadership in education[22]

Study: To keep pounds off, consider walking the dog[23]

Williams – library dean, 'Voice of commencement' – to retire in June[24]

Carpenter named a National Academy of Inventors Fellow[25]

John Carpenter, faculty member of the CU Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at the Anschutz Medical Campus, recently was awarded the rank of National Academy of Inventors (NAI) Fellow.

Carpenter was selected because he has “demonstrated a highly prolific spirit of innovation in creating or facilitating outstanding inventions that have made a tangible impact on quality of life, economic development and the welfare of society.”

He will be inducted April 6.

In addition to this honor, Carpenter recently was notified that he will be recognized by APhA as one of the “Giants in the Pharmaceutical Sciences: and will be honored, together with CU Boulder professor Theodore W. Randolph, with a dedicated issue of JPHARMSCI (Jan. 2020).

Tripp publishes field guide[26]
[27]

The University Press of Colorado recently published “Field Guide to the Lichens of White Rocks” by Erin A. Tripp, an assistant professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and curator of botany at the Museum of Natural History at the University of Colorado Boulder.

The book examines the lichens that occur at an outcropping of Fox Hills sandstone known as White Rocks Nature Preserve in Boulder County. The illustrated field guide is one of the only complete lichen inventories of a sandstone formation in North America and covers all constituents including the crustose microlichen biota, traditionally excluded from other inventories, according to the University of Colorado Press.

Tripp recently found never-before-seen lichens at White Rocks Open Space. She is the recipient of the 2011 George R. Cooley Award from the Botanical Society of America.

In memoriam: Jesse Gatlin[28]

36 join campus[29]

Links
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https://www.cu.edu/employee-services/flash-forward-retirement-event[8] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/tax-forms-are-mail-portal[9] https://my.cu.edu/[10] https://www.cu.edu/employee-services/w-2-information[11] http://www.cu.edu/employee-services/1095-c-aca-tax-document[12] https://www.cu.edu/employee-services/international-employees/1042-s-form[13] http://www.cu.edu/employee-services/policies/w-21042-s-reissue-request-form[14] mailto:employee.services@cu.edu[15] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/call-submissions-chase-faculty-community-service-award-humanities-grants[16] mailto:AcademicAffairs@cu.edu[17] http://www.cu.edu/office-academic-affairs/awards-grants/chase-faculty-community-service-award[18] http://www.cu.edu/office-academic-affairs/presidents-fund-humanities[19] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cant-get-sleep-wilderness-weekend-can-help[20] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/chancellor-search-committee-named[21] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/uccs-name-newest-building-honor-el-pomar-foundation-chairman[22] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/new-cohort-will-cultivate-latinoa-leadership-education[23] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/study-keep-pounds-consider-walking-dog[24] https://connections.cu.edu/people/williams-library-dean-voice-commencement-retire-june[25] https://connections.cu.edu/people/carpenter-named-national-academy-inventors-fellow[26] https://connections.cu.edu/people/tripp-publishes-field-guide[27] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/5q-tripp_top.jpg[28] https://connections.cu.edu/people/memoriam-jesse-gatlin[29] https://connections.cu.edu/people/36-join-campus