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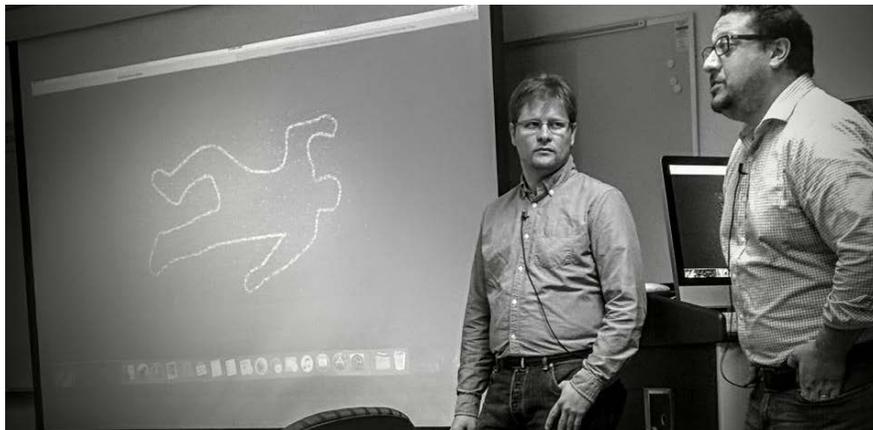
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Times Talk: Finding the 'body' using data and investigative journalism

St. Petersburg, Fla. (Oct. 5, 2015) Tampa Bay Times investigative journalist, [Michael LaForgia](#) and data and digital director, [Adam Playford](#) shared some tips about finding stories, collecting useful

data, and the importance of patience in regards to investigative journalism with Neighborhood News Bureau students Wednesday, Sept. 30.

“Find a body and discover why it’s there,” said LaForgia.

LaForgia and Playford admit that investigative journalism isn’t easy. It takes time, focus, and organization for the story to come together. While discussing [Failure Factories](#), their current investigative project dealing with systemic deficiencies at some Pinellas County schools, LaForgia mentions finding and poring over records can be the most time-consuming element, but is also the most important. Getting the documents can also become expensive.



Tampa Bay Times Award Winning Journalists Adam Playford and Michael LaForgia. Photo by Eric Vaughan.

“We requested millions of records for this story. We have spent \$8-\$9,000 in records requests and will probably spend more,” said LaForgia.

When it came to gathering personal stories of affected students for the Failure Factories project, LaForgia and Playford admitted getting parental buy-in was tough. Parents weren’t as forthcoming as they had hoped, especially given the controversial topic of the schools their children attended being labeled as “failure factories.”

So how did they get the families to go on the record?

“We just kept showing up,” said LaForgia. “We appealed to their sense of justice and righteousness.”

Eventually their patience and persistence paid off as they were able to gather compelling stories from multiple families.

Investigative journalists must remain patient and thorough

throughout working on any assignment. Understanding that some details require a bit of persistence and endurance is key to gathering important data, and eventually having a successful story to tell. There are a lot of stories that still need to be told, LaForgia said.

“All you have to do is think about what might exist in the world,” LaForgia said. “Everybody has to live someplace, everybody makes and spends money.”

View the [entire discussion here](#).



LaForgia and Playford discuss the importance of data collecting to NNB students

About Neighborhood News Bureau

Neighborhood News Bureau is a working newsroom, staffed by University of South Florida St. Petersburg undergraduate and graduate students under the guidance of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies faculty members. The newsroom opened in Midtown, St. Petersburg March 2006. Its mission is to serve the Midtown and surrounding communities of St. Petersburg. For more information, visit <http://www.nnbnews.com/> or email nnb@usfsp.edu.

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Video: Lara Cerri, Tampa Bay Times
Photojournalist
