

Script for April 19 Investigative Journalism Panel

Date: Wednesday, April 19, at 2 p.m.

Location: Hamilton Hall 122A (Martini Room)

Live-Stream Link:

<https://wpunj.zoom.us/j/96068366841?pwd=anAwZU04a0J0TWQvaVRSSkptNmlyUT09>

Live-Stream Meeting ID: 960 6836 6841

Live-Stream Passcode: 458566

Event Description:

Dr. Nicholas Hirshon, a journalism professor at William Paterson University and associate editor of the academic journal *American Journalism*, will moderate a panel on investigative journalism featuring *Inside Edition* chief investigative correspondent Lisa Guerrero, Katie Strang of *The Athletic*, Isaac Avilucea of *Axios*, and Thomas Zambito of *USA Today*. The panelists contributed to a special issue of *American Journalism* that Dr. Hirshon edited last fall on the history of investigative journalism. (As the special issue is behind a paywall, here is a [folder](#) that includes every article from that issue, including [Dr. Hirshon's Editor's Note](#).) The event will end with a raffle of Guerrero's new memoir, *Warrior*. The discussion is the keynote event in William Paterson University's annual Explorations symposium. It is a collaboration between the American Journalism Historians Association and the William Paterson Society of Professional Journalists.

Roles:

- Organizer/Moderator: Nick Hirshon, HIRSHONN@wpunj.edu, 646-288-6803
- Zoom live-stream: Rod Holliday, HOLLIDAYR1@wpunj.edu, 973-720-2959
- Social media: Rayah Hammad, hammadr1@student.wpunj.edu, 862-571-8810
- Remote speaker: Pamela E. Walck, walckp@duq.edu, 610-781-7104
- Book Raffle Coordination: Anthony Mayo, mayoa6@wpunj.edu, 973-720-3263
- Book Raffle: Rochelle Estrada, estradar4@student.wpunj.edu, 973-653-0756

Program:

We will start at 2:10 p.m. in order to give in-person students and remote guests sufficient time to get settled and avoid distractions during the program.

The Zoom chat will be disabled since we cannot monitor it during the event; instead, we will ask the in-person and remote audiences to tweet questions for the panelists using hashtag #WPSPJ. Please tweet questions, and tell your students and colleagues to do so as well!

2:10-2:20 - Joshua Powers, Provost

Provost Powers will welcome guests, speak on the importance of investigative journalism, acknowledge the fortieth anniversary of American Journalism, and introduce Dr. Hirshon.

SCRIPT WRITING STILL IN PROGRESS

Thank you, Provost Powers, and welcome everyone for this special panel on investigative journalism. I am grateful for the opportunity to moderate this important discussion at a time when investigative journalism is confronting new challenges – shrinking newsroom budgets, tens of thousands of newspaper jobs disappearing in recent decades.

Our virtual audience today includes many of my colleagues in the American Journalism Historians Association. Thanks to all of you for joining virtually, and I look forward to seeing you in person this fall at the AJHA conference in Columbus.

I also want to recognize the students in the Society of Professional Journalists chapter that I advise here at William Paterson. I'd like to provide some context here for our guests watching virtually: William Paterson is a state school in New Jersey, a federally recognized majority-minority and Hispanic-serving institution where almost 60 percent of students identify as persons of color. Many of them face extraordinary financial challenges. They juggle school with jobs. Many of them are the first in their families to go to college. And yet, they do remarkable work. Since we started our SPJ chapter here in 2017, we have been recognized as a national SPJ campus chapter of the year. This past academic year, they have helped me organize and publicize more than two dozen events on and beyond our campus – from conversations with editors from the New York Times to trips to the 1010 WINS radio studios, Newsday, and even to shadow a professional lacrosse announcer. Later tonight, we'll hear from one of our outstanding student journalists, Rochelle Estrada. Rochelle has been producing a new podcast with interviews between our journalism students and professional journalists. She demonstrates the bright future of our journalism program at William Paterson, and the news industry at large.

And now, I'd like to introduce you to our panel.

First, our in-person guests:

Isaac Avilucea covers Philadelphia for Axios. He twice received the Courage Under Fire Award from the New Jersey chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists for his work in his previous role as a reporter for the Trentonian. Avilucea was first honored in 2017 for successfully fighting a prior restraint order from the state attorney general that censored his reporting on a five-year-old boy who brought drugs to school. He was recognized again in 2019 after the chief of staff for the Trenton mayor named Avilucea as a suspect in an alleged office break-in that turned out to be a custodial error.

Thomas Zambito is an investigative reporter for the New York State team of the USA Today Network. During a 37-year career that has also included stops at the Record and the Star-Ledger in New Jersey and the Daily News and Newsday in New York, Zambito has been honored by Investigative Reporters and Editors, the National Press Club, and the American Bar Association. Zambito was recognized by the Society of Silurians in 2018 with its top

prize for environmental reporting for his series on the impact of the impending shutdown of the Indian Point nuclear power plant in Westchester County.

And then we have two more panelists joining us via live-stream:

Katie Strang is an investigative reporter for The Athletic, a subscription-based website that covers sports across America and the United Kingdom. A former gymnast, Strang rose to fame in 2017 for her coverage of the trial of Larry Nassar, a sports physician who pleaded guilty to sexually assaulting athletes under the guise of medical treatment while working for nearly two decades as a physician at Michigan State University and a team doctor for USA Gymnastics. Prior to joining The Athletic, Strang worked for ESPN and the Long Island newspaper *Newsday*.

And finally, Lisa Guerrero is the chief investigative correspondent for the syndicated newsmagazine Inside Edition, exposing scam artists and crooked politicians on a hard-hitting program that has aired for thirty-five seasons and reaches nearly ten million weekly viewers. A former cheerleader in the National Football League, Guerrero transitioned to journalism in the late 1990s as a sports anchor for the CBS and Fox affiliates in Los Angeles. She gained national prominence on Fox Sports Net's irreverent *The Best Damn Sports Show Period* and modeled for FHM and Maxim before landing a coveted position in 2003 as a sideline reporter for Monday Night Football, the longest-running prime-time sports series in television history. Despite Guerrero's portfolio of exclusive interviews with high-profile athletes, critics panned ABC for tapping an attractive woman who posed for seductive magazine shoots and played a vixen on a soap opera, and the network replaced her after one season. She joined Inside Edition in 2006 as a West Coast correspondent and was promoted to her current role in 2010. A winner of eight National Headliner Awards, Guerrero published her autobiography, *Warrior: My Path to Being Brave*, in January 2023.

2:30-3:45 - Dr. Nicholas Hirshon, American Journalism Associate Editor

Dr. Hirshon moderates the panel from 2:30 to 3:10.

So, I'll have some audience questions for all of you later on. But we have limited time here, and so I'd like to dive in and start by giving everyone here a sense of the reporting you've been doing recently.

Tom, I'd like to discuss a story you wrote last month – March 15 – investigating the women's lacrosse coach at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. And not just any coach – this coach, Kathy Taylor, was the president of an intercollegiate coaches association. You interviewed 10 former players and several of their parents, and you found that Taylor ridiculed players for their weight, dismissed their mental health concerns, and pushed them to play through injuries that shortened their careers. How do you go about an investigation like this?

Let's keep this with sports for a second and head over to Katie on Zoom. Katie, your coverage in the last month has a wide scope – the suspension of an NHL owner on assault and domestic violence, the trial of a urologist accused of sexually assaulting athletes for years. These kinds of stories require some deep sourcing. How do you develop sources and

get them to trust you to tell such sensitive stories?

Isaac, you're at the forefront of a new type of investigative journalism – adapted to fit the bullet point style of Axios. I was reading one of your stories last week about the presumptive Republican nominee for mayor of Philadelphia, David Oh, and his plan to tackle the opioid epidemic there. Your story had lots of links, all in these easily digestible paragraphs. Fewer words to work with than Tom and Katie. How do you make investigative reporting work in listicles?

Lisa, let's stick to format here – you're the only journalist here who doesn't primarily report in print. And for most of your stories, you are directly in the line of fire. For example, you recently did a piece on a former massage therapist in Arizona whose license was revoked last year, but was still advertising massages. And you responded to the ad and asked him to meet you in your hotel for a massage – in a room with hidden cameras, of course. And then you confronted him – and Lisa, who knows what this man could have done to you. It's scary. Now, the title of your book is *Warrior My Path to Being Brave* – but how do you handle putting yourself in harm's way for an investigative piece?

Around 3:10, Dr. Hirshon will read audience questions. Tweet your questions for the panelists using #WPSPJ.

At 3:45, Dr. Hirshon will introduce Dr. Pamela E. Walck, the editor of American Journalism, who will be joining remotely from Pittsburgh.

3:45-4 - Dr. Pamela E. Walck, American Journalism Editor

I want to thank Provost Powers, Dr. Hirshon and the students and staff at William Paterson who made our panel this afternoon a reality – and something available to viewers far beyond the borders of your campus. Many of the presenters you heard from today were part of a special issue that *American Journalism* published in Fall 2022 that highlighted investigative reporting in light of the 50th anniversary of the Watergate break-in. To read more of this wonderful collection Nick guest-edited and packed with original research, interviews, and book and digital media reviews from award-winning journalists, please visit our website at american-journalism.org. You will find the issue under the archived issues.

Additionally, as Provost Powers mentioned, the journal is currently celebrating its 40th anniversary. Throughout this year we are featuring guest essays from rising scholars in our field, interviews with high-profile media figures sharing their insights on journalism, and—as always—original research to mark the journal's four decades in publication. I would like to note: *American Journalism's* reach goes far beyond North America, examining media history across the globe. From its humble beginnings—a concept hashed out on a car drive between two friends following attendance at the annual American Journalism Historians Association—to today, the journal has been dedicated to publishing the best in media history research. And the current editorial board strives to continue this tradition in a way that will make AJ even stronger 40 years from now. In fact, some of you listening today – and I'm talking especially here to the students at William Paterson – could very well be the next generation of historians to publish and lead publications such as this.

In an era where there are wholesale efforts to censor history—or even rewrite it—it is more important than ever to keep learning from the past. It is often said that journalism is history's first draft—captured and reported in real time. It is my hope that the students listening here today strive to take this role seriously and protect it fiercely. Because news matters and you are its future. And one way not to repeat the mistakes of past generations is by learning from them and striving to do better. So dream big and work hard.

And now, I'd like to toss it back to William Paterson University and introduce one of Dr. Hirshon's students, Rochelle Estrada. Rochelle is the prime example of dreaming big and working hard. She is the vice president of the William Paterson SPJ chapter, and today she will tell us a little more about the work that Nick has been doing with his journalism students at William Paterson. Then Rochelle will conduct a raffle of Lisa Guerrero's new memoir, *Warrior: My Path to Being Brave*. It's a great read! Take it away, Rochelle.

4-4:20 - Rochelle Estrada, WPSPJ Vice President

Thank you, Dr. Walck [pronounced Walk], and good afternoon, everyone. As Dr. Walck mentioned, I'm Rochelle Estrada, the vice president of the William Paterson Society of Professional Journalists.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to hear today from these four remarkable journalists. And I want to share, for a moment, what journalism means to me. I grew up listening to 1010 WINS with my dad every morning on my rides to school. I would hear journalists use their voices to tell the story through the radio and I wondered...what if I could do that. I started doing journalism when I was 12 for my school newsletter and took a journalism course in high school where I was a contributing writer and copy editor for my school newspaper. I discovered that I really enjoyed writing articles and interviewing the people around me to gather quotes, so I kept doing everything that I could to keep writing. As a result, I got two of my articles published on Tapinto Paterson and on Medium.com before I started college. My passion for writing and reporting has brought me here today and I can't be any happier.

This panel really opened my eyes to the status of investigative journalism... **ROCHELLE, YOU MIGHT ADD EXTEMPORANEOUS REFLECTIONS ON WHAT YOU LEARNED FROM THE PANEL.**

Before we raffle off Lisa Guerrero's wonderful book, I want to tell you about the work of our nationally recognized chapter. For those in the audience who don't know, the Society of Professional Journalists is the nation's oldest journalism advocacy organization. I have been a part of our SPJ chapter for a year now, and I have embraced the SPJ code of ethics, which tells us to seek the truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently, and be accountable and transparent. SPJ has helped me learn the right way to cover the neighborhood where I grew up, in Paterson, New Jersey. I have also developed strong connections with reporters and editors who dedicate their careers to informing the public. It means everything to me to have been able to meet so many journalists and tour newsrooms where I have always dreamed of working. A few months ago, I landed my first internship, at a digital news platform named thesocialtalks. I wouldn't have been able to have any of these opportunities if it wasn't for WPSPJ. I want all students at William Paterson to know that WPSPJ can provide all of that for you, too.

There are a few ways that all of you in the audience – in person or virtually – can help WPSPJ right now.

First, Dr. Hirshon mentioned before that our WPSPJ chapter started what we believe to be the first podcast by an SPJ student chapter, featuring interviews with the journalists who speak to our chapter. The podcast is on every major streaming platform, including Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

We put in so much hard work on this podcast. We've interviewed reporters from PIX 11 Morning News and 1010 WINS and Al Jazeera. We are eager to have all of you listen.

So, please take out your phones right now and subscribe to the WPSPJ Podcast. I'm going to pause here for a few moments to give you time to find us on Spotify or Apple Podcasts. Again, you're looking for the WPSPJ Podcast. [Spell it out.] W-P-S-P-J.

Come on, everyone! I'm not going to continue talking until I see some of you on your phones and subscribing!

[Pause for 15 seconds. You may see a lot of people continuing to stare at you for a few seconds, and not looking at their phones. Keep pausing, because otherwise people won't subscribe.]

Second, a word to the students here today. WPSPJ invites journalists from big outlets to campus all the time – and we want you to get involved. Many of us are graduating this spring, and we are looking for new e-board members. Students from all majors are welcome to apply – you don't need to be a journalism major. You just need to appreciate the importance of journalism. We have openings on the WPSPJ e-board for students to help us with social media, and to be our treasurer, and to help coordinate field trips to newsrooms in New York City. We need your help to keep this chapter strong. And we're holding our elections next week, so this is the perfect time for you to get involved.

Please come up to me after the event, or say hello to WPSPJ president Angela Amegashie – [find Angelica in the audience and point her out] Angelica, stand up so everyone knows where you are. We'd love to talk to you about becoming a member or running in the elections!

You can also learn more by taking out your phones again, and following @WPSPJ on Instagram – see, I'm making you work today! OK, I know every student here is on Instagram! That's the best way to find out about all the fun WPSPJ events we're planning for the fall and beyond. Again, that's @ W-P-S-P-J.

And last thing, before the raffle, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge some of the people who helped us put this together: the producer for tonight's panel, Rod Holliday, who is in the back right now controlling the lights and the audio and the live-stream. Let's give him a round of applause.

[Pause for applause. If the audience doesn't immediately applaud, start clapping yourself so they know you're waiting for applause.]

And also to thank our WPSPJ publicity chair, Rayah Hammad, who has been in the back today going through all of your tweets and putting them up on the screen.

[Pause for applause.]

And of course the advisor of our campus chapter, Dr. Hirshon. He has done an exceptional job putting this panel together and organizing so many activities for the student journalists at William Paterson. We couldn't have done this without you, Dr. Hirshon, and we thank you!

And without further ado, let's see who's going home today with a copy of Lisa Guerrero's new book, *Warrior*!

I want to tell all of you in the audience about the great book that you could win here today. As we've heard here today, Lisa Guerrero is the chief investigative correspondent for *Inside Edition*, and Dr. Hirshon interviewed her for a recent Q&A in *American Journalism*. *Warrior* shows the strength that Lisa has had throughout her life and explains the strength that she needed as a child when her mom died. She illustrates how she developed bravery and overcame adversity. She chronicles her career—from dealing with harassment as a sports broadcaster to chasing “bad guys” for *Inside Edition*—and proves that through small, daily acts, bravery is a muscle we can strengthen over time. Lisa also discusses a series of events such as covering the Super Bowls, Worlds Series, NBA Finals, and interviews with sports superstars. She discloses that from the outside it seemed glamorous, but often she was miserable, told to smile more, argue less, and show a lot of leg and cleavage. Colleagues would joke—sometimes on national TV—that she clinched big interviews because of sexual acts rather than talent. She made a mistake on air during the opening game on *Monday Night Football* that cost her sportscasting career... and almost her life. *Warrior* is filled with Lisa's stories of failure, struggles, challenges, perseverance, and finally, success.

[Rochelle can select two tickets and distribute the books. Anthony Mayo will have delivered two of Lisa Guerrero's books as well as a ream of raffle tickets to Rochelle on Wednesday morning. The tickets will be handed out to the students as they enter the panel discussion meeting room in the afternoon. At the conclusion of the panel, Rochelle will choose two tickets from a container that mirrors two of the distributed tickets that were given to the students. Thus, during entry, students will be advised by Rochelle that she will choose two tickets from the container at the conclusion of the panel discussion, read aloud the numbers of the tickets, and then give the books to the students whose tickets match hers.]

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