**BEAT MEMO, Science Journalism, Fall 2017**

One of the most important skills science journalists have is the ability to dig into new scientific topics quickly but deeply. Whether looking for ideas or researching a story, science journalists have to be able to grasp the history of a field, evaluate the most compelling research in the area and find relevant experts with whom to connect. The best journalists also know how to work a beat to uncover story-idea “gems” that others haven’t yet found.

The one rule about choosing a beat: Pick an area that fascinates you—something you’ve always wanted to dig into but don’t know much about. **NOTE: Health-related beats are acceptable in this class (health is science!)**

*To get your ideas flowing, here are some beats students have chosen in the past:*

Arctic science, bioremediation, cosmology, the impact of climate change on the ocean, the impact of climate change on agriculture, developmental psychology, food technology, the human/animal bond, invasive species, marine biology, mycology, optogenetics, personal tech, pharmaceuticals, robotics, sleep, sociology of the Internet, space exploration, synthetic biology.

***What you need to do:***

1. What is your beat? Write a paragraph about why you chose it.

2. Name two universities that have a center or large department devoted to your beat (*Examples:* the MIT Kavli Institute for Astrophysics and Space Research or the Johns Hopkins Center for Epigenetics). *Describe in your own words the subareas of research that each institution specializes in.*

(Reminder hint*:* An **incredibly useful tool** for cutting through Internet noise is the targeted Google search. Type into Google a keyword or two that describe your beat and:

*site:.edu --* will bring up only university sites

*site:.org --* will bring up only nonprofit sites

*site:.gov --* will bring up only government sites)

3. Identify a scientific journal you will follow for your beat. (You can browse top journals by clicking “Metrics” in Google Scholar.) Journals that publish review articles, meta-analyses and systematic reviews are especially useful for journalists because the authors are distilling multiple studies. *Name the journal’s publisher and explain how you know that it is legitimate* (there are many scammy science journals). *Please do not choose a general interest science journal like Science, Nature, or PNAS, but rather one that focuses specifically on your beat topic.*

4. Identify one source you plan to follow to keep up with events on your beat and find stories before they hit the mainstream. This source could be a well-curated academic blog, a trade publication, or a newsletter from a major institution. *Explain why this source is useful to you and give an example of a potential story idea it has yielded.*

5. Identify a controversy or area of intense research within your beat. *Tell me about it.*