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Connecting

May 19, 2014



Colleagues,

Good morning, and here's to a great week.

Ousted New York Times executive editor Jill Abramson gave the commencement address this morning at Wake Forest University - a speech that suddenly assumed a national profile. Katie Neal, a spokeswoman for the university, said that everyone from local news outlets to the Associated Press, Reuters, major TV networks and Politico had requested media credentials for the event. Oh, the New York Times, too.

"I'm impressed that your achievements have attracted so much media attention," Abramson joked as she began her address just before 10 a.m. Eastern.

Abramson was the first woman to hold the newspaper's highest editorial position. She spent more than two years in the job. She joined the newspaper in 1997 after working for nearly a decade at The Wall Street Journal.

Publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. has denied media reports that

Abramson's dismissal had to do with complaints over unequal pay or the company's treatment of women. Sulzberger cites Abramson's newsroom management style.

During the commencement ceremony, Abramson did not shy away from the recent controversy.

"What's next for me? I don't know," she said. "So I'm in exactly the same boat as many of you."

Abramson's speech was live-streamed. C-SPAN2 will air the address on delay at 1 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. (Eastern) Monday.

Connecting will recap her speech and send in tomorrow's edition. Several stories relating to her ouster are included below, including Times' media critic David Brooks' take on the aftermath and what's ahead.

Doctor and the AP

Two topics of interest to the AP were covered in an interesting story by news industry analyst Ken Doctor in "The Newsonomics of Spring Cleaning" - shared in Connecting over the weekend.

His theme: From wire services to classifieds to news networks, some key elements of the news ecosystem we know are changing - often without much notice.

The wires business recedes farther into the 20th century

Once there was a flourishing "supplemental" wires business - all those wires that complemented the Associated Press (and, long ago, United Press International). The epoch spoke to the robustness of the news business. Many newspaper companies invested in content, both using it themselves and finding buyers among their newspaper peers. It wasn't unusual for a half a dozen wires to flow into news desks every day. Back in the '90s, we counted how much content flowed into the St. Paul Pioneer Press each day and how much of it we used. We printed just 5 percent of what we received.

Retired Scripps Howard News Service editor Peter Copeland neatly recounts a two-decade tale of consolidation and loss.

In the 1990s, McClatchy had a news service that was mostly in the West. They didn't want to operate it anymore, so Scripps Howard set up a deal to start a Scripps-McClatchy Western Wire run out of the Scripps Howard News Service office. When I took over SHNS, the Western Wire

was not doing well, so I folded it into SHNS. In 2006, McClatchy bought Knight Ridder and the old KRT [Knight Ridder Tribune] became MCT, and McClatchy was back in the wire business. LAT-WP [Los Angeles Times-Washington Post] broke up, and LAT went to MCT. WP joined up with Bloomberg. Along the way the Cox News Service disappeared; so did the Hearst News Service, Christian Science Monitor and the Newhouse News Service. Then, SHNS sold out to MCT. Then, McClatchy sold out to Tribune. I didn't think that Tribune would be the last one standing.

Tribune and McClatchy announced that latest move last week, with McClatchy selling its half share.

We know that Tribune - which has long run the business side of the wire but will now take over editorial operations as well - is consolidating the wire in Chicago. Layoffs of the D.C.-based editing staff are in progress, though it's important to point out that both McClatchy and Tribune will maintain their D.C. reporting bureaus.

We can expect that the Chicago Tribune will leverage its position as a central hub for the current Tribune chain in reorganizing what will become a Tribune wire. Tribune has already said it would meld the operation into the Tribune Content Agency. So what has been a roughly break-even venture will become part of a profit center. Expect new packaged products, something the Chicago Tribune has gained in proficiency in over the past several years.

How will the hundreds of newspaper clients of the wire react? Will the fact that it will soon be more a Tribune company than a quasi-coop (some newspapers contribute content to the wire as well as receive it) make any difference to them?

The move tells us a lot about newspapers and content. The supplemental wires have remained largely print-oriented, and as newspapers have finally gone more local in print and cut newsprint overall, there's less space for wire copy. In addition, relatively few newspapers have made effective use of this niche-y content - the McClatchy Tribune wire has distinguished itself with strong features across a variety of topics - in their digital products, one of the failures of imagination evidenced over the years. Now new syndicators like NewsCred bring new models of audience-targeting content licensing to the marketplace. Wires fade into the history books.

Whew.

And the second topic relating to AP:

New national news networks are forming

Look back in time 20 years and you'll find plenty of ideas for creating a reader-accessible site for most newspaper-produced content: a portal for all the news from the country's 1,350 or so dailies. Start with New Century Network, one such mid-'90s effort that hardly left the gate. Knight Ridder's Real Cities was a pretender as well. At various times, Yahoo News has aggregated lots of newspaper content.

Still, in 2014, there's no simple-to-use, single place to go for to tap into newspaper content overall. This year, we see new stirrings.

Expect to see the next upgrade of the Associated Press' AP Mobile app soon. Since its launch in 2008, it's been an intriguing product, embracing that broad expansive network notion. AP identified the green fields of mobile early and convinced hundreds of newspapers to contribute to the mobile-only product. AP Mobile gets impressive traffic, but mainly to its own national and global content; local content drives less than 20 percent of its traffic. The key going forward will be the user experience: How do you present many firehoses of reader-relevant national and local daily content in a way that makes sense, especially on a tiny smartphone screen?

Connecting mailbox

Jessica Bruce on Facebook: For those following Jill Abramson's ouster from the NYT and the bevy of stories on the few women in media leadership, I have to point out that AP - the world's largest news company - has had a woman in the top journalism spot for more than ten years, and has at a minimum of 50% of the top 10 executives have been women for at least 6 years.

Mark Mittelstadt - Although the St. Louis TV station mentioned in Saturday's Connecting found it big news that a farmer spreads human waste from a treatment plant on his fields as fertilizer, it's actually a fairly common practice, or at least it was 30 years ago. When I first started as the City Hall reporter for The Record of Cedar Falls, Iowa, the city's public works director gave me a fairly extensive orientation to his department, including the municipal waste water treatment plant. He gave a fairly detailed (and unappetizing) description of everything that flowed into the plant from the septic sewer system, and what flowed out. The effluent went to settling ponds for further treatment. From time to time it was necessary to scoop out the sludge, which was then further treated with microbes and given to local farmers. "If you ever have a chance to speak at a convention of sewage plant directors and need a joke, ask them how their tomatoes are doing," he said. It seems

the tomato seed is about the one thing that does not break down in the treatment process. It's not unusual for sludge piles to be full of thriving tomato plants.

Stories of interest

David Carr: Editor's Exit at The Times Puts Tensions on Display

Back in 2010, before she became executive editor of The New York Times, Jill Abramson sent me a handwritten attaboy note about a big story. It still hangs in my cubicle: "You wrote a story about the trashing of a once great American institution and people never tire of that." Jill loved juicy stories, the ones full of subtext, intrigue and very high stakes. Now she is right in the middle of one.

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The facts show it: female CEOs are more likely than men to be fired (Latrice Davis/FB)

The perception that high-achieving businesswomen are more vulnerable than their male counterparts to being abruptly fired - pushed off the "glass cliff" in the contemporary corporate vernacular - has been borne out by a new study from a global management consultancy. Researchers at Strategy&, formerly known as Booz & Company, found that women are forced out of chief executive positions more than a third of the time, while only a quarter of men in similar positions suffer the same fate.

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Yes, my life was in danger. No, I won't stop doing my job (Marcus Eliason)

A day after The Times of Israel's Avi Issacharoff was attacked at a Palestinian demonstration, he reflects on a terrible feeling of helplessness, and an abiding conviction to keep on reporting

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The Promise, and Pitfalls, of Video

ADAM NOSSITER'S first response to a now-famous video of the kidnapped Nigerian schoolgirls was caution. "I thought maybe we

should not make a huge thing of this until it was completely verified," Mr. Nossiter, the Times bureau chief for Central and West Africa, told me by phone. He described how he and a Times stringer in Nigeria first watched the video early this week in a hotel room in Maiduguri.

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William Worthy, a Reporter Drawn to Forbidden Datelines, Dies at 92

William Worthy, a foreign correspondent who in the thick of the Cold War ventured where the United States did not want him to go - including the Soviet Union, China, Cuba - and became the subject of both a landmark federal case concerning travel rights and a ballad by the protest singer Phil Ochs, died on May 4 in Brewster, Mass. He was 92.

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33 young writers graduate from Poynter's The Write Field program

The Mahaffey Theater was the scene of honored accomplishment on Friday night as 33 Write Field graduates shared a rite of passage before a packed house of family members, mentors, educators, sponsors and friends. The middle school and high school students, all male minority graduates, donned tuxedos, marched in to an African drum line and were honored for their meritorious work following a nine-month academic enrichment and mentoring program.

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Koch Brothers' Secrets Revealed In New Book (Lew Ferguson)

WASHINGTON -- Charles and David Koch are the unofficial standard-bearers of a new generation of billionaires, willing to spend immense sums to influence politics. Best known for bankrolling the tea party movement, the fiercely private Koch family has achieved a quasi-mythical status in political circles. Yet they remain an enigma to most Americans.

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Walmart Suing a Photog's Widow, Waltons Say They Own the Copyright to His Photos of Their Family (Bob Daugherty)

In a copyright battle truly worthy of the David and Goliath designation, it seems that Walmart and its founding family, the Waltons, have filed a

lawsuit against the widow of a photographer who ran a small Arkansas studio called Bob's Studio of Photography. According to the PPA, the lawsuit is over a set of images that the studio's founder, Robert A. Huff, took of the Walton family before they were the owners of the largest retail chain on planet Earth.

So who's winning the circulation war? Tribune or Deseret News? (Bill Beecham)

Numbers, of course, can be read many ways- and that includes the business of reading news. One view of new circulation audits for Salt Lake City's battling newspapers seems to bolster claims that a recent reworking of the two dailies' decades-old partnership is patently unfair. Seen another way, the figures appear to reflect a new world in Utah's media markets.

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