BRAINSTORMING AND DEVELOPING STORY IDEAS

What’s on the backside of the nickel? If you don’t know that it’s Monticello, you’re not paying close enough attention to your world. To come up with the best story ideas, you have to watch everything carefully. You’ll be tossed into assignments cold and need to turn them into stories. Or you’ll simply be asked by an editor, “What do you have for me today?”

Curiosity will guide you. Look at your world with wonder.

1. When you’re talking to leaders, whether they are school principals, government officials or heads of business ask, “What’s not being reported? What do you worry about at night when you go home? If you could improve anything at work, what would it be? What’s the biggest thing coming up for you at work in the next couple of months?

2. Check the Internet. Check other media for ideas done elsewhere that you might tailor to your community.

3. Check your local media. Look for the small, two or three-inch AP stories that leave questions lingering: Why is that happening? Who’s exploring solutions?

4. Reaction stories to major events:
   - After a presidential debate
   - Reaction to elections, deaths, strikes, etc.

5. Observe the Community:
   - Bulletin boards in grocery stores, laundromats and libraries
   - Fliers posted on telephone poles, car windshields, etc.
   - Events listings at KUT.org, Austin 360.com and UT’s daily email.
   - Classified ads (especially the personals). One found in The Daily Texan several years ago featured a couple looking for an egg donor from UT because they wanted their baby to be a Longhorn.

6. Issues and Trends:
   - Even though Austin is pushing a “Housing First” policy in addressing problems of the homeless, the city’s Habitat for Humanity group will start building in Bastrop because land prices have become too expensive in Austin.
   - More grandparents are rearing their grandchildren. Are social services adjusting to support them?

7. Listen to People Around You: Perk up your ears on the bus, in the dorm, at the grocery store. Then say, “I didn’t mean to eavesdrop, but I heard you talking about XXX and wondered if I could ask you a few questions.”