CURRENT EVENTS RESEARCH TOPICS

ECONOMICS: Oil Prices
TOPIC: The worldwide general economic slowdown and correspondingly increased supply of oil has sent the prices of oil tumbling. Producer nations, such as Russia, already having severe economic challenges, will have decreased revenues. Ordinary consumers will find the costs of heating oil and gasoline cheaper. How might the lower oil prices affect consumer behavior? How will the decline in revenues affect political relations between producer nations? How does the fact that oil is priced in U.S. dollars, and the Federal Reserve seems poised to raise interest rates, affect those governments that have borrowed dollars to purchase oil?
SEARCH TERMS: oil AND prices

CRIME AND LAW: Charlie Hebdo Attack
TOPIC: The Parisian offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo were attacked by heavily armed gunmen. Ten journalists and two policemen are reported to be dead. Why are Muslims offended by this publication? What are the themes of the items that are controversial? How do readers who are not Muslim respond to the magazine’s sense of satire?
SEARCH TERMS: Charlie Hebdo AND terroris*

CRIME AND LAW: Police and Fatalities
TOPIC: Two New York City police officers were executed in what evidence suggests was a response to the recent stories about police shootings of unarmed minorities. What has been the response of police departments around the country to the killing of these two officers? What has been the cause of tension between New York’s Mayor Bill De Blasio and his police department and how is that being dealt with? What happened in the case of Eric Garner that incited so much recent protest in New York?
SEARCH TERMS: police AND New York AND Ismaaiyl Brinsley

CIVICS, GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS: U.S. - Cuba Relations
TOPIC: The United States and Cuba have agreed on a process to normalize relations that could end a 53 year period of having no formal diplomatic relationship. Why did the United States and Cuba break relations in the early 60s? Why did the break last so long, and why are they being renewed now? Who is Assata Shakur and why is she causing tension between Cuba and the United States?
SEARCH TERMS: (United States OR U.S.) AND Cuba AND relations

SOCIAL STUDIES RESEARCH TOPICS

BUSINESS: Casino Industry Standards
TOPIC: The U.S. casino industry has released its first industry standards. What are some of the key areas where the industry is focusing on policing itself and how is the Bank Secrecy Act involved? What have been some public concerns over the years about having casinos in their area?
SEARCH TERMS: casino* AND standards

BUSINESS: Keurig Recall
TOPIC: Keurig Green Mountain is recalling over 7 million of its machines due to the possibility that they could overheat and spray users. What is the flaw that can cause this and how could it have been made better? Why are these coffee makers so popular and how do they work?
SEARCH TERMS: Keurig AND recall
BUSINESS: Perdue Pharma
TOPIC: The state of Kentucky could soon see a jury trial resulting from their seven year civil lawsuit against Perdue Pharma, the maker of the prescription drug OxyContin, a drug the state feels has been aggressively marketed and has been the key factor in the resurgence of heroin in their Appalachian region. What is the similarity between OxyContin and heroin that makes it so attractive to people withdrawing from OxyContin? What other states have seen a sharp rise in heroin and has there been any evidence in those states that OxyContin played a role?
SEARCH TERMS: OxyContin AND heroin AND Kentucky AND Perdue

BUSINESS: Missing AirAsia Flight
TOPIC: AirAsia Flight 8501 disappeared from radar screens while passing through clouds on its way from Surabaya, Indonesia, to Singapore. Wreckage and bodies were found two days later in the waters near where it vanished. Have they determined what caused this crash? Will this crash have any business implications for the budget airline? What are the career highlights of its CEO Tony Fernandes?
SEARCH TERMS: AirAsia Flight 8501 AND Tony Fernandes

CIVICS, GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS: Anti-Corruption Efforts
TOPIC: Former security Chief Zhou Yongkang has been arrested and kicked out of the Chinese Communist Party. He is a former member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo and has become the highest ranking person to be caught up in the current anti-corruption investigations. What are the charges against him? What are the political implications of his arrest? Why was he thought to be above the law?
SEARCH TERMS: Zhou Yongkang AND (arrest OR corruption)

CIVICS, GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS: Spending Bill
TOPIC: The U.S. Congress has ended the threat of a government shutdown by passing a $1.1 billion spending bill. What are the most controversial items in this bill and what are the most compelling arguments for and against each of these items? What is the federal deficit, how does it differ from the federal debt?
SEARCH TERMS: $1.1 billion AND spending

CRIME AND LAW: Jihadi Death Rates
TOPIC: Researchers used the BBC World Service reports to tally the number and location of those killed by jihadi attacks worldwide. There were 5,042 killed in 664 incidents. What groups accounted for over half of that number? What countries suffered the most deaths? What was the most prevalent form of attacks? How many of the dead were jihads themselves?
SEARCH TERMS: jihadi AND attacks AND (fatalities OR deaths) AND BBC

CRIME AND LAW: Peshawar School Attack
TOPIC: Seven Pakistani Taliban attacked a private school in Peshawar attended by the children of the Pakistani military. They claimed it was in retaliation for civilian deaths caused by the military in its fight against the Taliban in tribal areas. They set off bombs and indiscriminately shot students and teachers. Pakistan immediately ended its moratorium on hanging convicted terrorists. What has been a problem for the army fighting terrorists in Pakistan? Why are schools targeted?
SEARCH TERMS: Peshawar AND Taliban AND schools

CRIME AND LAW: Sydney Café Siege
TOPIC: A gunman with a shotgun and an Islamist black flag held hostages during a day-long siege in central Sydney, Australia. He entered the Lindt Café at 9:45 a.m. and forced hostages to hold the flag up to the café’s windows, to call the media for him and to record videos he put on social media. Who was this gunman? Why had he been in the public eye before this event? Why was he out on bail? How did the police resolve this siege?
SEARCH TERMS: Lindt Café AND hostages
ECONOMICS: Euro in Decline
TOPIC: The Euro has fallen in relation to the dollar by 15% since May. While this means the Eurozone’s exports will be cheaper to buy, it correspondingly means that imports will cost more. What are the reasons for the decline in the Euro’s value? Are there other positive outcomes of this decline? Are there other negative outcomes to it?
SEARCH TERMS: Euro AND currency value

ECONOMICS: Rent Control Eased
TOPIC: A law passed twenty years ago will end rent control in Spain’s city centers. This threatens thousands of small, family-owned businesses, as rent increases will erode their profitability. What made it hard for these business owners to prepare for this over the past 20 years? What types of stores are likely to replace them and how will that change the look and feel of Spanish cities?
SEARCH TERMS: Spain AND rent control

ECONOMICS: Extended Tax Breaks
TOPIC: The U.S. Congress has decided to extend expired tax breaks to the end of the year. Who gets these breaks and why did Congress think it will help the economy to extend them a little longer? What are the most compelling arguments for and against their decision?
SEARCH TERMS: taxes AND exten*

ECONOMICS: Dow and Economy
TOPIC: The surging economy has lifted the Dow Jones Industrial Average to a record of over 18,000. What is causing the economy to grow so quickly? How does the Dow Jones Industrial Average work and how can its measurement act as a reliable gauge of economic health?
SEARCH TERMS: Dow Jones AND record AND econom*

EDUCATION: Religious Schools in Turkey
TOPIC: Turkey has seen an increase in the number of students in religious schools, called imam hatip, and President Tayyip Erdogan has called for the teaching of Ottoman Turkish, which is written with Arabic letters. This has led to protests by parents and teachers. What is the governmental explanation for the growth in attendance at imam hatsips? What do the protesters claim is happening?
SEARCH TERMS: Turkey AND (religious schools OR imam hatip)

HISTORY: Anniversary 1914 Christmas Truce
TOPIC: 2014 marks the 100th anniversary of the 1914 Christmas Truce, when British and German soldiers on the Western Front mingled with the forces opposing them. In 1915 men were ordered not to fraternize with the enemy. How did this happen? Were there any repercussions from this action?
SEARCH TERMS: World War I AND (Christmas Truce OR fraternization)

HISTORY: Pearl Harbor
TOPIC: December 7th is the day we remember the Americans who died in the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese in 1941. What were the events leading up the attack that caused tension between the two countries? Where is Pearl Harbor and why did the Japanese select that location for its attack on the United States?
SEARCH TERMS: Pearl Harbor
SOCIAL ISSUES: Pope Addresses the Curia
TOPIC: Pope Francis has used his annual Christmas message to the prelates who run the bureaucracy to call for reform of it. The Curia is arguably the oldest bureaucracy in the world. He listed fifteen ailments besetting them that should be avoided. How was this speech received? What other reforming actions has the pope taken? Does the age of the bureaucracy feature in the problems within it?
SEARCH TERMS: Roman Catholic Church AND Curia AND reform

SOCIAL ISSUES: Animal Rights
TOPIC: An Argentinean court has ruled that an orangutan named Sandra has some rights previously reserved for humans. This contrasts with a New York appeals court that unanimously upheld a lower court ruling denying rights to a chimpanzee. What rights were being sought for Sandra? How does her existence differ from the chimpanzee in the New York case? Does the concept of 'legal personhood' for apes and other animals make sense?
SEARCH TERMS: Argentina AND Sandra AND rights

SOCIAL ISSUES: Abused Children
TOPIC: After canvassing 50 states and the District of Columbia, the Associated Press has found that during six months, at least 786 American children have died of abuse or neglect. What does the report say about the responsibility of child protective services in these cases? What are some of the most common contributing factors to abuse and to neglect?
SEARCH TERMS: child* AND abuse*

SCIENCE AND HEALTH RESEARCH TOPICS

ENVIRONMENT: New York Bans Fracking
TOPIC: New York State has banned the practice of high volume hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as fracking. What is fracking, how does it work and what are the concerns about it? How have other states reacted to this ban? What are the most compelling arguments for and against fracking?
SEARCH TERMS: New York AND fracking

ENVIRONMENT: Boxing Day Tsunami Anniversary
TOPIC: It is the tenth anniversary of the Boxing Day tsunami that devastated parts of Southeast Asia. It was one of the greatest natural disasters of modern times, with almost 230,000 killed. How did it happen? Where were the affected areas? What was put in place to help avoid a recurrence of it? How did the relief efforts work? How was it remembered?
SEARCH TERMS: Tsunami AND 2004

ENVIRONMENT: Carnivore Populations Growth
TOPIC: Large carnivores are thriving in West Europe as studies show their populations increasing. Wolves, bears, lynx and wolverines are found not only in wildlife refuges, but out in the countryside. This also means that prey populations are increasing. Where are these animals found? What European countries lack breeding populations of them?
SEARCH TERMS: Europe AND carnivores

HEALTH: HIV Testing
TOPIC: Ethiopia tested over 3,000 people of its Gambella region for HIV, a one day record they hope to have verified by the Guinness Book of Records. Gambella has a higher rate of infection than Ethiopia as a whole. What are the rates in Gambella and in the country as a whole? Can the higher rates be easily explained?
SEARCH TERMS: Ethiopia AND HIV
HEALTH: Teens Increased Use of E-Cigarettes
TOPIC: Studies done in Connecticut and Hawaii show that respectively 25% and 29% of teens use e-cigarettes. How do these studies differ from the study done by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and what concerns are raised by the new findings? What are some of the proposed regulations by the U.S. FDA and why haven’t they been enacted?
SEARCH TERMS: e-cigarettes AND (youth OR teen*)

HEALTH: Health Care Sign-ups
TOPIC: A Health and Human Services report on the latest to sign up for health care under the Affordable Care Act shows the volume is on target to meet the goal of 9.1 million in 2015. What are critics of the goal numbers saying and why? What is working well with the Affordable Care Act and what it working poorly?
SEARCH TERMS: Healthcare.gov AND Health and Human Services AND report

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY: NASA Mars Rover Findings
TOPIC: NASA’s Mars rover has discovered methane and carbon compounds on Mars. What possibilities does this discovery hold according to scientists? How did the Mars Rover identify these substances and communicate the discovery back to earth?
SEARCH TERMS: Rover AND Mars AND (methane OR carbon)

SPORTS RESEARCH TOPICS

SPORTS: Landon Donovan
TOPIC: Top United States soccer player Landon Donovan has announced his retirement at the end of 2014. What U.S. and foreign teams did he play for and what were his major contributions to those teams? What was his position, and what is the role of that position for the team?
SEARCH TERMS: Landon Donovan

SPORTS: BCS Four Team Playoff
TOPIC: The Bowl Championship Series (BCS) that determines the champion for the college football season is using a four team playoff for the first time this season. How does this new system work and how did the old one work? Why did the BCS make this change?
SEARCH TERMS: (BCS OR Bowl Championship Series) AND football AND four team

SPORTS: Thierry Henry
TOPIC: Thierry Henry, French soccer player, has retired from playing and will become a television analyst in Britain. He won the World Cup in 1998 playing for France. What was his club career like? What leagues did he play in and which leagues did his teams win? Beyond that World Cup win, what was his international career like?
SEARCH TERMS: Thierry Henry

SPORTS: Yachting Race
TOPIC: The Sydney to Hobart Yacht race was held again this Boxing Day (Dec. 26.) It is sponsored by Rolex, the Swiss watch maker. There were two winners, one for fastest time and one for a handicapped race, where time was adjusted. Which boats and owners won the two titles? What is controversial about the role of corporate sponsorship and big money in this race?
SEARCH TERMS: Sydney to Hobart

SPORTS: World Juniors Play
TOPIC: Canada beat Russia in the finals of the World Junior Hockey Championship, which was held in Toronto. The score was 5-4 and the Canadian team was able to keep the Russians from tying through the entire third period. What other teams were in the tournament? How successful have Canada and Russia before? Where did the U.S. team finish and which team beat them?
SEARCH TERMS: World Junior Hockey Championship
SPORTS: Deaths in Austria
TOPIC: Ronnie Berlack and Bryce Astle were skiing with some other teammates when they were killed by an avalanche. They were developmental members of the U.S. Ski Team. They had left the prepared slopes and may have started the avalanche that killed them. Their teammates were able to ski out of the way of it. What led both Astle and Berlack to be asked to join the U.S. Ski Team?
SEARCH TERMS: Ronnie Berlack AND Bryce Astle

SPORTS: NFL Disciplinary Policies
TOPIC: The National Football League (NFL) is expanding its disciplinary policies further with its updated Personal Conduct Policy. What new changes have been made and what drove them? What drove the 2007 Personal Conduct Policy?
SEARCH TERMS: NFL AND personal conduct policy

SPORTS: Jim Harbaugh
TOPIC: Professional football coach of the San Francisco 49ers Jim Harbaugh has resigned before fulfilling the last year of his contract. Why has he resigned and what is he planning to do? What is his background in college and professional football?
SEARCH TERMS: Jim Harbaugh

ARTS AND LITERATURE RESEARCH TOPICS

FILM AND TELEVISION: The Interview
TOPIC: A new film by Seth Rogan and Evan Goldberg called The Interview has angered North Korea with its plotline that has journalists called on to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. What revenge took place on Sony Pictures by a hacking group called Guardians for Peace and what connection has the FBI made concerning them? What threats were made by Guardians for Peace if the film was released and how did Sony respond?
SEARCH TERMS: The Interview AND North Korea

FILM AND TELEVISION: Stampy Cat
TOPIC: Joseph Garnett, the creator of Stampy Cat animations, will be launching an education series called Wonder Quest in a partnership with Maker Studios, owned by Disney. His Stampy Cat YouTube channel has over 4.5 million subscribers. How did he create Stampy Cat? What are his plans for Wonder Quest?
SEARCH TERMS: Joseph Garnett AND (Stampy Cat OR Wonder Quest)

FINE ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE: National Portrait Gallery
TOPIC: The National Portrait Gallery in London has appointed Nicholas Cullinan as its next director. He will succeed Sandy Nairne and begin his position in the spring. What has his career been up to this point? What were Mr. Nairne’s achievements in the position?
SEARCH TERMS: National Portrait Gallery AND Nicholas Cullinan

FINE ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE: Gladys Nilsson
TOPIC: New York City’s Garth Greenan Gallery has held an acclaimed exhibition of the work of Gladys Nilsson, who was a part of the Chicago Imagist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. What kind of art was created by the Chicago Imagists, who are some of the key artists of that movement and what was the Hairy Who? What are the qualities of this movement that appealed to critics?
SEARCH TERMS: Gladys Nilsson AND Chicago Imagist
LITERATURE: The Shattered World
TOPIC: The second book in the Starbound Trilogy by Amie Kaufman and Meagan Spooner called the Shattered World has been released. What is the Starbound Trilogy about and what has impressed science fiction critics about these books? What other books have been written by these authors?
SEARCH TERMS: The Shattered World AND Kaufman AND Spooner

LITERATURE: Costa Prize Winner
TOPIC: Emma Healey’s debut novel Elizabeth Is Missing has won the Costa Prize for Best First Novel and is in the running for the Costa Book of the Year. What are the other titles and authors in the list for this last prize? What is a major plot point in Healy’s book and how is it related to her life?
SEARCH TERMS: Emma Healey AND Elizabeth Is Missing

PERFORMING ARTS: Death of a Muse
TOPIC: Billie Whitelaw was an actress and muse to Samuel Beckett, who created several memorable characters for her to play. She appeared in films as diverse as The Omen and Hot Fuzz. What Beckett plays did she appear in and how difficult were the roles? What other plays did she act in? What were some of her film roles?
SEARCH TERMS: Billie Whitelaw

PERFORMING ARTS: Craig Wayne Boyd
TOPIC: Craig Wayne Boyd has been named the winner of the seventh season of The Voice. What are the qualities of his voice that have most impressed the judges? What songs is he most famous for singing?
SEARCH TERMS: Craig Wayne Boyd

PEOPLE RESEARCH TOPICS

PEOPLE: Steven Colbert
TOPIC: Steven Colbert is ending his popular television comedy program, the satirical news show called The Colbert Report, to replace David Letterman as host of The Late Show. How did this show satirize the news and what are some humorous examples? What is the legacy of David Letterman on The Late Show and why was Colbert chosen as his replacement? What is a common question that Colbert’s fans are asking about how he plans to host the show?
SEARCH TERMS: Stephen Colbert AND (Colbert Report OR Late Show)

PEOPLE: Janet Yellen
TOPIC: The London based Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum has named U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen as Person of the Year. What is the Official Monetary and Financial Intuitions Forum and how does it work? What were the qualities that impressed them about her work in 2014?
SEARCH TERMS: Janet Yellen

PEOPLE: Joe Cocker
TOPIC: Joe Cocker was a British singer who came to prominence in the late 1960s. John Belushi parodied his performance style in the early years of Saturday Night Live. What type of music did Cocker perform? What were some of his hits? Why was his performance style so memorable?
SEARCH TERMS: Joe Cocker

PEOPLE: Luise Rainer
TOPIC: Luise Rainer was a German actress who was the first to win back-to-back Academy Awards. How did she get to Hollywood? What was her career like before she came to the U.S.? What was her life like after she left Hollywood? For what films did she win the Oscar?
SEARCH TERMS: Luise Rainer
PEOPLE: Ralph Baer
TOPIC: Ralph Baer was one of the earliest video game developers. In what ways did he help pioneer the development of them, and what are some of the games he developed? In what country was he born, and why did his family leave?
SEARCH TERMS: Ralph Baer

PEOPLE: Alvin Nelson
TOPIC: Alvin Nelson was a legend of the American rodeo. What are some ways in which he distinguished himself? What are the key events in a rodeo and how did they originate?
SEARCH TERMS: Alvin Nelson

PEOPLE: Mario Cuomo
TOPIC: Mario Cuomo was a three term Governor of New York State. His son Andrew was just re-inaugurated for his second term in the same office. What was Mario Cuomo’s greatest accomplishment while in office? How was he perceived nationally? What was his greatest moment on the national stage?
SEARCH TERMS: Mario Cuomo

PEOPLE: Edward W. Brooke III
TOPIC: Edward W. Brooke III was a former two term U.S. Senator from Massachusetts. He was the first African American to be elected to the senate since Reconstruction and the first to be popularly elected, rather than selected by a state legislature. What were his positions on the issues of his day, which included the Vietnam War and Watergate? What office had he held before going to the senate?
SEARCH TERMS: Edward W. Brooke III