

The World Bank and Investigative Journalism

Course strengthens media in Latin America

This article originally appeared in Today, the daily E-Magazine for World Bank staff.

September 26 , 2001—There is no more effective check on corrupt officials, bribe takers, embezzlers and those who waste public funds than a hard-nosed investigative journalist. In many parts of Latin America, unfortunately, they are not abundant.

No more. The World Bank Institute is tapping its own knowledge, and that of media experts across Latin America to train 200 journalists in nine countries in how to dig up stories that make the corrupt tremble.

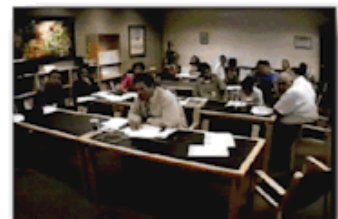
Every Monday for three hours, they learn about internet research techniques, access to information laws and practices, legal issues, codes of conduct, and developing sources. It is possible through the World Bank Institute's (WBI) revolutionary use of distance-education videoconference technology at multiple sites. The journalists—including print, radio and TV—gather, and interact via satellite, from classrooms in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

It's the first WBI course on Investigative Journalism conducted in Spanish via the [Global Development Learning Network](#). It follows similar courses conducted by WBI in Africa last year.

"This technology allows us to reach far more



Developed by a WBI core team under Rick Staphenurst, the sessions are anchored by Silvio Waisbord (shown here), a professor of journalism at Rutgers State University and supported by local facilitators and staff from the Distance Learning Centers.



journalists than we could in low-tech classrooms," said Roderick Macdonell, a Canadian journalist who helped design the course. "What's more is that instead of getting a drop-out rate, we get a 'drop-in' rate as word spreads, with more people enrolled in the course at the end than there were at the beginning."

The course is designed to tie-in with and reinforce aspects of the recent WBI course on Curbing Corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean. Lectures and interactive discussion among videoconference sites are complemented by Internet discussions between sessions.

Presentations by experts from across the Latin America are followed by reflection and collaborative projects by task groups at each site. For example, Pedro Enrique Armendares, a Mexico-based investigative journalist and educator, presented recently on how to use the Internet as a research tool.

"It is wonderful to be able to compare situations in our different countries, and to learn from one another in the region," said one journalist-participant. Part of that learning takes place as all 200 participants read, view or listen to stories produced by task teams of journalists. The '10 best' stories will be assembled in a WBI publication.

The course is organized and delivered jointly by the WBI Governance and Finance Unit and Radio Nederland Training Center in Costa Rica. Led by manager Rick Stapenhurst, the course team includes Silvio Waisbord, a Rutgers University journalism professor and author of *Watchdog Journalism in Latin America* who anchors the Latin American course; Canadian investigative journalism specialist Macdonell ([click here](#) for his first-person account, published in the online newsletter of the Canadian Association of Journalists); learning design specialist Peter Auer; and Gerardo

Throughout the course, small groups of journalists work on stories to be broadcast or published, the 10 'best' stories to be included in a WBI publication

Bolanos, training coordinator for Latin America. They are assisted by site learning facilitators, site administrators, distance-learning site managers, and technicians.

This is the third Investigative Journalism course offered via distance learning this year. The first reached 130 journalists in French-speaking African countries, and the second drew 250 journalists in eight English-speaking African countries.

"The next step," said course designer Peter Auer, "is an internet-based introductory course in investigative journalism."

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