**Journalism 121  
Kaplan-Biegel**

**Backgrounding Your Data Form**

**Directions:** To fill this information out for the dataset you are working with for Assignment #3, use the following resources:

* [Online form at discussed in the video in the book on backgrounding data](https://surveys.ope.ed.gov/security/PrintFormsView.aspx?id=1)
* [2014 SMCCCD Annual Public Safety & Security Report](http://smccd.edu/publicsafety/docs/2014%20SMCCCD%20Annual%20Public%20Safety%20and%20Security%20Report.pdf)
* [The Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting](https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/handbook.pdf) (This handbook is over 300 pages. For our assignment, review the table of contents and pick and choose the parts to look at.)
* Our campus and district security chiefs

Note that the questions below, while occasionally specific to our particular data assignment, are the same questions you would ask about any dataset. Keep a copy of this form as a resource for the future.

1. **Metadata**
   1. What, if any, were the column names (record layouts) whose meaning you did not know? (See if a “data dictionary” accompanies the dataset.)
   2. When was the data created?
   3. What doesn’t the data include?
2. **Know where the data comes from.**
   1. Where does it come from?
   2. Was the data collected from information on a form? (See video in the book on backgrounding data for where to get this form.)
   3. Find out what the instructions were for filling out the form. Were there categories or open-ended answers? (You will either get the answer to this from asking security or from looking at the form itself, provided there is one.) Is there documentation about the data—rules or instructions for the collection and what the data is?
   4. How often is this data collected? How often is the data updated?
   5. Why is this data collected?
   6. Are there reports that get generated as a result? (If so, ask for a copy of the report.)
   7. Who is responsible for the data (and remember: this could be a possible source for any story you do)? In Skyline College’s case, who is in charge of collecting this data and who is in charge of reporting this data to the government? Who do they report the data to?
   8. Ask security the following two questions: Is there anything I should know about this data? Anything I may be assuming that I shouldn’t?

*(Thanks to Derek Willis for inspiring this handout through his module in the Data Driven Journalism MOOC.)*