

Multimedia Journalist of the Year Submission 2023-2024
Elaine Jiang

Podcast series: [People, Politics, and Perspective](#)

My interest in politics is what encouraged me to become a journalist in the first place, which, combined with my love for watching video essays commentating on complex social and political issues, pushed me to explore further how I understand and interact with the world around me through in-depth conversations with professors, writers, and community organizers who had first-hand experienced or studied the topics that were making national headlines.

I was intensely anxious when I began my audio journalism with this podcast series in September because I had never used the software before. However, as I produced more and more episodes, I became more comfortable using Adobe Audition and I began to experiment. I changed the opening music from the jazzy, elevator-music-adjacent tune in episode 1 to a more serious sound in episode 2 and beyond, closer to what I had heard on real news podcasts produced by NPR or the New York Times.

I also began to realize that the political and social issues I was covering often required a certain level of base understanding and knowledge, which led me to intersperse segments of background information to contextualize what my interviewee was talking about in episode 2. I added a trilling sound effect to bookend each part of these interrupting segments to signal to listeners that there was a break in the audio. I continued this in episodes 3 and 5 where I wanted to equip listeners with more information. After 6 episodes, I hoped my podcast made listeners more confident and empathetic in navigating the complicated social and political realities of our world.

“People, Politics, and Perspective Ep. 2: Asian Americans, admissions, and the affirmative action debate” ultimately won the [National Free Press Women high school contest](#) first place for Radio/Television Interview or Talk Show

Multimedia feature: [Getting on track](#)

During mid-winter break of 2023, I developed an interest in watching Formula One racing, but a few days into learning all that I could about the sport, a question repeatedly blared in my mind: Where were all the women?

By the time I started my journalism class in the fall, I had read numerous articles about how women were just as physically capable of racing cars as men but were held back by other issues, such as lack of exposure and social stigma. In that time, I had also taken note of how racially and economically undiverse the motorsport world was and I set out to cover the stories of the minority of racers who did not fit the wealthy, white, male, and born-into-a-racing-family mold of most successful drivers.

I traveled for several hours to racing tracks to take photos and speak to kids and adults alike about their experiences. By the end, I had interviewed 20 drivers, parents, and fans, and

constructed a multimedia sports article that used audio clips, photos, infographics, and GIFs to bring this story of diversity and breaking through barriers to life.

“Getting on track” won the [Youth Journalism International contest](#) first place for multimedia sports news.

Audio package: [Getting on track: Michele Abbate ‘brakes’ through barriers in racing](#)

As part of my multimedia feature on racing, I wanted to include a more in-depth profile of one of the athletes I interviewed, Michele Abbate. Her story and insight were impossible to fully encompass in a few quotes, so I chose to create a podcast episode from my interview with her about her journey to the professional categories. She delves into how her father initially did not believe women belonged in motorsport, so she had to take it upon herself later in life to start driving. She also divulges how she doesn’t view herself as the “only woman” in her category but feels that she should be considered as just another one of the competitors, while at the same time acknowledging the barriers that women experience that reduce their presence on race tracks. The full interview was more than double the length of the final podcast, and this episode taught me how and where to cut audio efficiently while keeping the flow and heart of the story intact.

“Getting on track: Michele Abbate ‘brakes’ through barriers in racing” won the [Youth Journalism International contest](#) first place for multimedia profile story

Video production: [Japanese cultural exchange flowers at the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival](#)

As part of the first multimedia team package I led, I produced a video on the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival, a yearly staple in San Francisco that celebrates the culture and heritage of the Japanese American diaspora. One of the things I have always loved about growing up in the Bay Area is its thriving Asian communities and I sought to capture that in this video. I wanted to focus on the themes that each of the interviewees reflected on as part of their experiences and perception of the festival's importance, emphasizing their commitment to preserving Japanese traditions and history to pass on to future generations, the community aspect of the festival, and their welcoming of Japanese cultural exchange. The video includes interviews with four people who each played different roles in the festival, which I overlaid with many b-roll shots of their booths, their performances, and what they loved about the festival to illustrate their personal insights to the viewer.

This video was included in [Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival showcases Japanese cultural pride in bloom](#).

Data Journalism: [Middle ground: Reconciling free speech and university response to pro-Palestinian protests](#)

The Israel-Hamas war in Gaza had already been raging for six months when a Gaza solidarity encampment set up tents on Columbia’s South Lawn on April 17, making national headlines the next day when the university’s administration called the police to arrest 108 demonstrators.

Similar encampments immediately began springing up on college campuses across the country, including at the nearby Stanford University and University of California, Berkeley, triggering allegations of antisemitism, excessive uses of police force, and a broader conversation on the limitations of free speech for university students.

I gathered a team of students to create a multimedia package exploring that conversation, and its many sides, which I also created four infographics for. The first infographic was a chart that showed the fatalities and injuries of both Israelis and Palestinians throughout the war's course as a running race. It illustrated the rapidly increasing devastation the conflict had wrought on people's lives, which was the main reason for people staging the encampments. For this, I could not find a convenient database cataloging the deaths day-by-day that was available to the public, so I went to the [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs website on the occupied Palestinian territory](#) and dug through hundreds of their flash updates and hostilities impact reports to find figures about deaths and injuries on each side from different points of the war, specifically 10-day intervals. If the UN did not have a report or update on the day of one of these intervals, I pushed my research further to find numbers from Al Jazeera and the Times of Israel instead.

The second graphic is a map of the US which, as it plays, pinpoints over 50 protests on campuses nationwide as circles sized according to how many people were arrested. I wanted to illustrate to viewers the progression of how protests and the backlash to them spread so quickly across the country in a four-week period.

The third and fourth graphics are slideshows of graphs with the results from recent polling of US adults' thoughts on the war in Gaza and on the campus protests. I organized the data according to age group to put a special emphasis on how young people were consistently the most likely to sympathize more with the pro-Palestinian side. These charts helped connect the individual perspectives of our sources with national waves of public outcry and support. I always want to keep my eye on the larger, big-picture story in the background while crafting my articles.

Personal Statement:

The first time I ever edited a video together, I was hardly 7 years old, peering over my older sister's much taller shoulder as she selected the superhero trailer template in the iMovie app on her phone. We pretended that our father was Mr. Incredible, our mother was Elastigirl, and laughed as we made our white-haired grandma be baby Jack Jack. My child self thought making these video trailers was the most fun thing in the world.

But then, my sister graduated from high school a few years later and I deleted the iMovie app off of my phone to save storage, the videos lost along with it. After that, I never expected to be on either side of a camera again.

I was wrong, of course.

I thought I was too shy to be a journalist. Talking to strangers made me exceedingly anxious and I would often spend the minutes leading up to an interview, pacing a worn path into my carpet, wringing my hands. I spent a few months cursing my decision to join media arts because of that anxiety, constantly tracking down sources at the last minute and researching for hours to construct a story that made as much as sense as possible.

But then I helped write and produce my first [feature article](#). It was an in-depth story about the struggle of service workers to unionize and fight for labor rights against major corporations that sought to retaliate against them for speaking out. It was the first time I felt like the articles I wrote mattered.

It was the first time I thought to myself, “I could be a reporter.”

If my sophomore year was about finding my voice and confidence as a writer, then my junior year was about discovering my abilities and limits as a multimedia storyteller.

My first venture was to build my podcast, which was an exploration into my passion for politics and activism. I had previously only delved into political and social issues by watching video essays online and having discussions with my friends. Now, I wanted to talk to real experts, those who had the life experiences and wisdom that I would only be able to gain years upon years down the line, if at all.

Episodes [2](#) and [3](#) of my podcast were especially important to me because they were the ones I had wanted to produce since the beginning: a two-part series covering the benefits and criticisms of affirmative action policies in higher education. As a Chinese American, I had often felt torn in the affirmative action debate between my commitment to diversity and equity, and the disdain my friends and family had for it because of how it seemed to discriminate against Asian Americans.

I first spoke to someone who shared my views, a fellow Chinese American who was unwavering in her work as part of an organization defending affirmative action. As someone who had struggled with my own identity engaging in political discourse and activism, it inspired and affirmed me to speak to someone who looked like me and was so dedicated to fighting for what they believed was right.

That is what journalism means to me—it’s given me a greater understanding of others, but also helped me learn about myself and my place in the world.

I then spoke to a critic in episode 3, a writer who did not criticize affirmative action for the “reverse-racism” reasons I had seen used by pundits on Fox News, but had a much more nuanced take about the way that race-based affirmative action tends to leave behind people of color in poverty—those who would benefit the most from higher education. Talking with him challenged long-held perceptions I had and because of that conversation, I became more cognizant of how poverty impacts education. That level of empathy that I gain from interviewing

diverse groups of people is something I always hope to impart onto others with my journalism work.

By the time second semester rolled around, it was time to return to my roots.

If talking with strangers made me anxious, the idea of video-taping them made me want lock myself in my house, never to see the sun again.

However, I realized I just had to dive in headfirst, so I committed myself to producing a video of the San Francisco Cherry Blossom festival as part of a multimedia package I was managing. The stubbornly gray, overcast weather in San Francisco on that fateful day seemed to match my mood. Despite the rain, I felt better and more comfortable the more I talked with people so excited to share their heritage and cultural history with me. I felt a part of their community in those moments, which I highlighted in my video by emphasizing the parts of their interviews where they talked about the love, tradition, and resiliency of the Japanese American diaspora.

By the end of the year, I had stuck my foot in the door of every storytelling medium I could: audio, video, writing, photography, and infographics. I assembled all that I had learned to bring to life a story that had been dividing people for weeks at that point: the pro-Palestinian Gaza solidarity encampments that had been erected at campuses across the countries, before some were violently torn down by police.

It was a story that was fraught with outrage, intense emotions, and featured opinions on opposite ends of the spectrum. I felt my anxiety rise in me again as I wondered how I would direct my team of people into crafting a story that all at once sought to correct misconceptions about the protesters, acknowledged the valid criticisms of students who broke laws, and was sensitive to ongoing Israel-Hamas war and those who had lost their lives and been harassed as a result of it.

I refused to let my fears conquer me though and I edited the article extensively to do justice to perspectives of the students and professors we interviewed.

My favorite stories to cover have always been the ones that center human beings on a mission. Their passion for activism and making the world a better place has inspired me, and I hope bringing their stories to light aids them in their mission to make this world just a little less dark.