University of Vermont

Center for Community News

Opportunities and Obstacles for News-Academic Partnerships

Summary of Findings

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Key Findings

The Center for Community News at UVM launched this project to understand how news-academic partnerships at U.S. colleges and universities are navigating evolving curricular demands, external partnerships, institutional constraints, and shifting student interests. Through interviews with 131 faculty leading these programs, CCN uncovered the specific obstacles to program success and the potential for growth, innovation, and community impact.

These are the key findings:

Opportunities for Growth

- **Partnerships with Professional Media Outlets**: 89 percent (117) of faculty members observed a strong interest from local news organizations in collaborating with student reporting programs.
- **Authentic Learning Experiences**: 87 percent (114) said that student reporting provides meaningful, real-world learning opportunities.
- **Filling Gaps in Local Journalism**: 83% (110) emphasized that news-academic partnerships are well-positioned to address the decline in local journalism, particularly in under-covered areas known as “news deserts.”
- **Institutional Recognition and Prestige**: 77 percent (101) noted that these partnerships often lead to students and university recognition, enhancing both the reputation of academic programs and their parent institutions.

Obstacles to Growth

Misaligned Incentive Structures: 66 percent (87) of faculty reported that universities often prioritize traditional academic publishing over public-facing, community-focused journalism, limiting institutional support for such partnerships.

Faculty Overload: 56 percent (73) mentioned that faculty are frequently stretched thin, balancing teaching, administrative duties, journalistic projects, and fundraising, leaving less time for managing the news/academic partnership and editing student work.

Lack of Program Continuity: 55 percent (72) noted that student turnover poses a major challenge. Varying levels of commitment, skill, and consistency from semester to semester hinder program stability.

Methodology

Between February and April 2025, a team of eight researchers from the Center for Community News conducted Zoom interviews with 131 faculty leading news-academic partnerships. Interview subjects were selected from a **national dataset** built by CCN.

Contact Us

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More CCN research, mapping and raw data can be found at https://www.uvm.edu/ccn/research-reports-and-case-studies.