



# University of Vermont

## Center for Community News

### **2025 National Conference** *Key Takeaways, Presentations and Research*

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## Introduction

In October 2025, the Center for Community News hosted its first-ever national conference on the UVM campus in Burlington, Vermont. More than 140 people — representing 60 universities and colleges from 32 states — attended the two-day conference focused on supporting and growing “news-academic partnerships.” Around the country, university and college-led journalism programs are contributing to local news coverage and giving students high-quality, hands-on experience in news reporting and production.

Attendees included leaders of philanthropic organizations, researchers and faculty — the majority of whom have spent time in the news industry. The two-day event provided a collaborative space to learn about the challenges and solutions related to the “teaching hospital” model for journalism and fostered conversations around how student journalism can play a vital role in filling gaps in local news coverage. Additionally, CCN staff learned more about how the center can support that work. This report is a condensed summary of some of the key highlights of the event.

[Attendee directory](#) (As of September 2025)

## CCN PRESENTATIONS

### **CCN Resources – Meg Little Reilly, Ben Cooley, Sima Bhowmik**

News-academic partnerships and student reporters supported by the Center for Community News are filling gaps in local news coverage spurred by the changing news industry.

The country has lost about a third of its newspapers over the past two decades, according to the [most recent State of Local News Report](#) by Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. The presence of local newspapers tend to be positively correlated with:

- Higher voter turnout





- More candidates in local elections
- More competitive elections
- Less partisan voting
- Stronger civil attachment
- Stronger connection to local community

CCN is growing its network of journalism faculty who are engaging in news-academic partnerships by building connections and collaborations, free resources and research.

Resources include:

- [Starter kit for educators looking to launch new program](#)
- [Curriculum development tools, including templates and assignments](#)
- [Slack channel for help and networking](#)

*The full list of resources can be found at <https://www.uvm.edu/ccn>*

### **Research:**

CCN is studying the growth and the impact of news-academic partnerships. The center has developed data visualization tools and conducted research to further the understanding of university or college-led student reporting programs.

### **Recent reports:**

- [The Surprising Breadth of Student Reporting in Public Media](#) (June 2025)
- [2025 Benchmark Study on Student Reporting Programs](#) (May 2025)





- [Local News as a Public Good — University-led media newsletters](#) (April 2025)
- [Student Statehouse Reporting](#) (April 2025)
- [Opportunities and Obstacles Report](#) (Aug 2025)
- [Faculty Profiles Report](#) (Aug 2025)

In the future, the center is interested in embarking on and supporting research related to how journalism professors and students are adapting to and adopting artificial intelligence technology in the classroom setting, as well as how student reporting programs are affecting the characteristics of their local news industry. The center is also interested in studying the quality of the three dozen statehouse reporting programs.

### **Future Growth – Richard Watts**

Current landscape:

- 172 colleges and universities in the U.S. have at least one existing or emerging news-academic partnership today.
- There are 227 total news-academic partnerships, meaning some schools house multiple programs.
- As of 2025, there are 48 emerging news-academic programs in 2025, a 27% increase over 2024.
- Minority-serving Institutions now run 40 news-academic reporting programs.
- 69% of news-academic reporting programs are at public institutions, and 31% are at private institutions.

CCN expects the number of news-academic partnerships to grow to about 300 by February 2026. The center's mission is to help expand that number to 500 within the next two years.



## Key focal points for growth

Public media organizations: According to research published by CCN in June 2025 by CCN, there is strong potential for increased collaboration between university-led student reporting programs and public media organizations.

- 88 percent of public media organizations provide opportunities for college students to help cover their community (282 of 319 NPR and/or PBS affiliates.)
- 59 percent of public media organizations provide intensive, regular and ongoing opportunities for college students (188 of 319 stations.)
- Many public media organizations (41 of 319) make teaching students their core mission - 13 percent of local stations are “teaching hospitals” for journalism.
- Students at these public media organizations serve rural, suburban and urban audiences, many in news deserts. Public radio signals reach over 95 percent of Americans.
- 50 percent of all public media organizations are licensed to a college or university (161 of 319 stations.)

Student media organizations: Many student-led publications at universities and colleges around the country are already covering news in their local communities. There is an opportunity for CCN to strengthen its network by identifying more areas for collaboration with student publications. In October 2025, the center launched a [map tracking student newspapers in the country](#).

Mentorship: CCN is looking for more ways to support faculty who are in the early stages of their news-academic partnership program. CCN’s annual Champions program provides support and coaching in addition to a cash reward for educators who are leading the way for university-led reporting programs in their region. In 2026, CCN plans to significantly expand the Champions program.



New cohorts: With the continued growth of news-academic partnerships, CCN is identifying more areas of need and interest. During the 2025 conference, CCN hosted multiple small-group conversations around the following topics:

- Spanish Language reporting
- Statehouse reporting
- Innovations in teaching
- Journalism Research
- Arts and Life
- Sports news

CCN posed the following questions to conference attendees:

- What new resources do you need?
- Where do you see opportunities for more collaboration?
- What topics/beats/challenges do you want us to focus on in the coming year?

## **Collaborator Presentations**

### **Origins of the News-Academic Movement**

Eric Newton, former director of journalism for the Knight Foundation, presented a history of the “teaching hospital” of journalism education, which dates back to the conception of the “Missouri Method” at Mizzou in 1908.

Lessons from history, according to Newton:

- Don’t cater to a collapsing industry. Focus on students and the community.





- Don't slow down the adoption of new technologies and practices. Choose partners who will empower your students with the skills to be successful in the future.
- Don't ignore transparency and community engagement
- Don't hunker down, and network out to similar programs to learn and build best practices

### **Innovations and Collaborations**

In her presentation regarding innovation and collaborations, Dr. Amanda Bright, clinical professor at the University of Georgia and director of the [Journalism Innovation Lab](#) at the Cox Institute for Journalism Innovation, shared trends and best practices that leaders of news-academic partnerships should consider when improving or shaping their programs.

Trends included those in the area of

- Website/newsletter/app design
- Social media
- Artificial intelligence
- Partnerships with “newsfluencers”
- Short-form vertical video
- Data and explainers

### **Sustaining Your News-Academic Partnership**

CCN hosted a guest panel discussion with [Duc Luu](#), director of sustainability initiatives of the journalism program at the Knight Foundation, [Dale Anglin](#), executive director of Press Forward and [Danielle Altenburg](#), director of principal gifts UVM Foundation provided recommendations





and insight into how leaders of news-academic partnerships can garner funding for their programs.

Important takeaways:

- Student experiences and benefits should be at the core of every conversation.
- Asking donors to invest money into a problem is not a good pitch. Focus on solutions.
- Know what type of messaging has worked well. Press Forward has [toolkits](#) for how to approach funding conversations.
- Harness alumni base and research funding ecosystem of home university or college.
- Find ways to collaborate with similar programs and come together for funding.
- Build relationships with university or college foundations that are connected with different networks, including those with relationships with student clubs, alumni groups and other causes connected to campus.

### **The View from Leadership**

David Boardman, interim provost at Temple University and dean of the Klein College of Media and Communication; and William Falls, dean of the UVM College of Arts and Sciences also led a panel highlighting the ways student reporting programs are benefiting their home universities and colleges.

Boardman showcased [Temple University's Community Journalism Initiatives](#), and noted how the student reporting programs at the university provided impactful experiences and exposure for students, leading to increased visibility for programs. The work students produced built trust within the community and opened doors for new partnerships, collaborators and funding opportunities.





## About the Center for Community News at UVM

Established in July 2022, the Center for Community News (CCN) at the University of Vermont is a nonpartisan organization that aims to grow and strengthen university-led reporting programs across the U.S. The center has its roots in the University of Vermont's [Community News Service](#), a news-academic partnership created in 2019. The program connects student reporters with editors with proven track records in the state's local news industry to produce high-quality, trustworthy content for news outlets across the state.

Community News Service in 2025:

- 80 students enrolled in Fall 2025 journalism classes.
- Of those students, 44 worked as reporters in the community
- More than 300 original news items produced in Spring and Summer 2025.
- News items produced by student reporters were picked up more than 600 times by local Vermont news outlets.
- 35 active news partners so far in 2025.

In addition to individual donors and the University of Vermont College of Arts and Sciences, CCN is supported by the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#). In June 2024, the center reached a major funding milestone, earning a \$5 million commitment from the Knight Foundation, and an additional \$2 million in matching funds from the [MacArthur Foundation](#) and [University of Vermont](#).