Academic-News Collaborations

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Introduction

Millions of Americans get their news from student reporters working in university-coordinated newsrooms, news labs and classes. The Center for Community News documents collaborations between colleges/universities and local media outlets where student reporting provides local content. These are high-touch programs in which faculty teach and mentor students, edit and assign work and coordinate with media partners — enabling local stories that would not exist otherwise.

CCN has identified about 120 programs at more than 100 colleges and universities. In this report we summarize some of the programs and their attributes. Added details are provided on our website.

Trainings and support: If you are interested in starting one of these programs, or growing the one you have, the Center for Community News is conducting free trainings around the country. CCN also manages two funding programs — one for individual faculty members and one for Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

See the Center for Community News website for other resources or to add your program to the national data base.

Programs

University Newsrooms/News Labs

Drawing from the "teaching hospital" model, university-run newsrooms provide content directly to local, state and national audiences. For example, the University of Missouri runs five newsrooms, a daily paper, the local NPR affiliate, a commercial TV station, a magazine and a daily business news wire service. Faculty across the curriculum train and manage the student reporters/editors through classes and the newsrooms.

In other examples, Arizona State University coordinates a daily TV newscast, Cronkite News, that airs twice a day on the public TV station housed at the university. Cronkite stories are available through a daily news digest sent to TV and radio stations and print outlets across the state. In late 2021, the University of Georgia took over the operation of a previously family-owned community newspaper, the Oglethorpe Echo, and runs it in-house — managing student reporting, editing, advertising, communications and staffing the paper with students from a capstone reporting class. Temple University's reporting classes support its own online news site that covers neighborhoods in Philadelphia. A faculty member oversees about 60 student journalists each semester, while a full-time paid staffer handles the website.

In these models student reporters provide the staff and editorial content, often under the guidance of faculty editors, working in a mix of course credit, classroom instruction and for-pay opportunities. And the content is delivered directly to the public.

A second version of this model is university-managed news labs in coordination with local media partners. University staff or faculty direct the programs, edit the content to journalistic standards and coordinate with partners. For example, at the University of Washington, the News Lab operates like a small news bureau, with media partners providing some funding to the students as stipends for their work. At Boston University the Justice Media Computational Journalism Co-Lab (a data analysis class) provides data projects on request to a list of media partners. The class also works with other classes at BU to provide data for reporting projects.

At the CUNY Newmark Graduate School of Journalism, at least 10 classes work with media partners to provide content to news outlets. Students regularly report stories and produce photographs and video packages. The program manages the Columbia News Service, which publishes the best student work and operates under a Creative Commons License, allowing its content to be picked up for free by other outlets.

At Northwestern's Medill School, graduate students in the Social Justice Reporting program partner with local media outlets on projects that aim to provide solutions to community problems. Many of the stories are geared toward readers in historically marginalized and underserved communities. Kent State recently created the Collaborative NewsLab for three to five students per semester — and seven to 11 in the summer — to write stories for four local media partners. Grant money pays the students a stipend, and a few receive credit. A part-time professional editor oversees the project and ensures the work meets journalistic standards.

Notably, all of these programs — and many more not mentioned here — use university resources to fund faculty and staff. Students learn by doing, and democracy benefits from news coverage that otherwise would not exist, often in areas traditional media have neglected. In most cases, university funding models based on tuition revenues fund the bulk of the programs. Universities and colleges also raise additional dollars through grants and alumni donations.

Statehouse News Services

Given the importance of covering state legislatures and the decline in professional statehouse reporting, university coordinated statehouse reporting programs are growing increasingly crucial in providing legislative news coverage. During 2022, about 250 student statehouse reporters produced more than 1,000 stories made available to more than 1,200 media outlets in 17 states.

CCN has identified 17 existing university managed statehouse news programs with two starting spring 2023 (Texas, Vermont).

Most of these programs are directed by professionals hired for that specific purpose, who often come with statehouse reporting experience. Students generally participate through advanced

reporting or capstone classes. Some of these programs are residential, where students move to the state capital for a semester (e.g. Montana and Idaho), but in most cases students can easily travel to statehouses from campus. Students receive credit and in some cases are also paid. Funding is also often available for summer coverage.

For example, the University of Nebraska runs the Nebraska News Service — a statewide wire service with about 100 clients across the state. Students cover the legislature and statewide news, and their work is shared with news organizations for free, so long as they give the students the byline.

University News Sites

A number of colleges and universities provide publicly accessible and professionally edited student-produced news through on-line sources. In most cases, the content on these sites is available for local media to re-use as long as they cite appropriately and limit editing.

For example, when the local paper closed in Oxford, Ohio, Miami University created the Oxford Observer, a website updated weekly with stories from student reporters in capstone reporting and editing classes. Faculty members oversee the Observer and edit student work – providing community news to towns that no longer have a traditional newspaper.

Denison University students cover rural Lickling County, Ohio, and their stories go up on a reporting project website for local outlets to pick up. Often, they do. When Intel announced a $20 billion chip plant would be built nearby, students and faculty at Denison covered the impact on local neighbors — the only media outlet providing those stories. Denison is refocusing the colleges' journalism curriculum to provide more local reporting.

Similarly, Chapman University in California revamped its journalism curriculum so that all classes from beginning to advanced reporting are run in tandem with a local non-profit digital news site, the Voice of Orange County. The student reporters focus on reporting on communities and perspectives ignored by the media enterprises that concentrate on the wealthier parts of the county.

At the University of Florida, student work from an amalgam of classes is distributed to and republished by Florida's largest news organizations through a program called Fresh Take Florida. The content is distributed through agreements with AP, CNN, the Florida Public Radio Network, Gatehouse/Gannett, Tribune Media Company, McClatchy Co. and TEGNA. It has been an effective mechanism for students' exposure to hiring editors across Florida. More than 300 stories have been published since the program started.

Gary Green, who co-founded the program at UF with Ted Bridis, created Fresh Take Georgia when he moved to Kennesaw University to make student work available to media partners across the state. Fresh Take Georgia students participate through a class with the goal of

pitching and writing stories for media outlets. Both programs also have a legislative coverage component.

Sometimes these programs take on a particular focus. For example, the University of Michigan manages the Great Lakes Echo, a regional environmental news service focused on the Great Lakes region whose stories are often republished, reposted or linked to by other media outlets, environmental groups, industry groups and government agencies.

Susan Zake and Jacqueline Marino at Kent State focus their experiential learning program – the Collaborative NewsLab – on rural outlets. Its content is made broadly available through the Ohio Connection, but partners are usually rural papers and outlets.

Temple University's journalism program gives attention to urban areas with the online news site Philadelphia Neighborhoods, which emails a weekly newsletter to subscribers. Sharing content is part of the university's goal, so the outlet's website features a "Use Our Stories" link to give other publications access.

At Mercer University, students work side by side with professional reporters in the Macon News Room, learning by doing and contributing stories about the community. Mercer combines student reporting, local media partnerships and professional reporting through the University's Center for Collaborative Journalism.

At the University of New Mexico, professor Michael V. Marcotte started the New Mexico News Port to serve as a "teaching-hospital model" for journalism students at UNM and to create and publish stories that benefit the local news ecosystem. Students from intermediate and advanced reporting courses produce the work, and one of the partners is the independent student newspaper, The Daily Lobo.

At the University of Alabama, professor Chandra Clark leads broadcast classes that partner students with local and national media platforms for coverage of specific issues. Since she started teaching in 2009, Clark has always had a media partner, often a local TV affiliate in Birmingham and Tuscaloosa. Clark recently secured a partnership with The World Games, so that 25 students could see their coverage of the international sporting event air nationally and internationally.

University based organizations

In addition to coordinating student reporting, a number of colleges and universities are providing leadership, space, faculty creativity and fundraising skills to build centers and start programs that provide a range of services to media partners, stakeholders and the public.

For example, The University of North Carolina's journalism school hosts the Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Journalism — an organization with a mission to "grow a more equitable and sustainable future for local news, the journalists who make it and the

communities that need it." UNC provides offices for the center, hires the staff and helps raise money.

Northwestern's Medill School launched its Local News Initiative in 2017 with a mission to "reinvent the relationship between news organizations and audiences to elevate enterprises that empower citizens." The initiative provides deep-dive analysis of reader and subscriber data for 104 news outlets to assess their performance and finetune their strategic planning. It also hosts the latest research from Penny Abernathy on news deserts and the role of the corporatization of media in destroying local news. The Metro Media Lab spun out of the Local News Initiative to pair Medill graduate students with community news partners in the Chicago area to help those outlets develop reader-engagement projects.

The University of Wisconsin, Madison, houses Wisconsin Watch with a mission to "increase the quality and quantity of investigative reporting in Wisconsin, while training current and future investigative journalists." And at the University of Missouri, the Mississippi River Basin Agriculture and Water Desk is a collaborative reporting project focusing on environmental, agriculture and water issues, using the Report for America infrastructure to place 10 reporters at outlets across the basin. And, as mentioned above, Mercer University runs the Macon Newsroom, with two professional reporters covering the community.

At the University of Southern California, journalism professor Gabriel Kahn collaborated with the school's computer science department to develop Crosstown, a website that aggregates government-collected data — traffic accidents, parking tickets, construction permits, resident complaints — and makes it available for news outlets to tap into for stories. Kahn is now helping news outlets in three cities develop their own versions of Crosstown.

Classes

Special topics, capstone classes

Many programs are based around a particular class, sometimes an advanced reporting class, program capstone class or a special topics class. Some of these repeat every year. Some change depending on the teacher or the semester. Many classes feed students and stories to the news labs, newsrooms and websites mentioned above or have direct partnerships with media outlets.

For example, LSU's Cold Case class investigates racist killings from Louisiana's past to write stories published in coordination with state media outlets. See CCN's case study on the class for The class is offered every fall, and stories run in media outlets across the state.

At American University, Sheri Williams teaches Race, Ethnic and Community Reporting, an upper-level journalism class that changes media partners each semester it is offered. Stories have followed different themes: a semester writing about what it means to be Black on campus in partnership with the Nation, working with Teen Vogue on a project called "Racial Reckoning: a Year After a Movement Rocked the Nation" and more.

At Iowa's Simpson College, senior journalism capstone students work with Investigate Midwest on public affairs projects published online and available to other outlets. Professor Dee Hall at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, leads a 400-level investigative reporting class focusing on in-depth stories in partnership with Wisconsin Watch — a non-profit investigative reporting network. Wisconsin Watch also funds Hall directly. Stories are distributed to hundreds of editors around Wisconsin and beyond.

At California's Pepperdine University, the senior capstone class partners with The Malibu Times on special reporting projects related to Malibu and surrounding areas.

At Eastern Michigan University, professor Sadaf Ali leads an upper-level broadcast journalism course that partners with NPR affiliate WEMU. Students produce 6 to 8–minute audio stories that are aired on the station. Ali provides added editing support to reduce the burden on the station and provide air-ready pieces. Chris Evans leads a similar project at the University of Illinois, helping students produce hundreds of stories a semester for the local NPR affiliate through advanced and introductory level reporting classes that he teaches.

Erin Seigel McIntyre, a professor of journalism at UNC, partners her advanced reporting students with different news organizations each semester — often around specific issues or policies, such as public health. McIntyre won a 2020 ONA Online News Association Challenge Grant that has provided added support to the collaborations.

At the University of Georgia, professor Mark Johnson takes a fall photojournalism class out for an intensive three-day workshop in a small Georgia town. Students spend the weekend taking photos that are reviewed by a jury of photographers, shared in a community-wide forum and published in media outlets. They also do this with several statewide events, such as the Georgia National Fair, providing photos to outlets.

At the University of Colorado at Boulder, professor Hillary Rosner teaches a "special topics" journalism class in which a small group of graduate students function as a pop-up newsroom, diving deeply into single subject areas with stories published at the local nonprofit news organization, the Boulder Reporting Lab. A recent class focused on the health impacts of the Marshall Fire — the fire that destroyed more than 1,000 homes.

At Concordia University in Canada, professor Aphrodite Salas took five students deep into the country's north to cover the work of the federal reconciliation commission.

Some programs also fund faculty or professional staff to coordinate students receiving funding or internship credits, working in independent studies or simply volunteering. Chris Roush, dean at Quinnipiac University, created the Ability Media Group — which covers the lack of representation of people living with different abilities — and hired a professional reporter to edit and coordinate the program.

At the University of Vermont, students receive internship credit for enrolling in reporting classes taught by local reporters and editors as part of the Community News Service. The university hires professional reporters to lead the students and provides added funds for an editor to work as a liaison with 20 community media partners. The internship classes generate about 100 published stories a semester.

Student Media

Student media outlets are also playing a role in covering communities off campus or in providing independent news of university activities. Because student media is generally independent of university administrations, these outlets can provide coverage that university-managed programs may not.

At Eastern Kentucky University, student media advisor Tricia Fulks Kelley facilitates a partnership between the student paper, The Eastern Progress, and the local Richmond Register to share content. Because both publications have small staffs, student journalists can supplement their coverage while giving students bylines outside their campus paper.

The NextGen Journalism Club at Southeastern University, which has no student paper, grew out of professor Adrienne Garvey's plan to fill that gap. The club works with The Free Press out of Tampa, bolstering local coverage and engaging students in stories off campus.

The Northerner, the student-run news organization at Northern Kentucky University, has a content sharing partnership with LINK-NKY – a news organization that covers the state's northern counties. Through this partnership, LINK publishes student stories of interest to the broader community. Media advisor Michelle Day also engages her news media workshop class in writing stories for the LINK — which may also run in The Northerner.

At West Virginia University, student media advisor Madison Cook has organized a collaboration between The Daily Athenaeum (the student newspaper) and The Dominion Post (a community newspaper) in which the Post prints and inserts the student newspaper into its regular. The partnership extends the reach and audience of the student newspaper and provides more local content for rural communities in the state of West Virginia.

Faculty

At the core of these programs are committed and passionate faculty using their skills to initiate collaborations, create classes and navigate – sometimes challenging – institutions.

For example, at the University of North Texas, professor Dorothy Bland is involved in collaborations between her classes and other classes with the Denton Record-Chronicle and the NT Daily, the student-run news outlet. Bland also won money from the Scripps-Howard Foundation to start a program that brings high school students to campus to learn about reporting in the summer and then pays them to work for the local paper in their community.

When Terri Finneman at the University of Kansas, a research professor, realized the nearby small town of Eudora no longer had a local paper, she stepped in to create the Eudora Times and raised money to hire students to write local stories. Meg Heckman and her colleagues at Northeastern saw a similar need in urban Boston when they started The Scope, a magazine with a social-justice bent that gives voice to residents in sparsely covered parts of the city. And at Endicott College, a private school with a small journalism program, professor Lara Salahi has been partnering her classes with local Gannett papers — a challenge as Gannett cuts editors and reporters.

In Philadelphia, Professor Andrea Wentzel of Temple co-founded the Germantown Info Hub, a community journalism project that grew out of a study on the needs and assets of a city neighborhood. The Info Hub started as a collaboration between a community advisory group, researchers from Temple and Jefferson University, a community organizer and community reporter and various media partners. Students are involved through classes, including one through which students and residents co-report solutions journalism stories.

At Syracuse University, professor Ashley Kang helped start the South Side Newspaper Project, which publishes The Stand. Kang recently joined the staff of Syracuse public radio station WAER — also under the umbrella of the Newhouse School of Public Communications — to expand community news coverage there.

A few years ago, the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri started a program where students spend part of their winter break at a small community paper and help with one aspect of their digital outreach, from building Facebook pages to making Instagram posts and creating online newsletters. University of Georgia Dean Charles Davis heard about the program, and tasked UGA professor Amanda Bright with starting a similar program, sending students out to community papers to build new digital tools for rural news platforms. The program benefits the rural papers and helps students learn about these community papers as possible places to work in the future.

These faculty and many more are adept at finding resources within and outside of their universities to start, staff and manage these programs. They are skilled champions for local news, giving students the applied learning experiences they crave and directing university resources towards local news.

Conclusion

Universities and colleges can provide leadership and resources to address the local news crisis. Many are doing something as this report documents. But many could do more. Take just four-year colleges, there are about 2,500 – many more could be bringing their students and resources to telling stories that are no longer being published, partnering where they can and stepping up to start new programs as needed. Democracy needs local news; colleges and universities are part of the solution. Students are looking for meaningful experiences, and to learn by doing, as these programs illustrate.

At the core of these local media partnerships are creative and committed faculty and staff. Turning a class into a reporting partnership with local media requires added work editing and reviewing student stories to ensure work meets journalistic standards. Universities should consider allowing these classes to count for extra CE's in workload plans or bringing other resources like part-time editors to enable these programs.

Colleges and universities can lead. We hope this report shows some of the ways that some are doing just that and meeting their public service mission to give back to their community.

References & Methods

This report is based on 79 interviews and 120 survey responses as well as first-hand observation of college and university media partnerships between July 1 and December 30, 2022. Richard Watts, the Director of the Center for Community News visited and interviewed about 50 program leaders in the last six months. Other interviews were conducted by CCN staff and reporters Carolyn Shapiro, Emily Sheftman, Hannah Kirkpatrick, Jack Rooney, Lauren Milideo and Sarah Gamard.

Our deep appreciation to the many program leaders who took the time to talk about what they do. Their obvious passion and ingenuity is why so many of these programs exist. Thanks also to the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and generous donors to the College of Arts & Sciences at the University of Vermont that provided the funding for this work.

Interviewees

Adam Berland, Associate Professor of Geography, Ball State University, 11/16/22
Adam Kuban, Ball State University, Professor of Journalism, 11/10/22
Adrienne Garvey, Professor of Broadcasting and Journalism, Southeastern University, 08/09/22
Alan Miller, Visiting Instructor, Denison College, 10/05/22
Alison Jones, 9th Street Managing Editor, Duke University, 11/25/22
Alix Bryan Campos, Assistant Professor, Virginia Commonwealth University, 09/07/22
Amanda Bright, Academic Professional, University of Georgia, 11/29/22
Andrea Otanez, Journalism Educator, University of Washington, 09/19/22
Anthony Hatcher, Professor of Journalism and Chair of Department, 11/14/22
Bill Adair, Professor of the Practice Journalism, Duke University, 11/25/22
Brett Oppegaard, Assistant Professor of Journalism and Department Chair, University of Hawaii, 08/10/22
Brian Creech, Assistant Professor of Journalism, 12/02/22
Bryan Chester, General Manager, Colombia Missourian, University of Missouri, 10/20/22
Caroline Brouchard, Student, University of Florida 11/25/22
Carolyn and Ashley Kang, Content Producer, Syracuse University, 12/23/22
Charles Davis, Dean of the Grady College of Journalism and Communication, University of Georgia, 11/28/22
Chris Bolt, Director and Editor, WAER, Syracuse University
Chris Drew, Fred Jones Greer, Jr. Endowed Chair; Professional-in-Residence, Louisiana State University, 10/22/22, 11/15/22
Chris Roush, Dean of the School of Communications, Quinnipiac University, 10/22/22, 11/27/22
Christina Leonard, Professor of Practice, Arizona State University, 11/28/22

Christopher Malo, Assistant Professor of Practice, Temple University, 12/02/22
Colleen Steffen, Executive Editor, The Statehouse File, Franklin College, 10/04/22
Courtney Cowgill, Visiting Professor, University of Montana, 10/17/22
Damon Kiesow, Knight Chain, Professor, University of Missouri, 10/22/22
Dave Stevens, Professional in Residence, Quinnipiac University, 11/22/22
David Kurpius, Dean, Missouri School of Journalism, University of Missouri, 10/20/22
Dean's Panel, Desert U, 10/22/22
Debbie Blankenship, Assistant Professor of Practice, Mercer University, 10/22/22
Dorothy Bland, Professor, University of North Texas, 09/23/22
Elisabeth Stephen, Associate Professor, University of Missouri, 11/28/22
Elizabeth Stephens, Editor, Colombian Missourian, University of Missouri, 10/20/22
Erin Kelley Bland, Associate Director of Donor Relations, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 08/18/22
Gary Green, Director, Center for Sustainable Journalism; Lecturer of Communication, Kennesaw University, 12/06/22
Glenn Moseley, Senior Instructor, University of Idaho, 10/14/22
Heather Dunn, Faculty Associate, Arizona State University, 10/27/22
Heather Isherwood, Associate Professor, University of Missouri, 10/20/22
James Gormley, Lecturer, State University of New York, - New Paltz, 09/20/22
James Piscia, Assistant Professor, University of Illinois – Springfield, 09/14/22
Jerry Berger, Lecturer, Boston University, 10/27/22
John Schmeltzer, Professor, University of Oklahoma, 9/22/22
John Tomasic, Artist in Residence, University of Washington, 12/05/22
Kari Lydensen, Assistant Professor, Northwestern University, 12/17/22
Kathleen McElroy, Professor, University of Texas – Austin, 06/24/22
Kristine Blair, Dean of Liberal Arts, Duquesne University, 10/22/22
Lex Weaver, former Editor-in-Chief, The Scope, Northeastern University, 12/23/22
Logan Finney, Associate Producer, Idaho Public Radio, 10/18/22
Madison Cook, Director of Student Media, West Virginia University, 09/15/22
Maggie Lee, Co-editor, TAPinto Greater Oleans, 09/16/22
Mario Marillo, Professor, Hofstra University, 11/11/22
Mark Horvit, Professor, University of Missouri, 11/28/22
Mark Johnson, Senior Lecturer, University of Georgia, 11/29/22
Marlys Shulda, Associate Development Director, University of Kansas, 10/22/22
Marquita Smith, Associate Professor, University of Mississippi, 11/11/22
Martin Kaiser, Managing Director, Capital News Service, University of Maryland 11/03/22
Matt Carroll, Professor of Practice, Northeastern University, 12/12/22
Meg Heckman, Assistant Professor, Northeastern University, 12/04/22
Michael Marcotte, Professor of Practice, University of New Mexico, 10/18/22
Michelle Day, Professor of Practice, Northern Kentucky University, 10/18/22
Mike Shapiro, Founder and CEO, TAPinto, 11/15/22

Mimi Perreault, Assistant Professor, Eastern Tennessee University, 06/28/22
Norberto Santana Jr., Publisher, Voice of OC, Chapman University, 09/20/22
North Carolina A&T, 12/20/22
OJ Student, Oglethorpe, ECHO Class 11.29.2022
Pam Walck, Associate Professor, Duquesne University, 10/22/22
Patricia Gaston, Professor of Journalism, University of Kansas, 10/22/22
Phil Napoli, Professor of Public Policy, Duke University, 12/22/22
Rafael Lorente, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, University of Maryland, 11/03/22
Raul Reis, Dean, Hussman School of Journalism and Media, University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, 11/16/22
Richard Buson, Senior Instructor, University of Central Florida, 11/03/22
Richard Lee, Professor, St. Bonaventure, 09/16/22
Rick Warme, CEO, Advocate Media, 12/20/22
Ryan Famuliner, News Director, KBIA University of Missouri 10/22/22
Shannon McGregor, Assistant Professor, 06/25/22
Sheri Williams, American University 8.19.2022.
Susan Kirkman Zake, Professor, Kent State, 11/29/22
Thomas Grant, Associate Professor, Abraham Agriculture College, 11/03/22
Tim Morris, Managing Editor, Verite, Louisiana State University, 11/21/22
Tracy van Moorlehem, Senior Lecturer, Director of Journalism Residency, Northwestern University, 12/17/22
Tricia Kelley, Assistant Professor, Eastern Kentucky University, 08/10/22

On the cover

Temple University students Nordea Lewis and Ashley Alex reporting as part of Temple's Philadelphia Neighborhoods local news initiative.

Image courtesy of Temple University and Philadelphia Neighborhoods.