

University-Led Statehouse Student Reporting Programs

Sarah Gamard, Richard Watts,
Emily Sheftman & Hannah Kirkpatrick

Draft Report 2/20/2023



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
**CENTER FOR
COMMUNITY NEWS**

Contents

Contents	1
Executive Summary	2
Introduction.....	2
About the Center for Community News & the Report	3
University-Led Statehouse Student Reporting Programs	4
Overview.....	5
Professional faculty and staff	5
Media partnerships	5
Student learning.....	5
Dedicated Faculty Member/Staff.....	6
Legislative sessions.....	6
Proximity	7
Recommendations.....	7
Summary by state.....	7
University of Florida: Fresh Take Florida	8
Kennesaw University: Fresh Take Georgia	9
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Capstone Reporting Class.....	9
The University of Idaho's Journalism and Mass Media (JAMM) McClure Journalism Internship Program	10
Franklin College Statehouse File	11
University of Illinois - Springfield, Public Affairs Reporting	12
University of Kansas Statehouse Reporting class	13
The Louisiana State University Manship School Statehouse Bureau	13
University of Maryland Capital News Service Annapolis Bureau.....	14
Boston University Statehouse Program	15
Michigan State University Capital News Service	15
The University of Missouri's State Government Reporting Program	16
University of Montana Legislative News Service	17
University of Nebraska's Nebraska News Service	17
SUNY New Paltz: The Legislative Gazette.....	18
University of Oklahoma Gaylord News.....	18
Virginia Commonwealth University - Capital News Service	19
University of Richmond - Capital News Service.....	20
University of Washington State Government Communications Program.....	20
New in Spring 2023.....	21
The University of Texas, Austin - Statehouse Reporting	21
University of Vermont Capital News Service.....	21
On Hold.....	22
Brigham Young University Capital West News Service	22
References.....	23
On the Cover.....	23
Corrections	23
Report Interviews	24

Executive Summary

This report documents 17 existing university/college led statehouse reporting efforts, based on interviews with leaders at those programs. In addition, we describe two new programs starting in the spring of 2023 (Texas and Vermont) and one on hold (Utah).

During 2022, about 250 student statehouse reporters produced more than 1,000 stories that were made available to more than 1,200 media outlets in the 17 states.

The focus of this report is programs directed by colleges and universities where student content is made publicly available to news organizations and the state's citizens.

These programs are managed by professional staff and faculty -- usually former statehouse reporters – who review all content before it is posted. There is broad interest from media partners across each state.

Content is generally made available at no cost and shared with media outlets, either through publicly accessible websites, list serves and state press associations.

In some cases the programs are residential (Idaho, Montana) but in most cases the colleges and universities are located within driving distance, and sometimes within a few blocks of the state legislature.

There are 30 states with no programs, but a great deal of potential for colleges/universities close to state capitals to start them. Given the importance of covering state level legislation, the report recommends that more institutions create these programs for their students and to provide legislative content to media platforms.

Introduction

The nation has lost 27,000 staff from news rooms in the last fifteen years and more than one-fifth of Americans live in areas categorized as news deserts.¹

The decimation of news reporting has also hammered coverage of the nation's statehouses. Reports show statehouse reporting declines and more [recently a move to part-time over fulltime reporters](#).²

¹ Local News Initiative, "[The State of Local News](#)," 2022; PEW Research, "[10 charts about America's newsrooms](#)," April 28, 2020.

² PEW Research, "[Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are On The Beat Full Time](#)," April 5, 2022.

Yet as statehouse reporting declines, state level policy and funding decisions are more important than ever. It is in the nation's state legislatures where decisions over redistricting, health funding, gun rights, and [now abortion rights](#) will be decided.³

One bright spot in statehouse news coverage is the [increasing role student reporters](#) working in university/college statehouse reporting programs are providing.⁴ Over time, these student reporters have become a trusted part of the statehouse reporting corps, and in some states are the largest news bureau in the capital.

This report documents 17 existing university/college led statehouse reporting efforts, based on interviews with leaders at those 17 programs. In addition, we describe two new programs starting in the spring of 2023 (Texas and Vermont) and one on hold (Utah).

During 2022, about 250 student statehouse reporters produced more than 1,000 stories that were made available to more than 1,100 media outlets in the 17 states, according to interviews with leaders of the programs.

The focus of this report is programs directed by colleges and universities where student content is made publicly available to news organizations and the state's citizens, often at no cost.

These are professional level programs with skilled students, professional staff and faculty -- usually former statehouse reporters -- and broad interest from media partners across the state.

About the Center for Community News & the Report

The Center's mission is to document college and university programs where student reporting is contributing local news in partnership with local media organizations or sometimes in college run news rooms. Local news is more than just a trusted source of critical information; it's an essential ingredient in a healthy democracy. Communities with dedicated local news organizations report higher levels of civic engagement, social cohesion, and effective problem-solving. The Center is focused on bringing together the skills of students and faculty and the resources of colleges and universities to address the local news crisis. The Center is funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the UVM College of Arts & Sciences, and individual donors.

The principal author and researcher of this report is Sarah Gamard, a graduate of The Louisiana State University Manship School Statehouse Bureau. Any corrections or additions should be sent to Hannah Kirkpatrick at hkirkpat@uvm.edu. We welcome comments and suggestions.

³ Kate Zernike, "[The New Landscape of the Abortion Fight](#)," *The New York Times*, Dec. 10 2022

⁴ PEW Research, "[Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises](#)." See section: "[In some states, students account for a large and growing share of statehouse reporters](#)."

University-Led Statehouse Student Reporting Programs

State	University/College	Name of program	Students (annual)	News Outlets
Florida	University of Florida Florida A&M University	Fresh Take Florida The Famuan Online	10-20 40	80 -
Georgia	Kennesaw University	Fresh Take Georgia	10-20	30
Hawai'i	University of Hawai'i at Manoa	Legislative Reporting Senior Capstone	12	1
Idaho	University of Idaho	Statehouse Program	2	6
Indiana	Franklin College	The Statehouse File	10	35
Illinois	University of Illinois Springfield	Public Affairs Reporting	9-11	9-11
Kansas	University of Kansas	Statehouse reporting course	10-18	190
Louisiana	Louisiana State University	LSU Manship News Service Statehouse Bureau	10-12	90
Maryland	University of Maryland	Capital News Service Annapolis Bureau	35-47	30
Massachusetts	Boston University	Boston Statehouse Program	24-30	14
Michigan	Michigan State University	Capital News Service	15	40-45
Missouri	University of Missouri	State Government Reporting Program	25-35	75
Montana	University of Montana	Legislative News Service	3	250
Nebraska	University of Nebraska	Nebraska News Service	25-35	100
New York	SUNY New Paltz	Legislative Gazette	12	0*
Oklahoma	University of Oklahoma	Gaylord News	7-10	60
Virginia	Virginia Commonwealth University	Capital News Service	10-15	100
Washington	University of Washington	Government Communication Program	4	100

*See notes.

Notes: Student number estimates are two year averages and are based on self-reported data from each program leader. The number of media partners is also provided by each program. A ? reflects unknown and the New Paltz number reflects a program that makes content available through newsletter and website directly to the public. Program totals are an average of the middle range of each student estimate. Many of the programs require 4-7 stories per student per semester. The total number of stories is based on the low-end of that number (4) times the number of students on average (250) to arrive at 1,000 average number of stories per year. This number is almost certainly conservative. Examples of those stories are posted in the per state summaries below. Brigham Young (where the program is now paused) is not included in the above chart. Texas and Vermont where programs start in January 2023, are also not included. Only included are University/College run statehouse reporting programs, not internships.

Overview

Professional faculty and staff

Across all of these programs are professional staff and faculty who are highly trained and skilled in both the ethics of journalism and in statehouse reporting. In all cases, it is those staff or faculty who make the final decision on whether a piece is published.

“I'm a stickler for accuracy, fairness. Anything I see that raises any questions at all in my mind, I'm sending back to the student reporter to talk to people again. And I just think that putting them on the high wire where they've got to come through is the best way to prepare them for jobs.”

– Christopher Drew, Louisiana State University

Media partnerships

Almost all of these have media partnerships where content is made available and shared widely across the state. Programs do this differently with some having a website, where partners can download content, or others notify partners and include links when new stories are posted. One other model is a public webpage where content is made available and pushed out to the general public (New Paltz).

Student learning

Students invariably cite the experience as rewarding. There is nothing like writing real news that is read widely. For those students who intend to continue in a career as a journalist the experience can be a key stepping stone, not just the clips but also the networks.

“The program put my byline in front of the eyes of every editor in the state, multiple times a week, for months. That really helped when I started looking for summer internships. My current editor really liked my work and recruited me for an internship. I later learned that the internship was basically an audition period for a full-time gig, which I got. It's a fantastic job and I am so glad I get to keep working in the capital.”

– Piper Hutchinson, LSU

“The experience has made me remember why I love journalism and got into doing this in the first place: to tell cool stories and provide people with information. I can really see how much I've grown as a reporter and honestly as a person because my confidence has grown tremendously and I'm just a much better writer now.”

– Sydney Byerly, Franklin College

But not all students will go on to be journalists and several of the programs recruit political science students and other majors with an interest in legislative policy making. These students also tout how the program helped them understand policy making and legislative processes.

Dedicated Faculty Member/Staff

While some of the programs have dedicated faculty/staff who work side by side with students during the legislative session (Franklin), some operate as a class where the faculty member is also teaching other classes (Hawaii, VCU). In some of those cases (Hawaii, LSU) the institution has added funds to pay a professional editor to assist with the program and sometimes operate as a liaison between the students and the news organizations (Vermont).

Some of the programs (Maryland) are much bigger with several professional staff/teachers and involve graduate students also. In some cases the students work full-time in the legislature and in others it is one of other classes they are taking. Some pay their students or provide bonuses (Kansas). Almost all the faculty/staff have experience as reporters and specifically in covering statehouses.

Legislative sessions

Many states have spring legislative sessions which lends itself well to these programs. In some cases students are paid to stay on into the summer to finish out the session. And some of the programs have a class in the fall that is preparing students for the spring (Illinois). But some legislatures are year-round (New York) which adds to the complexity. In some of those cases there is a class both in the fall and spring.

Proximity

Proximity matters but is not essential. Several programs are just a few miles or less from their state capitals (LSU, Mizzou) while others are a 30–45-minute drive (New Paltz, Kansas) and others are many hours but have set up semester long programs in the capital (Montana, Idaho).

Recommendations

There are 30 states with no programs, but a great deal of potential for colleges/universities close to state capitals to start them. Given the importance of covering state level legislation and decision-making, we recommend that more institutions create these programs. There are a number of ways that this can be done, from creating a class to providing internship credit and funding to spinning some students out of an advanced reporting class or capstone experience.

Existing programs should consider adding other college and university partners. They already have the systems in place, which often includes the experienced leader, space in the statehouse (or near), media partners and institutional history. Adding more colleges and universities to existing programs provides the opportunity for more students and more legislative coverage. Yet, almost no programs do this currently.

Existing programs can also develop a network of statehouse reporting programs to build a cohort, share information and best practices and encourage more. This could include monthly conversations, access to particular resources, a shared list serve, shared syllabi and more.

Collaboration with student media is also beneficial. In some cases, student media organizations, independent of the university are also providing statehouse coverage, particularly as it relates to their university. Is there a partnership or collaboration to make more of this content also available to media platforms in the state?

Summary by state

Based on the interviews with program leaders in each state, here we present summary information on each program. Note, we made an extensive effort to identify all programs (University/College led) in the country. Please contact Emily Sheftman at esheftman@uvm.edu or Richard Watts at rwatts@uvm.edu if your program should be added or if you would like help in starting one or if the summary needs to be updated.

FLORIDA

University of Florida: Fresh Take Florida

The University of Florida's Fresh Take Florida runs two semesters per year and employs up to 18 students per semester to cover the Florida Legislature, which is 2.5 hours from their campus in Gainesville. The program provides coverage for 80 outlets across the state including radio, TV and newspapers ranging from small dailies and weeklies to the Miami Herald, AP and CNN. The three-credit class started in 2019 and operates during both the spring and fall semesters. While students are not usually paid, the program covers travel, dorm stays at Florida State University's campus in Tallahassee and access to public records thanks in part to donations via the University of Florida Foundation.

While many students will choose to take the class for two semesters, single-semester students will typically opt to take the class in the spring because it coincides with the legislative session. Most students come from within the journalism program. Students must write and publish five stories for the semester, and some have gone beyond that number. One of the five stories has to focus on an underrepresented community.

Contact: Ted Bridis - tbridis@ufl.edu

Website: [Fresh Take Florida, WUFT](#)

Illustrative story: [Former NYPD officers in Florida heralded by DeSantis include surprises](#), by Elise Elder

Florida A&M University

Added Feb. 2023

Florida A&M University coordinates a statehouse capital bureau through an advanced reporting class. About 20 students per semester cover the Florida Legislature and state government; the Capitol is less than a mile from their campus in Tallahassee. The three-credit class evolved out of a long-standing public affairs reporting course. It was first offered in 2022. It operates during both the spring and fall semesters. The class is a required course for the journalism majors at FAMU and is taught by Doug Blackburn, who spent more than 30 years as a reporter at multiple papers, including covering higher education and the Florida Legislature for the Tallahassee Democrat. In spring 2023, the class is adding broadcast quality video news reports to their written stories. The work is published on the student newspaper's website and available to other outlets to republish.

Contact: Doug Blackburn - douglas.blackburn@famu.edu

Website: [The Famuan Online](#)

Illustrative student story: [Legislature to address social media safety](#), by Kyla Hubbard

GEORGIA

Kennesaw University: Fresh Take Georgia

Fresh Take Georgia is a comprehensive learning experience and real-world reporting initiative run by the Center for Sustainable Journalism at Kennesaw University. Led by the Center's executive director, Gary Green, who co-founded a similar program at University of Florida, students register for a class that is taught by faculty and several professional editors from Atlanta-based news organizations. Approximately 15-20 students participate in the program each semester in a variety of roles including reporting, editing, photography, audience engagement, digital production and podcast production.

Students cover the Georgia General Assembly during the spring legislative session as well as city and county public affairs and other enterprise topics of interest for a statewide audience. Story ideas are developed by the students and editors together in weekly pitch meetings. Stories are then edited and published on freshtakegeorgia.org and shared with publishing partners including the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Georgia Public Broadcasting and the Associated Press, among others. When the Legislature is not in session, Fresh Take Georgia collaborates with its publishing partners on various projects including a [recent investigation with the AJC](#) into deaths in Georgia jails during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Contact: Gary Green - ggreen38@kennesaw.edu

Website: [Fresh Take Georgia](http://freshtakegeorgia.org)

HAWAI'I

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Capstone Reporting Class

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's journalism program began collaborating specifically on state legislative coverage in Spring 2022 and chose as its partner an innovative online-only news organization called Civil Beat. The idea was born from the long-standing relationship between the two organizations and was spearheaded by the Journalism program's Director, Brett Oppegaard, and a Civil Beat political reporter, Blaze Lovell.

The program is funded through the University and is a three-credit course coordinated through a senior-level "Innovation and Entrepreneurship" class co-taught by Lovell and Oppegaard, which is the final required class in the program's curriculum. Students focused on reporting on the spring session of the Hawaii State Legislature, at the Honolulu capital. Each student selected a beat at the beginning of the semester and was responsible for coming up with story ideas connecting that beat with current legislative action. The stories were then edited by the two course instructors before being forwarded to editors at Civil Beat for publication on its

website. In the first year, the program had 12 students participate, and this same collaborative class structure is being used in Spring 2023, during the next legislative session, as well.

Contact: Dr. Brett Oppegaard - brett.oppegaard@hawaii.edu

Website: [Civil Beat](#)

CCN Case Study: [Capstone Class Covers the Hawaii Statehouse](#), by Emily Sheftman

Illustrative story: [Molokai Residents Raise Concerns Over Plans to Reinforce Deer Fencing](#), by Nate Bek

“This story takes a lot of complicated twists and turns, from philosophical perspectives about hunting to governmental interventions in sensitive ecologies to concrete and practical concerns about how to build and maintain a big fence to keep deer in their proper places”

– Brett Oppegaard

IDAHO

The University of Idaho’s Journalism and Mass Media (JAMM) McClure Journalism Internship Program

The University of Idaho’s Journalism and Mass Media McClure Journalism Internship Program hosts about two students per spring semester to cover the Idaho Legislature in Boise, which is 300 miles away from the university campus in Moscow. Students live in the Boise area that semester, oftentimes with their families, fulfilling a near-full course load by writing a weekly story for six or seven weekly rural newspapers around the state who are part of the program, which started circa 2015. Students write one story per week and editors regularly reach out to students with story ideas. During the week students also get additional media training through the School’s news service, Idaho Public Radio. Students spend about every weekday and sometimes weekends, depending on whether there’s a news event, during January, February and March working at the statehouse during the session. Students tend to be juniors and seniors. The program is open to any student; international studies majors participated in 2022 and 2023.

The course is recognized as a 400-level internship and includes an average of 9 credits, though some students do less. Sometimes political science faculty have offered students additional credit for additional work, e.g. research papers on their experience, to fill other degree requirements outside the journalism program, too. Fundraising through the McClure Center has allowed a \$3,000 student stipend while the office and staff support through the center is paid for by the university

Contact: Glenn Mosley - gmosley@uidaho.edu

Website: [State Capital News Bureau, McClure Center](#)

CCN Case Study: [University of Idaho students cover the Capital](#), by Jack Rooney

Illustrative story: ['It's time to get on with it' -- Stockwater rights bill could be final step in decades-long battle](#), by Riley Haun, legislative intern

"As fine an example as you will see of taking a complicated public policy issue and breaking it down for the public"

– Glenn Moseley

INDIANA

Franklin College Statehouse File

The Statehouse File is run out of Franklin College, located in Franklin Indiana, 20 miles from the capital city of Indianapolis. The program is in its 16th year, offering daily coverage of the Indiana statehouse. The program was created in response to the dwindling media coverage in the Indiana Statehouse.

Students work in the press office in the statehouse and many spend an entire semester working as full time members of the press corps under the guidance of experienced journalist and editor Colleen Steffen. Students have the option of taking a variable amount of credits for the program, ranging from one to twelve credit hours.

During the semester there are typically between three and seven students working out of the capital press croup office. The stories are used by thirty-five professional media outlets for publishing.

Contact: Colleen Steffen - csteffen@franklincollege.edu

Website: [The Statehouse File](#)

CCN Case Study: [Small school delivers big results](#), by Emily Sheftman

ILLINOIS

University of Illinois - Springfield, Public Affairs Reporting

Since 1972 the University of Illinois Springfield has offered a Master's Degree in Public Affairs Reporting. The 10-month program allows students to have hands-on experience with political reporting. Students begin the program in August with a semester of classroom instruction and move on in the spring semester with a full-time reporting internship covering the Illinois Capital for a professional news organization that partners with the university.

The program is funded through the university along with the help of private donors and alumni. With the funding structure of the program in addition to stipends and scholarships offered to students, Illinois residents are able to complete the program for around \$6,000. The program is run by Jason Piscia, a longtime newspaper editor and reporter and graduate of the program. In a typical year, Piscia teaches and oversees around 10 students. The program has a 100% hire rate.

Contact: Jason Piscia - jpisc2@uis.edu

Website: [Public Affairs Reporting](#)

CCN Case Study: [Training graduate students in public affairs reporting](#), by Emily Sheftman

KANSAS

University of Kansas Statehouse Reporting class

The University of Kansas's statehouse reporting class is run by former Washington Post editor Patricia Weems Gaston and focuses largely on day-to-day coverage with stories available to about 190 news outlets in Kansas. Students commute 30 minutes by car to Topeka and can either be a reporter or an editor depending on their career ambitions.

The three-credit capstone class started in 2012 and hosts between 10 and 18 journalism students, mostly seniors, every spring semester. Students typically go to the statehouse once a week during the session, which runs from January through May. They end their coverage when the semester ends, not when the session ends.

Each student has to do 18 features or dailies, and two enterprise pieces. Gaston, who is the bureau chief, edits and posts all stories on a private site that requires a sign-in and allows Kansas Press Association members to log in and download stories. In return, the KPA provides \$5,000 per year for student's gas/tolls as well as student awards. Gaston typically doesn't tell students what to cover because she wants them to learn about pitching and developing stories. Students receive a bonus depending on the quality of their work, ranging from \$300 to \$500. During the pandemic, like many programs, students continued to cover the legislature but through ZOOM.

Contact: Patricia Gaston - patricia.gaston@ku.edu

Illustrative student story: [Senators propose a bill to raise the minimum wage to \\$16 per hour by 2026](#), by Paul Samberg

LOUISIANA

The Louisiana State University Manship School Statehouse Bureau

The Louisiana State University Manship School Statehouse Bureau has been covering the statehouse in Baton Rouge since 2016. The program includes a prerequisite class in the fall, a spring class based at the Capitol, which is just a short drive from campus during the legislative session, and a paid summer program for a handful of students to cover the end of the session once the semester ends.

The program is managed by faculty member Christopher Drew, who had a 40-year career as a journalist prior to starting in 2017. There are typically 10 to 12 students a semester. Funding comes from the university and Drew's endowed chair. Students receive 3 credits and can take the class twice. Students are required to spend at least one day in the legislature. Up to 90 publications, digital publications, newspapers, and radio/TV have run at least one of their stories and many take content on a regular basis.

Contact: Christopher Drew - cdrew2@lsu.edu

or LSU Manship School of Mass Communication manshipxgr@gmail.com

Website: [LSU Manship School Statehouse Bureau](#)

CCN Case Study: [LSU Statehouse Reporting & Enterprise Stories](#), by Richard Watts

Illustrative student story: [Reanimation of Greene tragedy, and timing, could have far-reaching consequences](#), by Piper Hutchinson

MARYLAND

University of Maryland Capital News Service Annapolis Bureau

The University of Maryland's Capital News Service Annapolis Bureau is one of five news bureaus managed by The Philip Merrill College of Journalism. All journalism (M.J. not M.A.) graduate students are required to work in one of the news bureaus, whereas undergraduates have to apply for it as a capstone. (Graduate students apply for their preferred bureau, but do not always receive their top choice).

The bureau has around 30 news organization clients and charges between \$100 to or \$200 per semester, depending on their size -- and also provides content to AP. The revenue goes toward student stipends for travel. The bureau produces from 25 to 75 stories per semester depending on the number of students in the Annapolis Bureau. Started in 1990, the bureau and the companion courses operate in the spring and fall. Graduate students get six credits for working four days per week. Undergraduate students get six credits for working two days a week or nine credits for working for days a week. The class size varies per semester, sometimes reaching as many as ten graduate and undergraduate students. Students get a small stipend to defray some travel costs

Funding comes from the University budget and pays for the faculty coordinators and office rent, which is a block away from the statehouse. The program is managed by long-time journalist and editor Martin Kaiser. The statehouse is a 40 to 45-minute drive from campus.

Contact: Martin Kaiser - wmkaiser@umd.edu

Website: [Capital News Service Annapolis Bureau](#)

Illustrative student story: [Purple Line: A Divided Rail](#), by Brittany Britto

MASSACHUSETTS

Boston University Statehouse Program

The Boston University Statehouse Program hosts up to 15 students per semester who are each assigned to work with an individual local newspaper in the state to cover state government and the Legislature, which is a 20-minute T-ride from campus. The 12-credit class, taught by former Massachusetts Statehouse reporter Jerry Berger, runs in the spring and fall and includes a 3-hour-per-week classroom session. The number of partner papers varies from 10-15 outlets.

Most stories are localized for a particular area, so stories are specific to the partner paper and a particular coverage area. Students are supposed to do weekly stories, as well as a group and final project at the end of the year, which go out to every outlet.

The class began in 2004 and is an optional capstone class for journalism students that runs in the spring and fall, but not the summer. Students use the statehouse as the base for the beat to report on public affairs-related issues. Students tend to be seniors and grad students, though some are juniors. Students are encouraged, but not required, to go to the statehouse in person.

Contact: Jerry Berger - jerrymb@bu.edu

Website: [Boston University Statehouse Program](#)

Illustrative student story: [Mass. impeachment push precedes Pelosi announcement](#), by Hannah Schoenbaum

“This story started out as a routine legislative hearing on whether Massachusetts should urge the House to impeach Trump – until Nancy Pelosi turned it into a breaking news story. Today, the reporter covers the North Carolina Legislature for the AP through Report for America.”

– Jerry Berger

MICHIGAN

Michigan State University Capital News Service

The Michigan State University Capital News Service is in its 41st year of covering statehouse news, with an average of five to six students – graduate and undergraduate – per semester in the spring and fall to provide news coverage to up to 45 news outlets. The three-credit class is capped at 15 students. While students are not required to be at the statehouse every week, the class includes off-campus interviews most Monday mornings with influential players such as the governor, a state agency head, an advocacy group leader or a legislator to kickstart stories that are due at the end of each week.

The legislature meets year-round with some breaks and is three miles from campus. The participating outlets collectively pay around \$8,000 per year for content, and most of that revenue goes to monetary awards and scholarships to participating students. The university pays for faculty salaries, the newsroom in the building, a student tech manager and a retired editor who works with students on Fridays. Former Michigan statehouse reporters Eric Freedman and Dave Poulson instruct the course.

Contact: Eric Freedman - freedma5@msu.edu

Website: [Capital News Service](#)

Illustrative student story: [Community college students face transportation challenges](#), by Sarah Atwood

MISSOURI

The University of Missouri's State Government Reporting Program

The University of Missouri's State Government Reporting Program has had students working at the statehouse in Jefferson City for more than 40 years. About 25 to 35 students work in shifts to cover the legislative session from January to May under the direction of long-time investigative reporter and editor Mark Horvit.

The university partners with the Missouri Press Association and the Missouri Broadcasters Association to distribute the students' stories to small newspapers and radio and TV stations across the state. Mizzou's statehouse audio coverage has even greater reach than print stories. Because of the demand for radio stories, students can get credit or payment for their audio work, and most opt for credit.

The stories for print or online publications also go through the copy desk of the Columbia Missourian, the daily newspaper that serves as the hands-on "lab" for journalism majors in their junior and senior years.

Contact: Mark Horvit - horvitm@missouri.edu

Website: [Missouri Statehouse Reporting Program](#)

CCN Case Study: [Mizzou Statehouse Reporting Bureau](#), by Carolyn Shapiro

MONTANA

University of Montana Legislative News Service

The University of Montana Legislative News Service was started in 1993 in an attempt to fill the gaps in legislative coverage for the residents of Montana. The program is housed at the University of Montana and run by former legislative reporter Courtney Cowgill. The program is funded through a partnership between the University of Montana, the Montana Newspaper Association, the Greater Montana Foundation, and the Montana Broadcasters Association.

Each legislative session, which happens every other year, two to three University of Montana journalism students move to the capital city of Helena to cover the session. While in the statehouse, the students are considered to be full members of the professional press corps covering the Legislature. The students produce written and broadcast reports of the daily events in the statehouse for more than 150 outlets across the state.

Contact: Courtney Cowgill - courtney.cowgill@mso.umt.edu

Website: [Community & Legislative News Service](#)

CCN Case Study: [Montana Statehouse News Service](#), by Emily Sheftman

Illustrative Student Story: Shaylee Ragar covered the 2019 Montana Legislature for the UM Legislative News Service. During those 90 days, she wrote feature-length deep dives for the state's weekly and daily newspapers and produced audio pieces for both public and commercial radio stations. She quickly became a fixture in the Capitol press corps and benefitted from the mentorship she found there among the state's top professional reporters. Right after graduation, she joined that professional press corps when the Bozeman Daily Chronicle scooped her up as a reporter. Just a short while later, she came back to the Capitol as the Capitol Reporter for Montana Public Radio and now reports on the news at the Capitol year-round and hosts a special in-depth podcast, called "The Session" with other reporters at the Legislature.

NEBRASKA

University of Nebraska's Nebraska News Service

University of Nebraska's Nebraska News Service has operated a statehouse bureau since 2011 and has since been merged with a newer program called the "Experience Lab" for different communications majors. The class meets for 1 hour and 45 minutes every Tuesday. Professionals, many of whom are either retired or working in the industry hoping to hire students post-grad, offer mentoring and guidance such as line editing.

Students cover the statehouse and the content is provided to about 100 outlets, some radio and TV but mostly newspapers. The campus is only a few blocks away from the statehouse. The class

is one credit per semester, and students have to take it three times for their degree. Students have to be involved up to six hours per week as part of the Experience Lab, but it's up to the student how much they want to devote to statehouse coverage. The senior capstone class averages 25 to 35 students.

The university foundation has a Nebraska News Service fund that anyone can donate to, and Nebraska alums do donate. That fund helps pay for travel expenses when needed. Typically only student leads, who work 10 hours a week, are paid \$11.25 per hour to manage, support and edit fellow students.

Contact: Jill Martin - jmartin42@unl.edu

Website: [Nebraska News Service](#)

NEW YORK

SUNY New Paltz: The Legislative Gazette

For more than 45 years SUNY New Paltz has been running the Legislative Gazette, an online media outlet that reports on the New York Legislature. The program is funded through the University as well as grants from a number of organizations, including the Knight Foundation and the Ottaway Foundation.

Each semester from 10-15 students make the 35-mile commute to Albany from New Paltz. Editor and New Paltz professor James Gormley leads the class and students have the option to take between one and twelve credits during the semester. The Gazette currently has between 5,000 and 6,000 readers during their publication from September to May. The students produce a variety of media including news videos, social media content, and written articles.

Contact: James Gormley - legislativegazette@newpaltz.edu

Website: [Legislative Gazette](#)

CCN Case Study: [45 Years of Covering the Statehouse – SUNY New Paltz](#), by Emily Sheftman

OKLAHOMA

University of Oklahoma Gaylord News

The University of Oklahoma's Gaylord News covers the Congress year around and the legislative session during the spring semester. There are two parts to this, a Washington, DC component in which students are paid \$10 per hour, plus housing and transportation, and an in-state practicum in the spring that covers the legislative session. All stories are edited by Gaylord

College faculty and made available to 60 plus news outlets, including seven television stations and 10 Native American newspapers, across the state.

Students typically will write 12-15 stories each during the course of the semester. The class was to meet in the state capital press room twice a week when the legislature is in session. Students would commute from campus, which is 20 miles from the state capital in a suburb of Oklahoma City. Washington and legislative content is provided free via ListServ emails and Google Drive.

Contact: John Schmeltzer - j.schmeltzer@ou.edu

Website: [Gaylord News](#)

Illustrative student story: [The future of Native children's custody rests with divided Supreme Court](#), by Beck Connelley

VIRGINIA

Virginia Commonwealth University - Capital News Service

Virginia Commonwealth University launched their Capital News Service in 2006. The program has between ten and fifteen students per semester registered in a reporting course. Many students will opt to take the course two times, using the fall semester as an introduction into political reporting and the legislative process, before jumping in during the spring semester once the Virginia Assembly convenes in January. The program is funded through the University.

The students are taught by Professor Alix Bryan-Campos, who also serves as one of the editors for the student work. The articles produced by the program are distributed to more than 100 news outlets, with almost every article being reposted by an outside news outlet.

The Capital News Service works hard with their active partners to ensure that students are reporting on the topics that are most important to the residents of Virginia and encourages students to reach out to local papers and communicate with news editors to get story ideas.

Contact: Alix Bryan Campos - bryaneg@vcu.edu

Website: [VCU Capital News Service](#)

CCN Case Study: [Covering the Statehouse in Virginia](#), by Emily Sheftman

University of Richmond - Capital News Service

Correction as of 12.15.2022: We are in the process of adding Capital News Service at the University of Richmond to our list of programs. A brief summary follows, pending more information.

Students at the University of Richmond contribute to Virginia Commonwealth University's Capital News Service as the University of Richmond bureau. Stories are shared on the bureau's blog site, as well as on Twitter, with the goal of providing coverage of the Virginia General Assembly to news outlets around the state.

Contact: Tom Mullen - tmullen@richmond.edu

Website: [Capital News Service University of Richmond Bureau](#)

WASHINGTON

University of Washington State Government Communications Program

Every winter quarter, the Department of Communication's Journalism and Public Interest Communication program at UW pairs students with local and state media outlets to cover news from the Washington Capitol in Olympia during the legislative session. The program is run by John Tomasic.

Contact: John Tomasic - tomasic@uw.edu

Website: [State Government Communications Program](#)

Illustrative student story: [Washington's Legislature moves to address equity in the cannabis business](#), by Maya Leshikar

"Maya Leshikar, 2021 participating student, followed legislative efforts to lower barriers to entry in the cannabis industry that drastically limit the number of local entrepreneurs participating in and benefitting from the booming trade—and especially ethnic minority entrepreneurs. Maya did a great job going into communities and bringing people affected into her story about lawmaking/public policy." – John Tomasic

New in Spring 2023

TEXAS

The University of Texas, Austin - Statehouse Reporting

The University of Texas, Austin this spring will launch its undergraduate statehouse reporting class that will include students being matched with a paper, preferably from their hometown. That student will work with the paper editor under the guidance of former New York Times editor Kathleen McElroy and former Dallas Morning News capital bureau chief Christy Hoppe.

The three-hour undergraduate class is capped at 20 students and plans to have 16 students this spring. The focus is legislative news for the student's hometown papers and the hope is those outlets will pay for students' work. Editors in the hometown papers will have some editing responsibility and oversight of the students and the intention is that each student will produce four to five stories over the semester.

The Capitol building is a 30-minute walk or an 8-minute drive from campus but the Texas Legislature only meets during odd-numbered years for up to 140 days. However, there is plenty of state legislative news that students will be expected to cover in off years, or perhaps dive into a public policy issue.

Contact: Kathleen McElroy - kathleen.mcelroy@austin.utexas.edu

VERMONT

University of Vermont Capital News Service

Writing this report and interviewing statehouse reporting program coordinators has inspired the University of Vermont to start a statehouse reporting program this spring. The Capital News Service is folded under the University's existing Community News Service program. Three students, each paid \$1,000 dollars are expected to work from 15-20 hours a week covering the legislature in Montpelier which is about 25 miles from Burlington. The students are seniors in their last semester and are also each receiving six credits.

The students will be managed and edited by the existing CNS editor and content offered to all of the state's media outlets (about 50) through a publicly accessible website. The CNS editor will ensure the content meets news values and work closely with the students on assigning and editing stories. The editor is paid partly by UVM's College of Arts & Science's funds and partly through fundraising. The student stipends come from the Provost's Office at the UVM.

Contact: Emily Sheftman Emily.Sheftman@uvm.edu or Justin Trombly jtrombly@uvm.edu

On Hold

UTAH

Brigham Young University Capital West News Service

Between 2014 and 2020, Brigham Young University coordinated the Capital West News Service out of the University's Salt Lake Center. The program included students from Weber State University, Utah State University, Salt Lake Community College and the University of Utah as part of our reporting corps from 2014 to 2020. About 10 different small newspapers would pick up their material frequently.

The program was highly successful but was discontinued during the pandemic due to some obstacles, among them revenue shortages in student media and the legislature operating remotely, according to faculty member Joel Campbell, a veteran Salt Lake reporter who edited the students.

The 12-credit course had between 10 and 20 students who were required to be at the statehouse one day per week at least. The program hosted student journalists at the BYU - Salt Lake Center. Some students moved to Salt Lake entirely for the semester and took all their classes in Salt Lake City. The class only met for the spring semester to cover the 45-day legislative session from January to mid-March. Students commuted from BYU's campus in Provo, which is 40 miles from the statehouse, via bus or train expensed by BYU.

Contact: Joel Campbell - foiguy@gmail.com

Website: [Capital West News](#)

References

- Abernathy, Penelope Muse. 2016. "[The Rise of a New Media Baron and the Emerging Threat of News Deserts](#)." The Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media.
- . 2018. "[The Expanding News Desert - The Loss of Local News](#)." The Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media.
- . 2020. "[News Deserts and Ghost Newspapers: Will Local News Survive?](#)." The Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media.
- . 2022. "[The State of Local News: the 2022 Report](#)." Northwestern Medill School Local News Initiative.
- Levin, Dan. 2019. "[When the Student Newspaper Is the Only Daily Paper in Town](#)." *The New York Times*, October 19, 2019, sec. U.S.
- Mitchell, Amy, et al. 2014. "[America's Shifting Statehouse Press](#)." Pew Research Center's Journalism Project. July 10, 2014.
- . 2022. "[Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time](#)." Pew Research Center's Journalism Project. April 5, 2022.
- Pew Research Center has published two reports since 2014 on the state of statehouse reporting in America. The 2014 report, "America's Shifting Statehouse Press," finds that 164 newspaper statehouse jobs were lost since 2003. The authors note that hiring students is one way newspapers have tried to compensate for this change: 14% of statehouse reporters in 2014 were students, 97 of whom worked on a part-time basis for legacy outlets. An unidentified portion of the other 126 may have been writing for their school paper.
- The 2022 report, "Total Number of U.S. Statehouse Reporters Rises, but Fewer Are on the Beat Full Time," identifies 34 states with statehouse students, but includes student interns as well as college and university-led programs. Students also are often grouped with part-time reporters. Pew finds that since 2014, the number of statehouse reporters at colleges and universities increased slightly, from 109 to 125.

On the Cover

Devon Sanders, an LSU Manship School Statehouse reporter, interviewed State Rep. Katrina Jackson in 2018.

Corrections

Any corrections or additions should be sent to Hannah Kirkpatrick at hkirkpat@uvm.edu. We welcome comments and suggestions.

Report Interviews

University of Florida's Fresh Take Florida

Ted Bridis - tbridis@ufl.edu

Interviewed: Nov. 1, 2022

The University of Idaho's Journalism & Mass Media (JAMM) McClure Journalism Internship Program

Glenn Mosley - gmosley@uidaho.edu - (208) 596-1717

Interviewed: Nov. 28, 2022

University of Kansas Statehouse Reporting class

Patricia Elaine Gaston - patricia.gaston@ku.edu - 571-723-1701

Interviewed: Nov. 10, 2022

The Louisiana State University Manship School Statehouse Bureau

Christopher Drew - cdrew1@gmail.com

Interviewed: Nov. 7, 2022

University of Maryland Capital News Service Annapolis Bureau

Martin Kaiser - managing director - (414) 313-6599 - wmkaiser@umd.edu

Interviewed: Nov. 8, 2022

Boston University Statehouse Program

Jerry Berger - jerrymberger@gmail.com - 617-510-4998

Interviewed: Nov. 11, 2022

Michigan State University Capital News Service

Eric Freedman - freedma5@msu.edu - 517-355-4729

Interviewed: Nov. 30, 2022

University of Nebraska's Nebraska News Service

Jill Martin - jmartin42@unl.edu / Mary Kay Quinlan - mary.kay.quinlan@unl.edu

Interviewed: Nov. 14, 2022

University of Oklahoma Gaylord News

John Schmeltzer - i.schmeltzer@ou.edu - 312-804-4586 (C); 405-325-9020 (O)

Interviewed: Oct. 31, 2022

The University of Texas, Austin - Statehouse Reporting

Kathleen McElroy - kathleen.mcelroy@austin.utexas.edu - (917) 693-0548

Interviewed: Nov. 11, 2022

Brigham Young University Capital West News Service

Joel Campbell - foiguy@gmail.com - 801-362-4298

Interviewed: Nov. 9, 2022

University of Hawaii Manoa Legislative Reporting Capstone

Brett Oppegaard - brett.oppegaard@hawaii.edu

Interviewed: August 10, 2022

University of Montana Legislative News Service

Courtney Cowgill - courtney.cowgill@mso.umt.edu

Interviewed: October 17, 2022

Franklin College Statehouse File

Colleen Steffen - csteffen@franklincollege.edu

Interviewed: October 4, 2022

University of Illinois - Springfield, Public Affairs Reporting

Jason Piscia - jpisc2@uis.edu

Interviewed: September 14, 2022

SUNY New Paltz - Legislative Gazette

James Gormley - legislativegazette@newpaltz.edu

Interviewed: September 20, 2022

Virginia Commonwealth University - Capital News Service

Alix Bryan Campos - bryaneg@vcu.edu

Interviewed: September 7, 2022

University of Washington State Government Communications Program

John Tomasic - tomasic@uw.edu

Interviewed: December 7, 2022

Kennesaw University - Fresh Takes Georgia

Gary Green - ggreen38@kennesaw.edu

Interviewed: November 28, 202

The University of Missouri's State Government Reporting Program

Mark Horvit - horitm@missouri.edu

Interviewed: November 28, 2022