



Iowa Newspaper Association Bulletin

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Company Board Meetings
April 21, 2023

WEBINARS

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To Do In 2023
March 30, 2023

How student journalists are filling the void to help save local news

More than 120 programs pair college students with seasoned editors to provide meaningful local news for communities that lack it

RICHARD WATTS
CENTER FOR COMMUNITY NEWS

Local news is in a crisis — there is no question about it. The revenue model has blown up, and national chains have eviscerated local news organizations, firing reporters and sucking out any last bit of the profit.

I always thought Vermont was immune to this trend. But then a few years ago a venture capitalist came to town — the Arizona-based O’Rourke Group — and bought up a once proud daily, the St. Albans Messenger, and three community papers. The firm eliminated editors and reporters, and today the content at those papers lacks substance and is largely irrelevant.

When we started up our Community News Service program at the University of Vermont, which provides student-reported stories for local outlets, we worked briefly with the O’Rourke group, but it quickly became obvious to me the company had no interest in community reporting. (For his part, O’Rourke CEO Jim O’Rourke praised his teams’ work in an email and said the company has plans to expand in the area this summer. He declined to say whether the papers have fewer reporters and editors than they did before the purchase). Between their out-of-town management and my unhappiness with how they handled one of our stories, we ended our relationship in short order.

But our Community News Service continues to thrive. Down the road from the O’Rourke newspaper group is another group of five papers, run by folks with a commitment to local journalism who pay professional reporters to cover local government, community events and regional stories. But they can’t possibly cover all the stories out there. And that is where university-run, student reporting services like ours can step in.

Here is how it works: We pay a professional editor to work directly with students and classes and act as liaison with our media partners around the state. Our editor, Justin Trombly, is in touch with our 14 media partners — mostly weekly community papers — to identify the topics they

want covered and to check on the stories we are producing. Justin edits and vets the stories and reviews his edits line by line with the students, sending drafts back to them as needed, ultimately producing professional-grade reporting. All of the students’ work is published, giving them bylines and the real experience of producing stories that people read, view and hear. (These are multi-media stories, digital, audio and video.)

Today we co-publish 300 print, audio and video pieces a year with local media outlets, at no cost to them. We are helping to fill gaps in reporting and forging a more financially sustainable model for these struggling newsrooms. We’re teaching and inspiring the next generation of journalists. And we are also introducing our mostly suburban students to rural communities.

UVM is not alone in this work. The Center for Community News, which I direct, has identified more than 120 programs around the country in which students are providing critical local news coverage, under the direction of professional editors and reporters, standing in where substantive media internships have largely disappeared — giving students the individual attention, networks and clips they need. The Knight Foundation recently named the role of universities as central to its strategy to address the sustainability of local news.

“Books and lectures will only get you so far,” Steban Rondon, a student at Florida International University, told me. “Journalism is a profession where you need to start practicing your abilities from the moment you write your first story, and that cannot be achieved in a classroom. In my first semester, I was already out in the street asking people questions, practicing my ice-breaking skills and stressing about deadlines.”

“I’ve learned so much from taking a class styled like this because it forces me to go out and learn what I’m talking about,” Vincent Martorano, a student at Ball State University in Indiana, said. “Like this isn’t just something I type up and my professor reads and gives me a grade. I think that

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makes me not only a better journalist, but a better writer.”

Some of these are well-known programs at flagship public universities, like the University of Missouri, where students staff five separate newsrooms, providing news to tens of thousands of state residents every day. Some are smaller, innovative programs that hold their own. For example, Franklin College, with a student population of 1,000, has a full-time faculty member leading a two-semester course that embeds students in the Indiana Statehouse providing legislative coverage to residents across the state.

Nearly all partnerships and university-run newsrooms are run by former reporters and editors. Fresh Take Florida, a class of investigative reporters at the University of Florida, is led by Ted Bridis, who worked decades as an investigative reporter with The Associated Press; his students broke the story about incoming president Ben Sasse’s private new \$300,000 swimming pool.

Chris Drew, who edits the student statehouse reporting program and the cold case student reporting project at Louisiana State University, was a top investigative reporter at The New York Times.

“I’m a stickler for accuracy, fairness,” Drew said about the LSU student reporting programs. “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.”

This is high-impact student reporting, assigned, edited, and vetted by experienced editors and reporters. It is also community-level reporting, telling stories that no one else is.

When the local paper closed in Athens, Ohio, university faculty created the Oxford Observer, the only source of local news in town. When the Oglethorpe Echo teetered on the brink of closing, the University of Georgia stepped in and now runs the paper through a reporting class, giving students hands-on experience in community journalism and ensuring the 150-year-old paper has never missed a week. At Chapman University, the journalism program has been remade from top to bottom so that everything students do is in partnership with the Voice of OC – a digital nonprofit focused on county news deserts.

The surprising thing is not how many universities are running these programs but how few. University caution, bureaucracy, inability to adapt to the changing media landscape are some of the obstacles that stand in the way. Too many universities run inward-facing newsrooms, giving students artificial experiences writing for non-audiences.

If you count all the students in communications and journalism programs around the nation, the number tops 340,000, according to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System at the National Center for Education Statistics. Imagine if universities engaged just a small fraction of those students in local news under the direction of professionals already on staff, using existing revenue systems.

And there is no reason to limit this to journalism/communication students. At UVM we have no journalism major, and our student reporters come from history, English, political science, environmental science and more. They may not go on to be reporters but they will know more about how to be engaged citizens.

As a foundational pillar of civic life, institutions of higher learning have an obligation to lead. We no longer have the luxury of offering cloistered, low-stakes reporting experiences to our students; they deserve better and so does our news ecosystem.

The alternative is to leave local news to companies like the O’Rourke Group.

Richard Watts is the founder of the Center for Community News, Co-Director of the Reporting & Documentary Storytelling program at the University of Vermont and coordinator of the Community News Service – a statewide, multi-outlet academic-news partnership with a mission to provide content to community news outlets and give students applied learning experiences.

This article was originally published by Poynter. Visit <https://www.poynter.org/commentary/2023/how-student-reporters-are-filling-the-void-to-help-save-local-news-news-deserts/> to read the full version online.

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WEBINAR SPOTLIGHT

Visit www.onlinemediacampus.com to register today!



How to Create More Effective Prospecting Messages!

APRIL 27 FROM 1-2 P.M.

IN THIS WEBINAR...

This webinar is for sellers and managers who want to improve the effectiveness of their messaging when prospecting for new business.

You'll learn how to warm-up your cold-calls by:

1. Provoking - the prospect's interest
2. Persuading - the prospect to take action
3. Proposing - reasonable next steps

This will be an interactive session, so make sure to bring your best practices to share with all.



ABOUT THE PRESENTER...

Daniel Grissom has helped many global organizations increase their performance like Google, IBM, Bloomberg, Walgreens and the NASDAQ just to name a few. He has served these companies and others in Asia, Africa, Europe and the USA. He has earned an MBA, an honorary PhD and CSP—a designation held which symbolizes excellence in speaking, which is held by less than 7% of presenters worldwide.

With deep knowledge and experience in business development, personal development and spiritual development, Daniel has a proven track record of inspiring individuals and organizations improve performance. He is a world-class communicator, able to connect with professionals at all levels, from Representatives to Executives, and within many disciplines, from Sales to Customer Service to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.

Selling Advertising Amidst Economic Uncertainty

MAY 18 FROM 1-2 P.M.

IN THIS WEBINAR...

The fear of economic uncertainty makes advertisers run for the hills. Add to that the fact that most advertisers are just barely recovering from the pandemic and you have a recipe for canceled contracts and ad sales rep frustration. Multi-million dollar media sales coach Ryan Dohrn shares highlights from his book *Selling Forward*. Proven methods to sell to emotionally drained, financially fatigued, Zoomed out advertisers in an ever-changing world of political and economic uncertainty!



ABOUT THE PRESENTER...

Ryan Dohrn is a top motivational speaker that won an Emmy for marketing excellence while working for ABC TV/Walt Disney Co. and was recognized by Forbes.com with the "Best of the Web" award for his business strategies. Dohrn's focus is leadership training and team performance development. His passion for sales and marketing has given him the

unique opportunity to touch half a billion dollars in revenue for companies in seven countries. Dohrn was one of the youngest managers in Walt Disney history. His management insights have been featured in USA Today and on CNN. Ryan is an internationally certified business coach, has trained over 30,000 professionals, and works monthly with companies in 15 business sectors.

FREE MEMBER EXCHANGE

▼ HELP WANTED

SENIOR STAFF WRITER. Business Publications Corporation (BPC), an award-winning media and communications company, is seeking a full-time journalist to cover business news in Greater Des Moines for the Business Record, our flagship division. The right candidate will join our experienced staff to lead the Business Record's coverage of the people, issues and trends affecting the business community as the region continues to grow and transform. This reporter's primary focuses will include real estate, development and local government; the role will also encompass producing a variety of business stories.

The position requires a strong writer who can develop a beat and write in-depth analysis pieces on a variety of business topics for our weekly print edition, website, e-newsletters and specialty magazines. This person must function with a great deal of autonomy, building sources on their beats and managing their story schedules.

This person is also given freedom to generate a majority of their own story ideas. The ideal candidate must also be able to report and write daily business news items quickly and efficiently for our website and be able to keep a daily pulse on the community.

Previous business writing experience is a plus; however, it is not a requirement. The candidate must have a solid foundation in AP style, the principles of journalism and have a desire to represent the Business Record at a large number of community events and network with the community both in person, virtually and via social media. In addition, this person must have comfort leading panel discussions in front of an audience.

Basic photography skills, video production experience and the ability to help our organization move forward in the digital world are major pluses, but not required.

Management experience, project management and editing skills are not required, but the role has the flexibility to be adapted to utilize skills of this nature.

A passion for the Des Moines and Iowa, and a desire to tell the story of our communities is a priority.

Visit <https://recruiting.paylocity.com/Recruiting/Jobs/Details/1287240> to apply. Please include a cover letter with your resume.

SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER. The Indianola Independent Advocate and Record-Herald, an independent, Iowa-owned digital plus print newspaper, is seeking help managing our Town News, Audience Plus subscription environment. The job will be a flexible, part-time, remote position setting up subscriptions and rates in the Town News offer-builder environment on an occasional basis and helping troubleshoot user issues when needed. Happy to work through a newspaper that uses this service and is willing to make its team available or an individual who works in this environment and would like to earn some extra income outside of regular work hours. Call 515-250-3698 or email amy@indianola-ia.com to discuss options. 0101

▼ FOR SALE

FOR SALE: Must go by May 1 - either to you or the scrapper. Two ERCM NewsMatic Mako CTP units, each with its own Glunz & Jensen in-line processor. Both used through November 2022, and continually maintained since. Approximately 4,800 ECO LCV 28 x 23.0626 x .008 Southern Litho plates. Plate punch and plate bender. Price: \$9,600 and you haul it all away. Also, Goss Community roll carts and spacers - make an offer. Call the Spencer Daily Reporter at 712-262-6610 or Brad at 641-430-1023.

WANTED: Old Apple Laser Writer printer. Laser Writer 16/600 or Laser Writer Pro, working or parts. Call the Don at the Avoca Journal Herald 402-681-4763.

View and submit ads on the Internet at www.INAnews.com. Students and professionals may also submit their resumés for online viewing.

There is no charge for most of these ads. They are a free service to INA active (newspaper) members only. The name of the newspaper in the ad must be the same as published in the current INA Directory.

If you are trying to help an employee relocate, please send us the ad information on your letterhead, rather than having the employee write us. We will not run ads for persons living in a member's town without first clearing the ad with the publisher.

Please have copy to the INA office no later than noon on Monday. The INA will make the determination of whether an ad qualifies for free or paid publication. If payment for an ad is not enclosed with the ad, the INA will require payment in advance before the ad will be published.

Ads for products or services which could be marketed for a profit may be published for a fee of \$10 per insertion, paid in advance, with a 40-word maximum.

Recruitment (help wanted) ads for positions in states other than Iowa may be published for a fee of \$25 per insertion, with a 100-word maximum.

For more information, contact Cicely Gordon at cgordon@inanews.com.



Iowa Newspaper Association

Bulletin

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The INA needs your help!

Work has begun on a comprehensive history of the Iowa Newspaper Association and its predecessor organizations. We need your help!

We ask all INA members to search their archives and file cabinets for photographs that might be considered for this publication.

EXAMPLES OF PHOTOS WE SEEK:

- Longtime owners, publishers and editors.
- Recipients of major awards, from Distinguished Service to Master Editor/Publisher to the Pulitzer.
- Award presentations or candid moments from conventions and other press association events.
- Memorabilia or souvenirs from early association events, including award plaques and covers of convention or banquet programs.

Photos from any period are welcome, but we particularly need images preceding the 1990s.

Digital images (TIF preferred, or JPG) may be emailed to brian.cooper@crestwoodpublishing.com. Please include identifications and description, name of photographer (if known) and name of the person and newspaper granting permission to publish.

More questions? Contact Brian Cooper, retired editor of the Dubuque Telegraph Herald, at the email address above.